

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# THE AGE OF PLASTIC; OR, CATHERINE MALABOU ON THE HEGELIAN FUTURES MARKET

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Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, preface by J. Derrida, trans. L. During. London, Routledge, 2005.

The dictionary definition of change  
means your face looks different in the water  
& even tho'you'd feel at home down there  
each moment spent at one remove, anywhere  
between the mammal & the sponge,  
you know you'd miss a particular cassette  
idle tears or a glass of gin  
& be irked by the serious options  
a changeless life presents e.g. 'Minor  
poet, conspicuously dishonest' would look funny  
on a plaque screwed to a tree  
while the blue trace of your former life  
suggests an exception  
generations will end up chanting; for them  
the parts of speech will need explaining  
not lakes or sleep or sex,  
or the dumb poets of the past  
who, being lyrical, missed out on this.  
—John Forbes, 'The Age of Plastic'

But that an accident as such, detached from what circumscribes it, what is bound and is actual only in its context with others, should attain an existence of its own and a separate freedom—this is the tremendous power of the negative; it is the energy of thought, of the pure ‘I.

— G.W.F. Hegel, ‘Preface’ to *Phenomenology of Spirit*

By the 1920s, French philosophy was languishing in the soul-sapping shadow of Bergsonian vitalism and academic neo-Kantianism, when the suffocating crepuscular gloom was unexpectedly banished by the blaze of several new Russian suns. The two Alexes—Koyraskiy and Kozevnikov, better known to posterity by their Frenchified surnames Koyré and Kojève—definitively transformed the entire philosophical environment of the twentieth century by irradiating the pallid Parisians with bursts of the heavy element Hegelium.

In a sequence of brilliant (if still under-appreciated) articles—coinciding with the centenary of the ignominious death of the Master from either cholera or a gastrointestinal disease—Koyré not only undertook the task of giving the French their first proper introduction to Hegel, but to improve the standing and understanding of Hegelianism across the universe of thought. Koyré’s essays, including ‘*Rapport sur l’état des études hégéliennes en France*’ (1930/31) and ‘*Note sur la langue et la terminologie hégéliennes*’ (1931), combine an extraordinary historical attentiveness with conceptual incisiveness and an often-striking turn of phrase. There are two features of Koyré’s intervention worth noting here: first, the anomalous position that he sees Hegel occupying in the history of thought, in part due to the encyclopaedic yet extreme difficulty of the German’s writings; second, the key role assigned in and by these writings to the power of language itself. The latter is so pivotal that Koyré will even declare that: ‘Hegelian terminology, and language in general, are full of more or less successful puns.’<sup>1</sup> We shall see what becomes of this emphasis in later French enterprises.

As for Kojève—who was, by the way, the nephew of the painter Wassily Kandinsky and who himself became one of the great bureaucratic architects of the European Common Market after World War II—he elaborated his notoriously aberrant explication of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in a famous series of seminars in the 1930s, mobbed by the most eminent local intellectual glitterati.<sup>2</sup> Attended by Raymond Aron, Georges Bataille, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Eric Weil, Aron Gurwitsch, André Breton, and Jacques Lacan, among others, the seminars quickly achieved legendary status; in their assembled form, written up by Raymond Queneau, they submit the *Phenomenology* to a bizarre but compelling spin-doctoring.<sup>3</sup>

1. A. Koyré, *Etudes d’histoire de la pensée philosophique*, Paris, Gallimard, 1971, p. 209.

2. See M.S. Roth, ‘A Problem of Recognition: Alexandre Kojève and the End of History,’ *History and Theory*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1985, p. 294.

3. See A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, ed. A. Bloom, trans. J.H. Nichols, New York and London, Basic Books, 1969).

What, then, was compelling about Kojève's seminar? It:

1. identified Hegel as the crucial philosopher of modernity;
2. identified the anthropological elements as crucial to Hegel's philosophy;
3. identified temporality as crucial to this anthropology;
4. identified the master/slave dialectic as crucial to this temporality;
5. identified the struggle for recognition as crucial to the master/slave dialectic;
6. identified the epitome of this struggle in the self-seizure of self-consciousness as such;
7. identified the program of the self-seizure of self-consciousness as finished in and by and as the 'end of history'.

It is having been infected by this eccentric misreading of Hegel that subsequent twentieth century French thought proceeds—and sometimes all the more powerfully for being founded on such a misreading. Indeed, from about 1930 to 1960 the French became obsessed with Hegel, and, in particular, the *Phenomenology*, in an unprecedented way. In other words, the Alexes founded an intense period of work by a number of extraordinary, and extraordinarily diverse, major figures (many already mentioned above).<sup>4</sup> The period closes with the work of Jacques Derrida, who simultaneously brings to the reading of Hegel an unrivalled rigour, intensity and import. This closure is accomplished between 1964 and 1974, between Derrida's early work on 'Violence and metaphysics' to *Glas*, and is all the more effective because, in giving Hegel the greatest possible significance (as, indeed, do others, such as Michel Foucault), it opens new possibilities of circumscription and circumvention, new ways for philosophy.

As Derrida himself notes, the strong misreadings of Hegel by the Alexes had some genuinely extraordinary benefits, particularly concerning the status of time:

Koyré and Kojève, recognized, contrary to Heidegger, the 'prevalence' or the 'primacy' of the future on the present in the Jena Lectures. They did this in a non-equivocal manner and with strong and powerful formulas... We should also not forget that Koyré and Kojève were amongst the first readers of Heidegger; they also recognized this influence in their interpretations of Hegel.<sup>5</sup>

4. For extended (and often very different) accounts of the role of Hegel in twentieth-century French thought, see B. Baugh, *French Hegel: From Surrealism to Postmodernism*, New York and London, Routledge, 2003; J. Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1987; D.K. Keenan (ed.), *Hegel and Contemporary Continental Philosophy*, Albany, SUNY, 2004).

5. J. Derrida, 'Preface: A time for farewells: Heidegger (read by) Hegel (read by) Malabou,' in *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, preface by J. Derrida, London, Routledge, 2005, p. xxv. Derrida continues, of the 'French reception of Hegel,' 'there were few who did not situate their thought in the shadow of Hegel and in the legacy left by Kojève's and Koyré's meditations. And not only in the more or less academic discipline of philosophy (Lévinas, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, but also Breton, Bataille, Klossowski, Lacan, and so many others) and not only in that generation: Althusser, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, all shared at least, with a few others, a sort of active and organized allergy, we could even say an organizing aversion, towards the Hegelian dialectic. They all shared this trait, of situating themselves philosophically, and they did this explicitly, from this rejection,' pp. xxv-xxvi. Significantly enough, if one returns to one of Derrida's most notorious essays, 'Différance,' there's this: 'Here, a remark in passing, which I owe to a recent reading of a text that Koyré (in 1934, in *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse* and reprinted in his *Etudes d'histoire de la pensée philosophique*) devoted to 'Hegel in Jena'. In this text Koyré gives long citations, in German, of the Jena *Logic*, and proposes their translation. On two occasions he encounters the expression *différente Beziehung* in

Of all the so-called ‘post-structuralists’, Derrida was the one who turned to Hegel in the most direct, extended and forceful way. Very summarily, his work is exemplified by a double-movement: first, to criticise those who thought they had escaped Hegel; second, to reread (in fact: *to translate*) Hegel in such a way as to render him unrecognisable, ‘Other to Himself’ (to resort to a banal expression). Indeed, Derrida’s translation of *Aufhebung* as ‘*la relève*’ is such a brilliant intervention that even the proudly Hegelian and virulently anti-Derridean Alain Badiou will later grudgingly accept it (my own proposed English for *Aufhebung* would be, by the way, either ‘lift-off’, as in, ‘we have lift-off’, or ‘push-up’, as in push-up bra).<sup>6</sup> What Derrida—and the other great French thinkers of the 1960s—managed to accomplish in regards to Hegel was, among other things, his deanthropomythologising (pardon the neologism), the presentation of just how powerful and intricate the Hegelian onto-logy was, and, finally, a kind of ‘new refutation of time’, to invoke J.L. Borges’s brilliant little title. Hence, among other French accomplishments, we find Deleuze’s radicalisation of Jean Hyppolite’s sense that the sense of existence has to be located nowhere but in sense itself; or Althusser’s separation of the two Marxes by revivifying the concept of absent causality, and, later, of aleatory materialism.<sup>7</sup>

Whatever one feels about deconstruction in particular as a philosophy, one must not underestimate just how crucial Derrida has been for the rereading of Hegel. If, as even such adherents as Paul de Man and Friedrich Kittler note, Derrida can often miss what’s important in the texts he reads—this is *because* he reads them so closely. It is this quite extraordinary aspect of Derrida’s work that ought to be affirmed here: his *rereading* of the philosophical tradition on the basis of direct *interventions* into his contemporaries’ own readings of the aforesaid tradition. Derrida’s practice of interpreta-

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Hegel’s text. This word (*different*), with its Latin root, is rare in German and, I believe, in Hegel, who prefers *verschieden* or *ungleich*, calling difference *Unterschied* and qualitative variety *Verschiedenheit*. In the Jena *Logic* he uses the word *different* precisely where he treats of time and the present, *Margins*, trans. A. Bass, Sussex, The Harvester Press, 1986, p. 13. ‘*Différance*’ itself is thereby proposed as a *translation* of Hegel.

6. See Derrida, *Margins*. As for Badiou, speaking about the Labarrière and Jarczyk French translation of the *Logic*: ‘I was not able to reconcile myself to translating *aufheben* by *sursumer* (to supersede, to subsume), as these translations propose, because the substitution of a technical neologism in one language for an everyday word from another language appears to me to be a renunciation rather than a victory. I have thus taken up J. Derrida’s suggestion: “*relever*,” “*relève*,” *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham, London and New York, Continuum, 2005, p. 488. Moreover, having broached this topic, I cannot resist adding Giorgio Agamben’s own contribution to the problem. In *The Time that Remains*, he notes of the German translation of the Pauline word *katargein*, messianic fulfilment, that ‘Luther uses *Aufheben* — the very word that harbours the double meaning of abolishing and conserving (*aufbewahren* and *aufhören lassen*) used by Hegel as a foundation for his dialectic! A closer look at Luther’s vocabulary shows that he is aware of the verb’s double meaning, which before him occurs infrequently. This means that in all likelihood the term acquires its particular facets through the translation of the Pauline letters, leaving Hegel to pick it up and develop it,’ *The Time that Remains: A Commentary on the Letter to the Romans*, trans. P. Dailey, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2005, p. 99.

7. As Louis Althusser, who in fact did his Master’s thesis on Hegel, writes in ‘The Return to Hegel: The Latest Word in Academic Revisionism’(1950), fulminated: ‘This Great Return to Hegel is simply a desperate attempt to combat Marx, cast in the specific form that revisionism takes in imperialism’s final crisis: *a revisionism of a fascist type*,’ *The Spectre of Hegel*, trans. G.M. Goshgarian, London, Verso, 1997, p. 183.

tion cannot be separated from its performative force; his rereadings are always also carefully-situated political interventions. Hegel is right at the centre of this enterprise, for which the key texts remain *Writing and Difference*, *Of Grammatology*, *Margins of Philosophy*, *Dissemination* and *Glas*. Derrida shows how Heidegger, Levinas, the structuralists and others have (often seriously) misunderstood Hegel; how, even when they haven't or at least do their best not to (Bataille, maybe Foucault), they cannot escape him; at the same time, Derrida also shows how Hegel remains complicit with procedures that he is allegedly against, or how he fails on his own terms; and Derrida attempts to do all this in such a way as to evade the unparalleled recuperative powers of the dialectic.

From the early 1960s, then, the explicit anti-Hegelianism of French philosophy becomes part of its power, and, just as academic German philosophy is dissolving into conceptual irrelevance or delivering its best work as sociology and media studies, Paris becomes once again the true philosophical centre of the world, its revivification due precisely to this protracted encounter-struggle with Hegel.<sup>8</sup> From the mid-1970s to the present, however, Hegel returns as a different kind of interlocutor: no longer the overwhelming figure of 1930-60, he now regularly functions as a standard negative reference for philosophies of science, is reinterpreted happily through nuanced close readings, or treated as a great philosopher whose thought must be dealt with as absolute (if wrong), a key figure in the history of philosophy, if not in the philosophy of history. That's where I think the French are today with their Hegel: the Parisian Triangle (as one says 'Bermuda Triangle') of exemplary error, neutral commentary, historical monument.

I have provided an indecently protracted preamble to this review because I do not believe that Catherine Malabou's book can be profitably understood without some sense of this context. Indeed, *The Future of Hegel*, as the 'Acknowledgements' confess, began life as a doctoral thesis under Derrida's supervision. This fact alone should give a hint of Malabou's extreme attentiveness to previously overlooked or under-examined details of Hegel's text, especially the linguistic intricacies; her affiliative ingenuity in linking apparently heterogeneous expositions of concepts to one another; and her heady immixture of interpretation and intervention, simultaneously restrained by its interpretative care and erudition *and* unleashed to the bogglingly ambitious, seeking nothing less than to blow Hegel out of the encrusted continuum of history for radical new uses.

This program therefore takes the problem of *Hegel's future* as central. As the very title *The Future of Hegel* immediately suggests, the problems are manifold. First, does Hegel really have a future, that is, as a philosopher whose work will continue to persecute us, to have a bearing on thinking as such? Second, does Hegel even have a concept of the future, does he think the future? Third, are we ourselves Hegel's future, have we ourselves already been thought by Hegel, and/or in what way will we have already been Hegel's future? These questions for Malabou are pressing, and they are inextricably linked. They also provide her with a matrix to proceed: the problematics of the event, of time, and of history are foregrounded from the start; as, indeed, are the associated

8. See Badiou's absolutely stunning 'The Adventure of French Philosophy,' *New Left Review*, September/October 2005, pp. 67-77 for the best short account of the French innovations.

problematics of false starts, of re-commencement, and of belatedness; not to mention the problems of eternity or atemporality.

In order to think these problematics through, Malabou turns to the concept—if that is what it is—of ‘plasticity’, *Plastizität*. Here are her preliminary etymological remarks, concerning:

a term which itself, in its first sense, describes or *designates the act of giving form*. The English and French substantives ‘plasticity’ and *plasticité* and their German equivalent, *Plastizität*, entered the language in the eighteenth century. They joined words already in use which had been formed from the same root: the substantive ‘plastics’ (*die Plastik*), and the adjective ‘plastic’ (*plastisch*). All three words are derived from the Greek *plassein* (πλασσειν), which means ‘to model’, ‘to mould’. ‘Plastic’, as an adjective, means two things: on the one hand, to be ‘susceptible to changes of form’ or malleable (clay is a ‘plastic’ material); and on the other hand, ‘having the power to bestow form, the power to mould’, as in the expressions, ‘plastic surgeon’ and ‘plastic arts’ (8).

Malabou goes on to emphasize the constant semantic extensions of ‘plasticity’ (including synthetics and explosives). Despite the self-evident linguistic interest of the term, one has to ask: why plasticity at all? Does it not have a very restricted field of application in Hegel’s work? What could it possibly have to do with rethinking temporality and dialectics? After all, almost every reputable reading of the term in Hegel gives it a rather circumscribed home in the realm of the fine arts, notably sculpture and tragedy; and, concomitantly, locates its real effectivity in the distant classical past. Stephen Houlgate’s account is representative here: “Plasticity” of character, in Hegel’s view, is the living “sculptural” quality shown by those individuals who identify wholly with their ethical pathos.<sup>9</sup> For Hegel, the great Greek figures who achieve such plasticity in their exemplary and substantial individuality include Pericles, Socrates, Plato, Sophocles, and so on. One can see the point immediately. Such plasticity was a stage, a mediated moment, in the pre-history of modern subjectivity, one in which self-fashioning and immanent embodied becoming were precisely attainable as one and the same activity.

For Malabou, however, the term takes us a lot further than this. For ‘philosophical plasticity’ ‘characterizes the philosophical attitude’ as well as applying ‘to philosophy itself, to its form and manner of being’(10). She cites the ‘Preface’ to the 1831 *Science of Logic* and the ‘Preface’ to the *Phenomenology* as evidence here—‘*ein plastischer Vortrag*’—that the ‘plastic individuality of the Greeks thus acquires the value of a model for the ideal philosophical attitude’(10). And since ‘Absolute Relation’ is the ‘activity-of-form’ (*Formtätigkeit*), ‘it is this “activity” that clearly indicates the very *plasticity of substance*

9. S. Houlgate, ‘Hegel’s Theory of Tragedy,’ in S. Houlgate (ed.), *Hegel and the Arts*, Northwestern University Press, 2007, p. 175. Aside from note 57, pp. 174-5, this is the only mention of the term ‘plasticity’ in the entire volume; in any case, it is given no real bearing on Hegel’s philosophy *in toto*. Moreover, Hegel commentary generally underplays and restricts the sense of this term, even when it may seem central to the discussion. For instance, in John Shannon Hendrix’s *Aesthetics and the Philosophy of Spirit: From Plotinus to Schelling and Hegel*, New York, Peter Lang, 2005, though much hinges on the status of ‘the plastic arts,’ ‘plastic’ isn’t even deserving of an entry in the index.

itself'(12). It is thus by attending to the hitherto-unactualised possibilities of plasticity in Hegel that Malabou orients her entire account. Indeed, she will make the very strong claim that plasticity 'is, therefore, the point around which all the transformations of Hegelian thought revolve, the centre of its metamorphoses'(13). In doing so, she tries to release Hegel from the sclerotic grip of one dominant tradition of commentary, and attempts to do so by precisely reading Hegel more closely and carefully than this tradition has managed.

Yet the peculiar contingency of such a claim regarding the centrality of the concept of plasticity—a claim whose entire pertinence derives, as I have been suggesting, from the Parisian Triangle of Malabou's situation—entails that Malabou attend to the problem of contingency in Hegel. To this end, she has recourse to an idiomatic French phrase '*voir venir*' (a phrase which poses some problems for the translator Lisabeth Daring, who marks its difficulty in her little note on xlix). Malabou explains herself as follows:

'*Voir venir*' in French means to wait, while, as is prudent, observing how events are developing. But it also suggests that other people's intentions and plans must be probed and guessed at. It is an expression that can thus refer at one and the same time to the state of 'being sure of what is coming' ('*être sûr de ce qui vient*') and of 'not knowing what is coming' ('*ne pas savoir ce qui va venir*'). It is on this account that the '*voir venir*', 'to see (what is) coming', can represent that interplay, within Hegelian philosophy, of teleological necessity and surprise (13).

*Seeing coming*: it's impossible not to sense an entire lineage of recent Continental thought behind this little syntagm (Blanchot, Lacan, Derrida, Lacoue-Labarthe, Nancy, Agamben, etc.), in which a problematic of vision, timing, enjoyment and so on is invested with a political animus directed towards a rethinking of community as 'unworking', 'inoperative', 'advening', 'coming'.<sup>10</sup> The syntagm, in high Derridean style, irreducibly (that is, according to Derrida's own inventive and covert renomination of the Hegelian vocabulary, *absolutely*) encrypts the irresolvable doublet of anticipated certainty *and* uncertain expectation, of knowledge properly bound to necessity *and* of the impossibility of knowing the future, of phronetic patience *and* frenetic anxiety.

To make such idiomatic word-play stick, particularly in the context of Hegel interpretation, Malabou has a lot of explaining to do. This brings us to another ambivalent benefit of post-Derridean readings of philosophy: the argument has to be made step by step with close reference *to the text itself*, and show itself to be proceeding as such; every term has to be carefully interrogated, and articulated with its cognates and affiliates throughout the corpus; consequences then have to be drawn regarding the new comprehension of that corpus, as of the history of its interpretation; finally, the reading may seek to open itself up to variants and dissidents, in a kind of auto-deconstruction. This procedure, moreover, immediately renders any summary or paraphrase otiose: conviction must attend on demonstration, and this demonstration is at once unique (or, better,

10. See, for example, G. Agamben, *The Coming Community*, trans. M. Hardt, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1993); M. Blanchot, *The Unavowable Community*, trans. P. Joris, Station Hill, 1988); J.-L. Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, trans. P. Connor et al., Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1991).

as we ought to say these days, *singular*) and forever-to-be-repeated (or, rather, essentially iterable). As such, it's a nightmare for a reviewer—you'll have to take my word for it that Malabou's demonstration is strong and convincing, without me ever being able to convey adequately why—and itself a function of what she is trying to argue for, the very future she is trying *to see to come*.

That said, a review can at least gesture towards some of the brute way-stations of such an itinerary. The first part of this book is 'Hegel on Man: Fashioning a Second Nature', which moves from a reading of the *Anthropology* and its narrative of the vicissitudes of the individuation of the properly human soul—that is, through problems of nature, animality, sensation, auto-affection, and habit—to Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle's *De Anima*—that is, of *vovς*, sensation and understanding—to the relation of habit and organic life in *The Philosophy of Nature*—involving adaptation and self-differentiation—to conclude with the problem of Greek subjectivity as the 'becoming essential of the accident'.

The second part, 'Hegel on God: The Turn of the Double Nature', follows Hegel's arguments regarding the necessity of the emergence of revealed religion as a precondition for modern (post-classical) subjectivity proper. In Malabou's own words: 'By replacing *passivity* with *plasticity* as the interpretative key to the divine negativity, we will suggest a new reading of the relation between divine subjectivity and philosophical subjectivity, based on the double sense of the Death of God'(84). Ingeniously extracting Hegel's account of Christianity from the shadow clutches of his often-subtle theological commentators—that is, philosophy and religion cannot be disassociated without falsifying Hegel's account—Malabou reminds us that, '[b]efore Hegel, no one had philosophically interpreted the Death of God as the event of his self-negation, that is, as a moment of truth within God himself'(105). The discussion that Malabou dedicates to this doubled *kenosis* is stunning, all the more effective for binding it to the dialectics of *Vorstellung*, and, finally, to the extraordinary image of a Plastic God of Time.

The third part, 'Hegel on the Philosopher or, Two Forms of the Fall', forces Malabou's analysis further, against one of her real targets, the spectral presence of Kojève and his interpretation of the 'End of History': that time in which time still passes but nothing essential happens, in an eternal Sabbath of Mankind. For Malabou, of course, this is a poor interpretation, for:

The moment of Absolute Knowledge only causes the dialectical suppression of one *certain time*, one specific temporality. From this moment on, far from closing all horizons, Absolute Knowledge announces in fact a new temporality, one born from the synthesis of two temporalities, the Greek and the Christian. The moment which dialectically gives rise to the two temporalities marks the emergence of a new era of *plasticity* in which subjectivity gives itself the form which at the same time it receives (133).

One problem here, of course, and despite the strenuousness with which Malabou pursues her *idée fixe* of the plastic, is that, for Hegel, philosophy explicitly—and, not coincidentally, in and as Hegel himself—first, 'seizes its own concept', thereby completing the



journey of spirit as it completes itself, and, second, does this precisely by ‘looking back’ (*Zurücksehen*), thus becoming the ultimate hypotyposis of absolute spirit in this epochal recapitulation and consummation. Malabou’s solution to this difficulty can by now hardly be unexpected: she reinjects the dialectic into itself, by asserting that Hegel ‘in effect “sublates” *aufheben* into *aufheben*, *Aufhebung* into *Aufhebung*. The possibility of a new reading of Absolute Knowledge emerges from this truly plastic operation’ (145). Take your pick of the translations, but it’s not unthinkable that Hegel sublatingly sublates sublation, sublates sublation with sublation. It is also not unthinkable that Malabou’s project is a kind of heterodox contribution to the post-dialectical tendencies of contemporary philosophy, whether Deleuzian, Lacanian (in its Slovenian Hegelian form), Agambinian, Badiouan, whatever. In any case, it seems clear that she thereby blows Hegel out of the Parisian Triangle of History—as I said above, of error, commentary and monument—and into a new ‘space’ of thought.

And this is, to return to Malabou’s guiding thread, the power of plasticity for reshaping a genuinely contemporary Hegel:

Hegel’s philosophy announces that the future, from now on, depends on the way the extraordinary and unexpected can only arise out of the prose of the well-known and familiar. Plasticity fulfils its promise for the future with its treatment of a past that has become rigid: if it *plasticizes* that past—by solidifying or laminating it—it also explodes that past, through what the French call *plasticage* or bombing (190).

One, however, wonders whether in an epoch whose apocalyptic fears are crystallised under the heading of ‘global warming’ and, still, ‘nuclear winter’, the plastic explosives of terrorists, and in which the oil-based phenomenon that is plastic implies unsustainability in itself, the neuroscientific obsessions with ‘neuroplasticity’, the cheesy geek enthusiasm for plastic action figures and Hegel dolls, and so forth, whether ‘plasticity’ can achieve the destiny and rigour of a true philosophical concept in Hegel’s concept of concept.

Yet this is exactly what Malabou has gone onto achieve with her subsequent work. In a series of further brilliant encounters with Derrida, Hegel, psychoanalysis and the neurosciences, Malabou has extended the concept of plasticity in a number of different ways.<sup>11</sup> Drawing on work on the ‘three plasticities’—developmental, modulational, and reparative—from the neurosciences, Malabou uses these discoveries to radically criticise the procedures and claims of traditional philosophical and analytical programs, in order to, as she puts it in her conclusion to *Les nouveaux blessés*, develop a new philosophical materialism. This entails, she affirms, refusing the slightest separation between the brain and thought, as well as between the brain and the unconscious. Unsurprisingly, given her post-Derridean-Hegelianism, this also entails the maintenance of a supercharged dialectic: ‘A reasonable materialism, in my view, would posit that the natural contradicts itself and that thought is the fruit of this contradiction.’<sup>12</sup>

11. See, for example *Les nouveaux blessés: De Freud à la neurologie, penser les traumatismes contemporains*, Paris, Bayard, 2007; *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. S. Rand, New York, Fordham, 2008; *La Chambre du milieu: De Hegel aux neurosciences*, Paris, Hermann, 2009; *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. C. Shread, New York, Columbia, 2010; among others.

12. Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, p. 82.

In the end, therefore, what Malabou does, if anything, is show us that the reading of Hegel has hardly begun; that it is, as yet, impossible to close the book on his philosophy without forgetting or foregoing philosophy itself; that the history of philosophy is itself integrally philosophy or it is not (that is, neither history nor philosophy); that this history, beyond any possible recapture by pragmatics, blasts us into a future from which brilliant fragments of Hegelian negativity are already radiating back, conceptual supernovae erupting in the infinite void of energetically-metamorphosing being.

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