

THE FUTURE OF HEGEL

Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic

Catherine Malabou

Translated by Lisabeth During

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THE FUTURE OF HEGEL

‘ . . . nothing will ever absolve us from following step by step, page by page, the extraordinary trajectory of *The Future of Hegel* . . . I once again urge all to read this book.’ *Jacques Derrida*

The Future of Hegel is one of the most important recent books on Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, a philosopher who has had a crucial impact on the shape of Continental philosophy. Published here in English for the first time, it includes a substantial preface by Jacques Derrida in which he explores the themes and conclusions of Malabou’s book.

The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic restores Hegel’s rich and complex concepts of time and temporality to contemporary philosophy. It examines Hegel’s concept of time, relating it to perennial topics in philosophy such as substance, accident and the identity of the subject. Catherine Malabou also contrasts her account of Hegelian temporality with the interpretation given by Heidegger in *Being and Time*, arguing that it is the concept of ‘plasticity’ that best describes Hegel’s theory of temporality.

The Future of Hegel also develops Hegel’s preoccupation with the history of Greek thought and Christianity and explores the role of theology in Hegel’s thought.

Essential reading for those interested in Hegel and contemporary Continental philosophy, *The Future of Hegel* will also be fascinating to those interested in the ideas of Heidegger and Derrida.

Catherine Malabou is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Paris X, Nanterre.

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CONTENTS

<i>Preface by Jacques Derrida</i>	vii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xlvi
<i>Preliminary remarks</i>	xlix
Introduction	1
PART I	
Hegel on Man: fashioning a second nature	21
Introduction	23
1 Introduction to the <i>Anthropology</i>	28
2 On noetic plasticity: Hegel's reading of <i>De Anima</i>	39
3 Habit and organic life	57
4 'The proper of man' in question: human specificity and plastic individuality	65
Conclusion	75
PART II	
Hegel on God: the turn of double nature	77
Introduction	79
5 Presentation of <i>Revealed Religion</i>	85
6 God without transcendence? The theologians contra Hegel	91

7 The death of God and the death of philosophy: alienation and its double fate	103
8 Divine plasticity: or, the <i>turn</i> of events	115
Conclusion	125
PART III	
Hegel on the philosopher or, two forms of the fall	131
Introduction	133
9 Presentation of <i>Philosophy</i>	135
10 The dialectical simplification	143
11 ‘On the Self’	155
12 The philosopher, the reader and the speculative proposition	167
Conclusion	184
<i>Notes</i>	194
<i>Bibliography</i>	230
<i>Index</i>	236

PREFACE BY
JACQUES DERRIDA

A time for farewells:
Heidegger (read by) Hegel (read by)
Malabou¹

The future, tell me, the future would then have a history.

Yes, if we are to believe *The Future of Hegel*. And also time, time itself would have a history. And history then, history would also have a history, a singular history setting the stage for the protagonists of a philosophical gigantomachia already engaged over questions like: ‘What *is* history?’, ‘What *is* time’, ‘What *is* the future?’, ‘What is the authority of ‘What *is* . . .’ in all of these questions?’, ‘And how may we reflect on the *being* of this ‘is’ or on the present tense working here?’, etc.

The Future of Hegel! There is, to begin with, the art of the title. This would be the first entitlement to our admiration. If the art of the title is a grand art, that is because it is double: it is at once a conceptual and a plastic art, an art which gives one form and one form only, the most economical, while at the same time, in order to *cease* itself, grasps and receives, in two nouns and four words, *The Future of Hegel*, the immensity of *three questions*. Nothing less, in fact, than the heart of three redoubtable questions. The very economy of plasticity can only *give* a form to the title if *at the same time* (and I purposefully say *at the same time*, for this expression shall henceforth never leave us) it grasps its form, and can only grasp it if *at the same time* it receives it from a final or destinal unity. For what will be shown is that these three questions, in the end, only shape and arrange themselves into one.

I understand. First question, then: Does Hegel have a future? Or again, does he remain, as so many current philosophers commonly believe, yes, too commonly, in their classes, courses where they ‘go through’ the history of philosophy, a thinker of the past or a simple passé thinker?

Certainly, but at once, a second question emerges from the fold of the first. A question already implied in the first and which displaces its accent from the *future* to what *is to be had*: Does Hegel, the philosopher,

have a future, in the sense of: ‘has he (*thought*) the future? Will he have had a *concept* of the future?’ Is there a future, or a place for the future according to his vision and in his philosophy? Will he have thought the future *as such*?

We must listen to and contest those who believed this could be doubted: currently and commonly, this suspicion is in the air, and it rests upon a certain trend of the day, a certain current or movement of time. For the answer to these two initial questions will turn an entire current of recent thought backwards. Yes, Hegel is a thinker of the future. Yes, he has a future for he has also, contrarily to what we may believe, thought the future, its being, the possibility and the necessity of what we suppose may be recognized under this noun, the future, a noun which also bears in French a certain verbal form, that which is *to come*. Hence, inevitable but still astonishing, precisely where we see it coming without ever seeing it come, the third question, which we still may consider as the same question, is at the same time the most grave and difficult. It hauls and pulls us away from what could seem to resemble a debate on a towering ancestor between philosophers or historians of philosophy: in what way does the possibility of the *future in general* depend on the future of *Hegel*, on the future *promised to* this thinker as well as on the future *thought by* this thinker? Such is the scope of this book, such is what is at stake in this book, and its most troubling risk: will there and can there be a future after the supposed end of history, beyond this *scene* or ‘*topos*’ called ‘absolute knowledge’? Beyond a certain interpretation or presentation of time in general? And what may it be? Can the future, what is to come, be thought, be conceived or be announced by the question ‘what is . . .’ or even, more generally, by what is called and what we may call a ‘question’? And in what way would all of these phrases here formed belong to the tradition, in what way do they come from the tradition, and furthermore, do they belong to the future of Hegel’s name? Or to the interpretation associated to his heritage?

To salute a great book, should or would we speak henceforth of an event?

Yes, in reading *The Future of Hegel*, it would be tempting to do so, it would be a strong temptation to salute this work while endlessly urging it to help us think what it means to *salute* and what is meant by this strange word ‘*salutation*’ (greeting, acknowledgment, welcome, but also, salvation, redemption, deliverance, liberation . . .). It remains extremely difficult to understand exactly what is meant and what we mean to say when we utter ‘salutations’ to another, for example when the moment comes to say ‘goodbye’ or ‘farewell’, but also, sometimes, in the Midi, when the other appears in the middle of the day (‘hello!’, ‘good day!’, ‘greetings and salutations!’ or ‘farewell and adieu!’²). Is it a word, this word ‘salutation’, like this other word ‘farewell’ or even ‘adieu’? Are these words or are they something like the withholding of a phrase, a wish or a prayer (‘be well!’, ‘farewell!’, ‘be saved!’, ‘may your salvation, health or redemption be

secured and maintained!', 'be with God', etc.), the time of a calling, something like an appeal, henceforth suspended amid more than one simple meaning, at the very moment of an encounter or of a separation? However, a certain reserve or distance holds us back from saluting or hailing a book too loudly or too soon: but also, whether this is warranted or not, there is the belief that only the future will have decided, what *will have been* this book and if it *will have sealed* such an event. And above all, for this is the incontestable lesson of *The Future of Hegel*, one should not, ever, treat this word 'event' too lightly. This word, one should not 'see it come' into view too quickly. One should not too hastily apply it to the demonstration here put forth by Catherine Malabou. At the turbulent and paradoxical heart of this book, which projects nothing less than an unheard history, a history of time as a 'history of the future',³ and hence as a history of the 'event', there lies a powerful demonstration. It comes to itself and is formed precisely from this fold: as soon as an idea of the event is advanced, a discourse or a text on the event is proposed, and at the very moment when a history of the event is designated, there is, already, creation and formation of *an* event.

How may we anticipate the formation of this form? What does it *announce* in itself? What does one see coming in this *annunciation*? The chance of this expression, 'to see (what is) coming',⁴ will traverse the enigma of this book. It seems to be linked to some sort of *equivocacy*, but in truth it remains profoundly dialectic, in a sense where the dialectical here thought is thought over, re-thought, from what could resemble a fortuitous chance. We need time and time again to meditate this quasi-automatic alliance between chance and necessity, between accident and essence. Catherine Malabou gives all its chances to this chance of and in the idiom itself, and thus claims all that is announced from another idiom, following Hegel's 'imperative to philosophize in one's idiom'.⁵ Literally making this Hegelian imperative her own, following it and pursuing its commandment in her own language, French, at the very point where it commands the literality of the letter and to the point where it remains almost untranslatable, Catherine Malabou *invents* an idiom. This really means she *recovers* and brings to light, she brings about and retrieves, from a place where it was never really abandoned but where something like a 'farewell' had somehow banished it, dismissing it without ever giving it its leave, the double and contradictory sense of this strange French expression 'to see (what is) coming' ('voir venir'). 'To see (what is) coming' is to anticipate, to foresee, to presage, to project; it is to expect what is coming; but it is also to let what is coming come or to let oneself be surprised by the unexpected, by the sudden appearance of what is un-awaited. 'To see (what is) coming' means *at the same time* to anticipate and to let oneself be surprised, to bear *and, at the same time*, I mean precisely *at the same time, not to* bear the unexpected. In other words, the surprise *in* what is coming, the event *of* what is coming: the future.

This ‘goodbye’, this ‘until we meet again’, which you have just been talking about, and which I don’t read as a farewell, an adieu or a salutation which marks an eternal separation; she, it seems to me, does not talk about it. Now, beyond the fact that this ‘to meet again’ intrigues me, in so far as it seems to appeal to a ‘seeing’, a ‘seeing of what is coming’, together with all the equivocal and dialectical character which you bring to this phrase, I wonder what is the scene of this exile or of this slumber. I wonder where is to be found, to take up your expression, this ‘leave’. In what sense has the double meaning of ‘to see (what is) coming’ been banished, retreated or taken its leave? Which is the scene of this goodbye to which, without ever having said farewell, we are now returning? Would it not be some sort of unconscious? Would it not be some sort of cunning performed by the unconscious (here understood as the unconscious proper to language) of which Freud said both that it renounces nothing and that we must reckon with it when we attempt to interpret the ‘contradictory meanings’ of the celebrated ‘primal words’? An unconscious about which he even said, rightfully so or not, that it remains indifferent both to logical contradiction and to temporality? In any case, to temporality understood as that which is constituted within the ego of a phenomenological consciousness or as that which is constructed by the self-relation of *Dasein*, that is, by the ‘mineness’ (*Jemeinigkeit*) proper to *Dasein*.

We shall speak again of these differences between goodbye and farewell, that is, between all of *these farewells*. Each in its proper time, and it will always be at that very time when we shall have to say ‘goodbye’ or ‘farewell’. Freud? Yes, if this book never names him *per se*, everything in it seems to address him, point by point, in each and every word, almost as if he was already participating in a major and seriously worked out explication. There is so much more to be learned here about the Freudian discourse on life and death, and thus on so many modalities of Freud’s analysis, than in a host of books explicitly psychoanalytical.

I shall continue to speak a little while longer. Not so much because I wish to put forth a sort of meta-discursive monologue, but rather in order to let myself be caught or trapped in the snares of language and to take on a certain risk here involved, the risk of *my* idiom. I will have to do this while always remaining deliberately *on the edge* of this book. After all, what we are doing here is to put forth an invitation, an invitation to read a book too rich in its content to be explained, paraphrased or analysed in a few pages. *The Future of Hegel* bears such a strong relationship to its own writing and its own idiom that it constitutes on its own a kind of philosophical *œuvre*. That is, at least, what I wish here to show: it is a unique *œuvre* on which any meta-linguistic dialogue very quickly experiences its own limitations and its own simulated nature. This experience, as it unfolds, we shall make our own.

By ‘reinventing’ an idiom, by coining this phrase ‘to see (what is) coming’, by revealing the power and the virtual economy of its ‘unconscious’,

if you like, and by making it the organizational figure of an immense problematic, Malabou's strategy, as I see it, achieves three feats in one: (1) She transposes or translates the Hegelian imperative ('to philosophize in one's idiom') thus displacing it into the history of French language and philosophy. (2) She puts into practice – and thus to the test – this other Hegelian motif: the very possibility, or chance, of a *speculative* language, or rather, of inserting the *speculative* in language when language measures itself to the very capacity of condensing two contradictory meanings in one single syntagm. Two antinomical meanings *at the same time* concentrated in one and the same verbal formation (verbal, again, in a double sense: consisting of two words and two verbs: 'to see (what is) coming'). The Hegelian *Aufhebung* is not only an example of this possibility: it is its very concept. Between the two contradictory senses of 'to see (what is) coming' there is an *Aufhebung*, or a *sublation*, of one meaning into its other. (3) Finally, the factor, the modality, that demonstrates this mobile and self-contradictory ambiguity of 'to see (what is) coming', is its *plasticity*. The 'to see (what is) coming' is plastic. Before inquiring into the immense breadth of this conceptual word, *plasticity*, before interrogating the very plasticity of this conceptual word which is what it states and states what it is, which is precisely what it thinks and reflects, before specifying its very opportunity which is discovered and offered by Malabou's philosophical writing, we should remark that plasticity is not a secondary concept, another concept which, conjoined with the expression 'to see (what is) coming', would form a sort of hermeneutical couple in *The Future of Hegel*. It is the same concept in its differentiating and determinating process. Because of its own dialectical self-contradiction and mobility, 'to see (what is) coming' is itself a plastic concept, it allows us to see coming plasticity itself. Since its self-interrelating with its own difference also passes through the *Aufhebung*, we would almost be tempted to recognize in it the Hegelian concept, the very concept itself, the concept of the concept. In any case, without going too fast or too far at the moment, we should recall that it is in order to define this expression 'to see (what is) coming', the future and the structure of its anticipation or again the Hegelian subjectivity, that the *Introduction* of this book associates the dialectical, time and plasticity. And since the Hegelian subjectivity, the Hegelian concept of subjectivity, incorporates the whole and entire history of *being-subject*, the becoming-subject of all subjectivity, what must be thought here is the very subjectivity of the subject and what happens to the subject, that is, the experience which exposes a subject to what comes to it, to what happens to it, to what it 'sees coming', in the double sense of what can be anticipated and what remains impossible to anticipate. And what happens to the subject who 'sees coming' will be for it as essential as accidental, as essential as the necessity of its *telos*, as accidental as an unanticipated accident. At the heart of Malabou's thought, that is of a certain non-empiricist idea of contingency or of a certain responsible

empiricism with renewed radicality, we will always find the same commitment: the ‘becoming essential of accident’ and, *at once, at the same time and in the same time*, the ‘becoming accidental of essence’. The paradox or formal *aporia* here raised is revealed by the dialectical plasticity or the self-contradiction in the expression ‘to see (what is) coming’. Towards the end of the book, this feature will become more and more apparent, especially in the discussion of Hegel’s profound repetition of the Aristotelian notion of *automatos* or *automatismos*, the self-being of that which necessarily moves in and of itself (*aus sich selbst*), but also, *at the same time*, the self-being of what happens in and of itself by chance or by accident.⁶ Without both, without the conjunction of the essential or teleological necessity and, *at the same time*, of the aleatory accident, of the ‘may-be’ inherent in contingency, no event would or could ever come forth or happen. This is where we must return, to this ‘may-be’ or to this ‘perhaps’, for it is without doubt the most difficult and most audacious thesis of this book. The syntagm *at the same time*, which I shall underline again in the following passage, declares *at the same time* the conceptual indissociability and a singular synchrony, the one of temporality itself together with the transformation of a form – at once spatial and conceptual. ‘At the same time’ emphasizes the power of language, others would say, the genius inscribed in such and such *play* with language, the capacity or the aptitude to conjugate in itself two contradictory meanings at the same time, in the same stroke, within the same time, all at once and in one time. More than one time at the same time – and these times (*fois, feiz, vices*) are also successions of strokes, they are all ‘plays’.

The dialectical composition of such concepts as the ‘future’, ‘plasticity’, and ‘temporality’ form the *anticipatory structure* operating within subjectivity itself as Hegel conceived it. To distinguish this structure from the future as it is ordinarily understood, we will name this structure ‘to see (what is) coming’, obeying Hegel’s injunction to philosophize in one’s idiom. ‘*Voir venir*’ in French means to wait, while, as is prudent, observing how events are developing. But it *also* [I emphasize, J.D.] suggests that there are intentions and plans of other people which must be probed and guessed at. It is an expression that can thus refer at *one and the same time* [I emphasize again, J.D.], to the state of ‘being sure of what is coming’ and of ‘not knowing what is coming’. It is on this account that ‘to see (what is) coming’ can represent that interplay, within Hegelian philosophy, of *teleological necessity* and *surprise*.

(p. 13)

This ‘interplay’ of necessity and of surprise does not only happen once in language, as if by chance, as if it resulted from a simple accident of and

in the idiom. Language must be able to play, there must be within it the very display of its aptitude to play, the habit of conjugating, and of holding in itself and for itself, in the very body of its syntax and of its lexicon, the constant mark of this transformation, something like the permanent *habitus* of this alteration. In other words, it is of the essence of language, of what we call an idiom or a dialect,⁷ that its vocation be dialectical or, if one prefers, that its calling be essentially plastic. The idiom itself must be a subject capable of 'seeing what is coming'. In both cases, in the very alternative proper to the 'at the same time', all depends on the coming, if I may say, of 'what comes' and of what we are sure is coming as if 'what will come', and of what slips away from being seen, from what is to be had and from what is to be known. It is what comes that is here the issue, and hence the event or the advent, of invention or of adventure. Where it comes to the subject and where the subject, the essence of the subject comes to itself and sees itself come. The question becomes then, and will remain obscure: how can (and may we) see *ourselves* coming to *ourselves*, to the double meaning of 'to see (what is) coming'? What is the *ipseity* of this 'self' who sees itself come, and hence, constitutes itself *at the same time* in the teleological development of itself and in absolute surprise? For, let us say it simply: there would, without the future, be no more history, and there would be no more future, no event to come, without the very possibility of an absolute surprise (that is, without this 'to see (what is) coming' blind to all anticipation); but there would also be no future, no future as such, no novelty at all, without some sort of historical link, memory, retention or tradition, thus without some sort of synthesis. This synthesis has already claimed the future anterior and the 'to see (what is) coming' of anticipation, it has already called for the teleological structure which must dampen surprise itself or novelty in order to make it possible: as if it were a surprise *without* surprise. A continual transformation and radical interruption, a process and an explosion, plasticity and gelignite. But also *physis* and *techné*, nature and culture, nature and the technological, nature and art, if you like: on the one hand, the natural or organic transformation of living forms, their own plasticity and, on the other hand, plastic artificiality and art, and the synthetic, indeed prosthetic technology of 'plastic matter'. Such would be, at the heart of the 'to see (what is) coming', the two antithetical forms of the plastic and the plasticity of these two contradictory forms.

Once again, let us start again. This book sculpts a multiplicity, both powerful and organized, this book formulates thousands of impatient, troubled and anxious questions on what the word 'annunciation' can mean in the various modalities of prophecy, of prevision, of information or of prediction, of prefiguration, of protention, all within the horizon of phenomenology or of ontology, on what can be meant by the expression 'to see (what is) coming', precisely, when we are more or less 'sure of what is coming'; but it also asks, this book, at the same time, what it can mean for

there to be an interruption of this 'to see (what is) coming' by *its* other, the 'to see (what is) coming' which does not know what is coming. This book can be read as a meditation on what could mean a form, a process of formation or a formalization of form, or its very plasticity, which corresponds to the first instance of the expression 'to see (what is) coming'. But it can also be read as an interruption of this formative or informational plasticity by the irruption or the explosion of some sort of gelignite dynamite, a meditation, we might say, on 'to see (what is) coming' that which could never be seen or known, on what it could mean 'to see (what is) coming' as an absolute surprise or an unpredictable accident. What is here announced, we may have already seen it, is not exactly a question of posterity, but rather the question of the future, the question of the condition, if we may say so, of what is to come in itself, of what comes in the event which is coming, of everything which presents itself or which absents itself in the word or the experience of 'to come'.

Here, then, a work which is from one end to the other obsessed by this same question: what can it possibly mean this 'coming', this 'arriving', and most of all, this '*to see (what is) coming*' and thus also, 'being born', 'appearing', and even before 'being born' and 'appearing', what can it possibly mean to 'take', to 'conceive', 'to take or give a form', to 'arrive' and to 'arrive onto oneself'? And why does this matrix of questions bring us back or lead us to the question of plasticity? To the plasticity of a form, of course, to the plasticity of another form, to the plasticity of a form involved in its process of formation, to the plasticity of the unformed, to the plasticity of 'plastic matter', but also to the plasticity of gelignite, of what can at any time explode or threaten to explode, for example, the self-identity of the present? Yes, it is the expression 'to see (what is) coming' and plasticity, both thought together, as if they were inseparably intertwined, as if everything we needed to say could and would be said in these few words, that would be the genius of this book: it can launch a real event in the world of thought by inventing the very reinvention of one, two or three words, to 'see (what is) coming' and 'plasticity', in order to think in both their common or shared possibility and in order to recall their very presence not only in one but in more than one language. At the philosophical frontier between many languages, by putting to the test a desire for a speculative translation.

If I understand correctly, what you find admirable in this book is that, at the same time, it is a gift of idioms and a particular type of philosophical writing.

Yes, and also, which is extremely rare, the art of cultivating something like a performative writing of which the force be philosophical or, better, reflexive: reflecting upon the very possibility of the philosophical. Without ever surrendering to aestheticism, without ever striving for 'stylistic effects', this book achieves a sober beauty which I would want to call

plastic, precisely where it takes *shape*, the same *shape*, singular and unique, as the *thought* of plasticity, and the European genealogy of this concept. *The Future of Hegel* opens precisely the way to a thought of the corporeal, it engages it in the very manner plasticity is treated, plasticity which ‘works on and within the body of the systematic exposition’ (p. 18).⁸ Here, in the very same horizon as this problematic, what is being discussed is plasticity *as a schema* in Hegel. Since Being ‘schematizes itself’, empirical or sensuous existence is not to be dissociated from the movement and the unity of the concept. Therefore, it has the right to demand a systematic exposition of its own. The system is thus its scene, its home, and hence the very scene or home of the sensuous body. This is one of the strategic justifications, we shall return to it, which Malabou offers for the extensive and systematic treatment of a notion which, in the end, appears only very rarely, and in a self-contained manner, within the Hegelian corpus, never at its heart, or at least not at first glance. (A possible title for an imaginary chapter: *on body and corpus*.) Malabou has just called it the *schematization of being* in Hegel, in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: ‘The singular individual is, on its own terms, the transition of the category from its concept into external reality: it is the pure schema itself.’⁹

Then, in order to justify her choice, and the privilege bestowed to this motif, Malabou connects it to what she names the ‘motor’ of a ‘strategy’ (motif or motor, word or concept, concept of a schematization movement, this is what would be plasticity):

Being schematizes itself, and the unification of the concept with empirical existence cannot be explained by anything external to the system. The scarcity of the references to the concept of plasticity is thus evidence of its distinct mode of presence, which is that of the originary synthesis, maintained only in the interval between presence and absence. It is for this reason, because plasticity works *on and within the body* of the systematic exposition, without ever extending above it or over determining it, that it is revealed as the concept capable of accounting for the incarnation, or the incorporation, of spirit.¹⁰

Following the rich and significant examples which Malabou offers from the first words of her *Introduction* (which also refers to Hegel’s *Aesthetics*, the *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, as well as to the Prefaces of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and of the *Science of Logic*), we cannot help sensing the many occurrences of this term, occurrences which are all clearly symptomatic. Perhaps neglected, but wrongly so, and in this regard *The Future of Hegel* is inaugural. Although Malabou does not linger on this, it seems to us (for this is the hypothesis I would like to suggest here) that the major philosophical

and strategic decision of her book consists in emphasizing the Hegelian *schema*, the Hegelian notion of a *schema*, that is, the Hegelian thesis which holds that being *schematizes itself*. (Being or God, one or the other, either one – God who thus sees himself coming while leaving, departing and separating *himself from himself*, all the while, ‘farewelling himself’, but let us not anticipate what we see here coming.)

The concept gives itself or receives *from itself* its own sensuous figures, its own rational imagination, its own intellectual intuition, etc. This giving and receiving, this giving to oneself to receive, which is the very process of plasticity, the very movement of being as becoming-plastic, this would be the speculative and reflexive power of the Hegelian concept. The Hegelian concept assimilates itself and exceeds in itself the opposition between giving and receiving, between giving and taking. It is here that we could find its ontological plasticity, at once its essence and its schema, the historical schematization of its being. This schematization is entirely historical, and the word used to speak of it, here, is a Greek word. For, if to ‘see (what is) coming’ is a French idiom with Latin roots, ‘plastic’ is before all and initially Greek. This word embraces deeply in its memory, if we may say so, keeps and holds in the immense stratification of an invisible archive, a privileged relationship to art, the ‘very birthplace of plasticity’ (p. 8);¹¹ it penetrates and informs, hence, if not all European languages, but certainly the Romance, the Slavic, Germanic and English languages. The name of the philosophical form of this dual penetration proper to plasticity, that is to say, the form which receives just as much as it gives, this *plastic* form, is nothing but that enigmatic *betwixt and between* called a *schema*. It is, between Kant and Hegel, the scene of so many fundamental questions and debates, some explicit, some less so, questions and debates which have, in any case, shaped (I could hardly say here *schematized*) a philosophical legacy far greater than us all.

The very invention of *The Future of Hegel* has occurred, among so many things (for we are still only on the edge of this book), at the philosophical intersection between the expression ‘to see (what is) coming’ and *plasticity*, precisely where each of these two ‘terms’ dialectically *conjugate telos and surprise*, anticipation *and* eruption, metamorphosis *and* absolute explosion. To invent, and most particularly understanding invention as an event, means here to rediscover what was there without being there, both in language and in philosophy; it is a question of finding, yes, but of finding for the first time what was always there and what had always been there, to find again, almost to re-find, something in its (contradictory) fusion and in its (atomic) fission where it had never before been seen, to invent it almost as one would invent a bomb, but to discover it also almost like the excessively obvious evidence of a purloined letter: never seen, never known, never waited on or for, never expected as such, while all the while only expecting it and not expecting anything else but it, the unexpected (‘*Plasticity*’ will

be presented as the ‘unforeseen of Hegelian philosophy’¹²). The letter will have been *there*, in other words, have been *truly* there in truth, and if we reflect on this and read carefully what it means, it will have been there *everywhere*, everywhere where plasticity itself, everywhere where the lexicon and the concept of plasticity operates within the moments and the corpus of the history of philosophy, even before Aristotle and after Hegel, but especially in those towering figures, at the intersection of philosophy and science, of genetics and of politics, in short, at the very centre of the *Encyclopedia*. To invent and to formulate invention as an event, in this case, is to find for the very first time, and to show or demonstrate what is there to be found within the family, the genealogy, the resources of a lexicon, and by this gesture, to institute, in a manner which shall never again be effacable, the modality in which words become concepts and confirm thereby their theoretical legitimacy. It is, in other words, formulating the scene of an idiom as a philosophical *topos* through which we will have to pass hereafter. Such words which seemed lost, hidden away in language, almost asleep in language, but asleep with one eye open, here they appear leaping into the centre of the stage, organizing and playing a lively and vigilant role. These words are almost like animals. A profound thought or conception of animal life animates this entire book. It almost gives it its breath. Such ephemeral meanings, such auxiliary predicates or attributes which seem barely determinable, in so far as they are spoken of as neither determinate nor indeterminate, but plastic, and ‘seen in their coming’, actually arrive at the highest position and maturity of major concepts. It is into this very conceptual scene that we are called, to which we are already indebted, without however knowing the extent of our debt but, more than ever today, in debt towards it. Here, then, is a rare book, an uncommon, unusual, and ambitious book which meets the importance of its ambitions to the fullest and which, from its inherent doubleness, from the pair of concepts it puts forth, the two families of words it presents, words which have been largely invisible and unthought – ‘to see (what is) coming’ and ‘plasticity’ – takes on the difficult task of rethinking precisely what constitutes the *event-ality* of the event: what comes in the event, what comes forth or comes again in an event, what can be seen as coming in what comes and thus what can be seen as coming in the future itself – at the same time, always, in both senses of the expression, that is between teleological anticipation and the explosive surprise.

But again, once again, why Hegel? Why ‘*The Future of Hegel*’? And what does plasticity or what does the expression ‘to see (what is) coming’, or again, what does the inherent plasticity of the expression ‘to see (what is) coming’, have to do with Hegel’s time?

The question cannot be limited or restricted to what one could or would want normally to categorize or include simply in the history of philosophy, even though, it must be said, Catherine Malabou treats this history with

great rigour and unquestionable attention. No, nothing in the world can be in this way determined or pre-determined, for almost two centuries, whether or not we are aware of it or know about it (and in general we are aware of it, or believe we are aware of it), that does not entertain some sort of relation with the living tradition embodied by Hegel. It is simply not enough to recall the names of Marx and Heidegger, or the themes of the 'end of history', of 'absolute knowledge', of the 'dialectic', of the *ends* of this and the *ends* of that, the 'death of God', the 'death of Man', etc. These terms and themes are Hegel's terms, we always finish by finding Hegel at the very origin of all these thematized or schematized *ends*. We are all the inheritors or the descendants of Marx, of Heidegger, and a few others, and we often, perhaps always, have lived, for many decades, in the reassuring certainty that the Hegelian legacy is over and done with. Even though we may always and do always recognize the unequalled power and force of this thought, we always maintain that this thought has assigned to itself its own fate, which, as every fate, belongs to the past, to what already has passed (fate is precisely being already a part of the past, of what is passed and of what has passed away in everything that comes or could come). More profoundly, Hegel's thought would have assigned to itself this final fatefulness of fate, this very finality of the end and of what remains final, of which the only temporal determination is the 'past', what 'has already passed away'. It is in this sense, simply because it has thought time itself, to have it in this manner thought about time, that Hegel's thought would have, above all, renounced any future for itself as all future itself. This is, at least, the common belief or the widespread interpretation, in truth the accusation which Malabou re-interrogates and re-questions to submit it, first of all, to an intractable and obstinate trial. With as much acerbity as patience, Malabou first reconstitutes, in all of its breadth and range, the history of this interpretation, the history of an interpretation which has become dominant, the history of its hegemonic-becoming. Having become hegemonic, almost held as a common or current currency, held as the only accredited interpretation, it becomes something like our universal coin. This interpretation, as a universal coin, is legal tender everywhere and universally. Why here insist on this image, an image of a universal currency which could *flow* everywhere? And all the while referring to Heidegger, who is, as we know, the one responsible for coining this interpretation in its most striking and most profound way. It is he, Heidegger, who combines the two interpretations of Hegelian temporality, one according to which time has always 'passed' (and is thus without any future) and the other, which cannot be dissociated from the first almost as its own premiss, according to which the Hegelian concept of time is the current or ordinary (which is, as we know, the current translation of the German word *vulgär*)¹³ way one understands time, for it refers to the image of a 'course of time' (*Lauf der Zeit*). Let us start with the second of these interpretations: 'Hegel's concept of

time presents the most radical way in which the vulgar understanding of time (*des vulgären Zeitverständnisses*) has been given form conceptually, and one which has received too little attention.¹⁴

As we know, despite the extreme radicality demonstrated in this conceptual elaboration, Heidegger only sees in the Hegelian discourse a ‘paraphrase’ of Aristotle’s *Physics*, precisely where Aristotle had previously determined time as the ‘flow of a current’, or again, as a succession or flux of moments.

Time appears to the vulgar understanding (*für das vulgäre Zeitverständnis*) as a succession of nows constantly ‘present-at-hand’ (*vorhandenen*), that pass by and arrive at the same moment (*zugleich vergehenden und ankommenden Jetzt*). Time is understood as a sequence, as a ‘flux’ of nows, like the ‘stream of time’ (*als ‘Lauf der Zeit’*).

Why has this interpretation of time as a figure of succession, as a modality of what is ‘cursive’, as something which must be read as a ‘course’, a ‘transition’ or a ‘passage’, become the *current* interpretation? Why has this interpretation of time become generally accepted, dominant, hegemonic, self-evident, and even legitimate, accredited as such and at face value? And most of all, why has it come to deny and even erase or forbid all thought of a future? Well because, by passing through its passage, the ‘course’ of time would only *follow* the series of present moments, the very essence of the present, all of the nows here present (the actual present, but also, the past present and the future present), and this along the same line of succession. This sequential representation, and often linear depiction, would render it impossible for anything to *take place* or *arrive*, anything which has not yet been in advance reduced or which would not yet be reducible to what Husserl, the last inheritor of this tradition, would have called the originary form (*Urform*) of temporalization, the ‘living present’. This present would give its basic form to all that could be ‘seen coming’ or to all that might be ‘bound to come’. It is the anticipatory act of ‘seeing what is coming’, the very dampening act of the absolute surprise inherent to the future. The future will thus be the present which will then become the present past or the past present. If the future disappears or vanishes, for Hegel, it is because, according to Heidegger, he would have all too well understood the very essence of that cursory and cursive, current and general, interpretation inherited from Aristotle; Hegel would have carried to their limits the consequences and taken to its finest accomplishment this very tradition of which and in which he still belongs. With admirable but yet questionable intrepidity, Hegel would have arrived at the conclusion that the future itself is finished! He would have reached the end point where every event can only be as such reduced to the cursive and cursory

passage that follows being as it ‘becomes past’ or as it ‘passes away’. This is at least the thesis Heidegger advances in his 1930 lectures on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, a thesis which ‘follows’ the same interpretative line formulated in the famous Note of *Sein und Zeit*, where the Hegelian interpretation of time is assimilated to a paraphrase of Aristotle’s *Physics*:

Undoubtedly [Hegel] occasionally speaks about having been, but never about the future. This silence fits with the fact that (for him) the past is itself the decisive character of time, and for a good reason: time is both the passing itself and what passes; it has always passed away.¹⁵

Malabou argues that she is not here ‘proposing a confrontation between the Hegelian and Heideggerian interpretations of time’. And, without doubt the elegant modesty of this assertion points to a certain truth: *The Future of Hegel* does not organize or set out such a ‘confrontation’; it is even less an attempt at mediating a *direct* debate or a *thematic* conflict on the *concept of time*. But in truth, we shall progressively see it, all is much more complex. As are the matters at stake.

On the one hand, behind the modesty, behind the moderation, behind the *measure*, we must recognize the cunning of a deliberate strategy: take on the questions differently and displace the horizon in which one can or may think them, and above all, do not precipitate oneself into the conceptual and thematic antagonisms. Malabou distinguishes, in what we could call her discourse on method – or her discourse on war – the *theme* and the *strategy*. She does it precisely in order to justify her recourse to the couple ‘plasticity’ – ‘to see (what is) coming’, terms which designate, not so much thematic concepts, but rather operative *figures*, motifs or ‘motors’. As figures or ‘schemes’, these must keep something like a sensuous body in the translation of the categories. Irreducibility of this sensuous translation – which is, of course, more than a simple translation, more than a translation in the current sense of the word, and which orchestrates the plastic beauty of the philosophical writing we have been speaking of earlier. Malabou translates it herself (we should here analyse the foundation or the limits of this analogy) in Kantian language, especially when she calls it a ‘hypotyposis’.

In this regard, our approach shall be not so much thematic as strategic. It is a strategy driven by the two concepts – of *plasticity* and ‘to see (what is) coming’ – whose construction is the keystone of this project. *An economy of sensuous translation* – to borrow the Kantian definition of hypotyposis (1) – is itself figured sensuously by these concepts. This translation of the concept into the form of the sensuous is in essence systematic, an operation which cannot be *pinned down* in a transcendental deduction.

1. 'All *hypotyposis* consists in making a concept sensuous, and is either *schematic* or *symbolic*.' Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, §59¹⁶

The autopresentation of this 'method' is written in a remarkable and marked manner. It shows itself to itself as entirely 'plastic' and urges itself to manifest itself as the 'formation of concepts'. It underlines an added point in that the concepts ('plasticity' and 'to see (what is) coming') it calls into play constitute a sensuous figurality, which necessarily calls them to formulate the great question (post-Kantian or post-Hegelian, let us say, Marxist) of time as an un-sensuous sensibility. While insisting on the strategy rather than on the thematic, it recalls that the warrior's strategy is necessarily required by all dialectical thought, that is, by all conceptual opposition: 'The dialectical process is plastic . . . the process of plasticity is dialectical.'¹⁷ But here, strategy does not mean polemic, and the question here posed by the antagonism does not in any way resemble some sort of philosophical victory. The thought implied in the expression 'to see (what is) coming' is much too plastic and in itself contradictory, stretched out between surprise and anticipation, too attentive to what comes in the future, to the future of what is coming, to come back and say 'I have come to see . . .'; and even less to conclude simply on some sort of *veni, vidi*, in the past of a 'I have conquered . . .'.

On the other hand, this strategic insistence on the schematic hypotyposis of the expression 'to see (what is) coming' or of 'plasticity' can but provoke, in depth, a radical transformation of the whole horizon. This is the hypothesis I would like here to expose, in four points, four headings, while proposing, perhaps, another mode of reading.

1 The choice of the strategy, of *this* strategy, does not, in this case, only have a beneficial value. As the book demonstrates, this strategy does not only have a simple exemplary *operative* value, for the strategic motif itself is precisely justified by the figures or the hypotyposis themselves radically inseparable from the expression 'to see (what is) coming' and from the notion of 'plasticity'. This choice has an *exemplary general* value, we should even say, a universal methodological value if we could at least agree on surrendering the concept of method to a Hegelian mutation. It should not suffice then to hold method, as Hegel himself thought, for something other than a system of predetermined rules or regulations, but as the very experience of the path tracing its own history; we should also interpret this experience from the motifs of plasticity and the expression 'to see (what is) coming'. And this dialectical experience commands the very 'strategy' of this work, if I may say so, inasmuch as it is structured, from its most speculative form, as and by work, practice, as and by a philosophical writing which effortlessly adapts the languages to the corpus rather than to some sort of theoretical view, rather than to some 'to see (what is) coming' which

would be limited only to the category of 'seeing'. For, let us say it without any further delay, the dialectical and plastic complexity of the expression 'to see (what is) coming' does not only refer to the paradox of 'waiting for itself without ever waiting for itself', of 'waiting for what comes' without ever seeing or knowing 'what we are waiting for'. We must go further than this paradox: in both terms of the alternative, in both figures of the expression 'to see (what is) coming' the theoretical and theatrical privilege of 'seeing' can also be suspended or see itself suspended. All of the senses are put into play here, and beyond the sensuous passivity, 'all' of the gestures are 'active'. We can anticipate while 'seeing', but we can also anticipate without ever 'seeing', and first of all, because we can only truly anticipate something or someone if we go beyond what can be perceived, or what can present itself in the present tense of sight; we may no longer be capable of anticipation, let ourselves be surprised, because we no longer see or because we see without ever seeing what comes. In other words, within the expression 'to see (what is) coming', the anticipatory prevision must go beyond the category of 'seeing', must go beyond the present act of seeing the visible; furthermore, within the same expression 'to see (what is) coming', the exposition to surprise, the non-anticipation can paradoxically have the same effect: the surprise can be so explosive that it cannot even constitute itself as an *object* for the category of 'seeing'. In both cases, as irreducible and as contradictory as they are and as they seem one in the face of the other, we only *see coming* if we no longer *see*: whether without seeing anything at all (the apprehension of the surprise), whether by relating to the future of what comes through the perception of what is and remains visible, in the full thematic and intuitive actuality of what is given to sight. The expression 'to see (what is) coming' is also plastic for it passes from one sense to the other and is not, from one end to the other, the affair of sight: to see coming, in the end, would always mean to see coming *without ever seeing*, whether we see beyond the visible present, whether we see nothing at all, whether again, what is announced or what surprises without ever being announced has nothing to do with the category of sight and is never given at all to sight. In all cases, there needs to be some sort of blindness. And hence, beyond theoretical *perception* or *thematic* intuition, beyond the *object*, there needs to be *strategy*. This paradoxical stance of 'sight' in the expression 'to see (what is) coming' without ever 'seeing what comes' perhaps responds to another strategic necessity. As we have suggested it, beyond the simple commentary, it allows us to conjoin the intrinsic plasticity of this expression, 'to see (what is) coming', to all living beings in general, whether they be endowed with the faculty of seeing or not seeing, to all animals, human or not (not all animals are endowed with sight, and not all sensitivity to light can be considered as sight). Plasticity characterized all sensibility or irritability as a moment of subjectivity in general, and, we shall come back to this,¹⁸ the 'plastic'

contraction of all habit (or *hexis*). In the strong conclusion of her book, devoted to the ‘event of reading’, that is of what has just taken place, of what has hence happened as to the unveiling of Hegel, and by fidelity to the Hegelian Law, Malabou takes into view this alliance of ‘sight’, of the category of ‘sight’ and of the blindness inherent in the expression ‘to see (what is) coming’. How ‘to see (what is) coming’, how reading is ‘seeing without ever seeing’:

The Hegelian idea of *plastic reading* confers on the notion of ‘to see (what is) coming’ its real meaning. ‘To see (what is) coming’ denotes at once the visibility and the invisibility of whatever comes. The future is not the absolutely invisible, a subject of pure transcendence objecting to any anticipation at all, to any knowledge, to any speech. Nor is the future the absolutely visible, an object clearly and absolutely foreseen. It frustrates any anticipation by its precipitation, its power to surprise. ‘To see (what is) coming’ thus means to see without seeing – a wait without awaiting – a future which is neither present to the gaze nor hidden from it. Now isn’t this situation of ‘in-between’ *par excellence* the situation of reading?¹⁹

In the spirit of a book largely devoted to the plasticity of the living in general,²⁰ we could here prolong the weight and the extension of this remark with regard to the possibility of genetic deciphering. On the DNA strands, even before the constitution of animal organisms without vision, the decoding operations suppose no vision or visibility as such.

What is being said here of reading, and of the possibility of reading the living being *per se*, should we not also say it of *death*? If we were to ask how to name or categorize the event which a living being always ‘sees coming’ (letting it come to it as that which in any way will be an absolute surprise and thus be entirely unsubjective), sees coming without ever seeing it come, that is to say, without ever being able to see or foresee it, and hence without ever knowing and without ever having any power over it, an event which remains for it the place marked by an absence of all power and as itself impossible, how can we not name that death, as obscure as this event remains or the thing designated as such? The ultimate unity of ‘to see (what is) coming’ and ‘not to see (what is) coming’, of the ‘to see coming without ever seeing what comes in the act of seeing what comes’, the ‘seeing without ever seeing’, and thus of the *without* everywhere and anywhere this word articulates something, whatever it is, to itself, is that not what we ought or should call or name death? The plasticity of death at the heart of the ‘to see (what is) coming’, is that not also (as the root of habit) a kind of mourning? Or mourning itself? What we understand or determine as the work of mourning? We would then only have to relate

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