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# 1

## *Voir Venir*

At the end of her book, *Le Change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie*, Catherine Malabou asks herself whether she managed, after all, to really rethink Heidegger's ontology through the prism of change, of Being *as* change, or whether she failed to convince her readers. In order to address this question, she weighs the two possible outcomes of her endeavour: either it will be rejected and Heidegger's ideas remain obsolete or it will be accepted and Heidegger's work, thanks to her, will be given a new lease of life with the concept of change. Unsurprisingly, Malabou does not predict one of the two possible outcomes. Her meditation on the future of her book does not take sides. By drawing attention to the success or failure of her endeavour, she only highlights the importance of the act of weighing, considering, or evaluating things – an act that is essentially directed to the future: either this or that *will* happen. This weighing is crucial not because it questions whether or not she managed to convince her readers, but because it represents the purest form of risk-taking, *a risk-taking exercise essential to all thinking*. Focusing on the relevance of the idea of weighing things, she writes, quoting Heidegger:

... a scale is the most simple converter, the purest, *the figure itself of any risk-taking*. Heidegger says so himself in relation to Rilke in one of his most beautiful texts: *Why poets? To posit an alternative is first and foremost to take a risk*... However, to risk oneself, to be in danger, is to be undecided [*c'est être en balance, in der Wage.*] 'In the Middle Ages, the word *Wage* [*balance*] still meant something almost like danger [*Gefahr*]. To be in the balance means to be in a situation that can turn out in one way or the other. That is why the instrument that moves [*bewegt*] like this, by dipping one way or the other, is called

the balance [*die Wage*]. It liberates; it plays about the beam and plays itself out. The word *Wage* [balance] in the sense of danger and as the name of the instrument is derived from *wägen, wegen*: to make a way [*Weg*], that is, to go, to be going. *Be-wägen* means get something under way, to get it going: *wiegen* [to sway or weigh].<sup>1</sup>

Further down she adds:

To weigh, as you might have gathered, does not mean *to decide one way or another*. To weigh does not mean to wait either. As I said, the messianic horizon is never pure, it is always already changed; and the angel, as Heidegger knew well, is metamorphosed from the start . . . *To swing two positions, to break down flatness: the shape that comes indeed comes from splintered forms.*<sup>2</sup>

Malabou's conclusive remarks on the meaning of the act of weighing are of paramount importance when it comes to understanding her work. The act of weighing something or other represents *a test* that aims to gauge a possible outcome to a present situation. To weigh is therefore *to set* a context in order *to hazard* an interpretation. There are therefore two sides to this act. Firstly, it establishes the context in which the future will unfold. It creates a situation in which the appliance or the circumstances end up deciding on the course of action. Secondly, once the context or the situation is in place, it provokes an action based on weighing the results up. As Malabou recalls, reading Heidegger, to weigh is to set in motion, to go off, to figure, to wander on one path or another. The act is therefore paradoxical: on the one hand, it is entirely passive in front of the unknown – it lets the future come – and on the other, it is entirely proactive – it actively engages the future. How is one to measure the true importance of this test, of this paradoxical act of weighing in Malabou's work? The answer to this question will be lengthy, because we need first – even before introducing the problematic that will concern us in this chapter – to briefly introduce Malabou's work.

### **Metamorphosis and *The Future of Hegel***

To date, Malabou's work represents a colossal attempt to rethink the work of three major authors in continental philosophy: Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida. Her aim is to think these authors as if there had been no evolution, no progression between Hegelian dialectics,

Heidegger's destruction and Derrida's deconstruction of metaphysics. For her, these three authors are the most representative of a way of thinking that situates itself between two types of negativity. As she says,

My philosophical itinerary situates itself – this is where it indubitably situates itself – at the crossroads of two negative logics. According to one, negation, by redoubling itself, forms its own solution – *dialectical negativity*. According to the other, negation, by redoubling itself, differentiates and displaces itself without resolving anything, tracing only its own separation as the spacing of a pure dislocation – *deconstructive negativity*.<sup>3</sup>

In situating herself in this manner, Malabou attempts to think and work in two times and in two ways *at once*: a time in which one re-assembles or reshapes together what is broken, and a time in which one increases the breakage or the breaking point in order to carry on threatening the possibility of any formation whatsoever. By bringing together these two times and these two modes of thinking, Malabou's ambition is to think about the constant exchange taking place between them and consequently, to fathom the endless transmutation and transformation taking place between dialectics, destruction, and deconstruction and this without any consideration of conventional historical development.

The result of this double negativity is a new mode of thinking that would overall come to push into another direction Derrida's expanded understanding of writing. If one could sum up this aim with a couple of questions, it would probably go something like this: How can one think about the legitimization of the displacement incurred by Derrida's expansion of the notion of writing? Could it be that to think about Derrida's understanding of the trace as the erasure of the trace necessarily implies that the concept of trace was already amenable or responsive to the change in the first place? If these are valid questions, then writing – in its expanded Derridean definition – is necessarily plastic, malleable, compliant, but also resistant and even perhaps somehow, rebellious to its incurred modifications. In other words, for there to be an expanded understanding of writing, writing itself must, in the first place, be able to respond to these imposed changes. The new mode of thinking that Malabou is putting forward is therefore a new way of *characterizing* the momentary organization of thought, a way of understanding the spacing (and) temporizing *metamorphosis* of (and in)

writing, a way of *materializing* that which occurs or comes towards us as trace (formation)/not (dislocation).

There is no space here to critically evaluate the ambitious philosophical turn that Malabou is proposing. A sustained reading of her work and a lengthy analysis of her ideas – and the ideas of those she borrows from – would be necessary. It would also require tracing the path of her thought from her early Hegelian studies to her current interests in the plasticity of neurobiology.<sup>4</sup> Such a reading cannot take place here. What can be done, however, at this stage in Malabou's career is to focus, more modestly, on one single work, her first book, *The Future of Hegel*, and to see if one can make sense of this way of thinking about the characterization of the trace, this *metamorphosis* or *materialization* of writing [*écriture*]. The choice of this book is dictated not by a desire to simply introduce the first English translation of Malabou's work, but by our very own topic: the disjunction or 'unhinging' of space (and) time – (the) *à-venir*. What does this book, which relies so much on the process of deconstruction, tell us about this disjunction or 'unhinging', so familiar to Malabou's doctoral supervisor: Jacques Derrida? How is *à-venir* affected by Malabou's *metamorphosis*? How is one to perceive the *materialization* of what could be seen as the spacing (and) temporizing (dimension) of Derrida's *différance* – *à-venir*? A word on the scope of her book is necessary here.

Catherine Malabou's first book, *The Future of Hegel*, can be understood as an attempt to rescue Hegel's philosophy of time from the museum of dead onto-theological monuments.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, she offers a radical reappraisal not only of Heidegger's interpretation of Hegel, but also of the work of the three main protagonists in Hegelian studies in France: Jean Hyppolite, Alexandre Kojève, and Alexandre Koyré.<sup>6</sup> In a way, Malabou's attempt is similar to that of Deleuze, Derrida, and Lévinas who have all tried to surpass Hegel's 'end of history' by offering notions such as 'multiplicity', 'différance', and the 'irreducibility of the face'. However, what distinguishes Malabou's first book is precisely her attempt not to discard, disrupt, or exceed negative dialectics, but to reassess it in the light of its *survival*. For her, destruction and deconstruction are already inscribed in Hegel's work. Similarly and perhaps surprisingly, dialectics remain in the work of Heidegger and Derrida – in the shape of a Hegelianism without reserve, for example. Hegel's time thus becomes something much more complex and problematic, something that cannot be so easily discarded.

This complexity comes from a particular way of reading and writing which is unique to Malabou. This way of working is not that of retracing

past studies or that of starting from a specific secondary source, but that of highlighting a specific leitmotif in these philosophical works and sticking to it until the works studied no longer become familiar. In the case of Malabou's reading of Heidegger, this way of thinking comes across when she highlights three words that have received as yet no exegetic analysis. These words (*Wandel* [*change*], *Wandlung* [*transformation*], *Verwandlung* [*metamorphosis*], which she then summarizes using three letters: W,W,V) are then transformed into a recurring threefold concept that sheds an unexpected new light on Heidegger's work (i.e. *le change* [change/exchange/to change]). In *The Future of Hegel*, Malabou focuses on one key Hegelian word: *plasticity* [*Plastizität*]. This expression is applied to all aspects of Hegel's philosophy, from his understanding of the plastic arts to his concepts of man, God, subjectivity, and of course, as we will see, to his way of dealing with the issue of time. The word recurs throughout the book not in a repetitive way, but in a way that dislocates common preconceptions of Hegel's work and restores it under a radically different light. Why is Malabou so obsessive about using this word as a leitmotif to reread Hegel? Perhaps one way of understanding this obsession is to see it as an extraordinary attempt to continue Derrida's work on Hegel and to offer a unique reflection (*at once* dialectical *and* deconstructive) on the 'shape' of Derrida's key 'device': *différance*. How is one to make sense of this reflection?

Within a purely Hegelian/Derridean context, this reflection or this rethinking centres on a twofold thematic. On the one hand, Malabou wants to challenge Hegel's dialectic with the thought of *différance*, and on the other, she wants to push Derrida's Hegelianism 'without reserve' one step further, in order to think about a type of deconstruction that will not end up in an absolute relativism, but with a thinking of the shape that events take when related to what is irreducibly other. Malabou's task is therefore to think the abyss of deconstruction, the place where *différance* is not recuperated within the same or stubbornly externalizing itself in relation to an absolute other, but sublated as 'form', therefore as history. In a sense, her aim is to represent or expose the shape of a double take, one in which thought is caught *at once* by a body of thought and by its dissimulation.<sup>7</sup> As Malabou remarks, 'the philosophical signification of plasticity is today made up by the juxtaposition of two ways of playing the game, metaphysics and deconstruction, refutation of *différance* and indication of the trace...'<sup>8</sup> Plasticity is therefore a synthetic operation – a metamorphosis or a materialization – of two negativities – dialectical negativity and

de(con)structive negativity, or as she says, 'non & non'<sup>9</sup> – that points to the *différance* of *différance*. Before exploring further Malabou's ideas in *The Future of Hegel*, let us put forward at this stage the premises for the arguments developed in this chapter.

### The test of plasticity

This chapter articulates itself around one question: What shape could this synthetic operation (plasticity) actually take? The idea behind this simple question is *not* to critique, reiterate, or paraphrase *in English* the way Malabou invents and exposes her French key concept. The idea of critiquing or reiterating Malabou's invention would indeed be equivalent to that of offering a *meta*-discourse, a discourse that would add or graft itself onto her discourse and this would be useless. The reason for not doing this is that Malabou's account of plasticity cannot simply be reiterated or commented upon because it simply defies the idea of commentary itself. If one criticizes or reiterates her thoughts, one risks asking this crucial and inevitable question: How plastic would *this* commentary be? And as soon as one asks this question, one defies the very possibility of addressing Malabou's work. As Derrida remarks: '*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 *oeuvre*. . . It is a unique *oeuvre* on which any meta-linguistic dialogue very quickly experiences its own limitations and its simulated nature.'<sup>10</sup>

The idea of this chapter is therefore not to repeat or critique, but, following Malabou herself, to *weigh* Malabou's plasticity, to *set it* in *another* context and see what *other* shape plasticity can possibly take. In this way, if one remains as faithful as possible to Malabou's way of thinking, the aim is therefore to see if her new post-Derridean–Hegelian 'notion' can really be *set in motion* under a completely different set of circumstances, whether plasticity can really allow one to wander onto a radically unforeseeable path. Because of the remit of this book, this weighing or test focuses on the problematic of translation and that of its coming or as a *form* of coming. In this chapter, the aim of this specific test is therefore to measure the pliability or the explosiveness of Malabou's words, to experiment with their ability to espouse and reject *at once* a foreign language, a language totally alien to Malabou and her specific Franco-German idiomatic delineations. This foreign language is English. How does *plasticité* translate *into English*? How does one see coming the plasticity of English in English? How blind is English

to Malabou's French plasticity? And finally, can one compare between French and English ways of seeing and plasticizing that which comes? It would be wrong to see in all these questions, a simple attempt to ask the question whether inter-linguistic translation and plasticity are synonymous. Not unlike our central question (What shape could this synthetic operation – plasticity – actually take?) these further questions are far more complex than one would at first suspect and cannot be reduced to a simple equation. There are *two premises* for all these questions – that is, for this test.

The *first premise* is to highlight the all-important issue of the *choice* of (the) idiom for (of) philosophy. Malabou insists in her book that, following Hegel, one must 'philosophize in one's own idiom'.<sup>11</sup> Commenting on this aspect of Malabou's work, Derrida highlights that to do so is to give one's own language all the chance in the world. In other words, Malabou gives the French language a chance to address a Hegelian term by 'inventing a [new] language',<sup>12</sup> by allowing and/or moulding her own language into something else. In this way, Malabou translates or more precisely transforms Hegel's *Platzität* into French not simply with the word *plasticité* [*plasticity*] but with a double syntagm *plasticité/voir-venir* [*Platzität/kommen sehen*]<sup>13</sup>. I leave here, for the moment, the importance of the supplement *voir venir*. At this stage, the issue for us is not how to understand this German to French transformation, but how can one *give another chance* to Malabou's French transformation; how can one translate or transform her new *double* syntagm in yet *another* language? How is one to give and what would it mean to give a third language [English] a chance *after* a second language [French] was given all the chance in the world? Can there be *so much* chance or can there still be any chance *left*?

This issue of idiom and its chance is indeed crucial in relation to Malabou's Derridean reading of Hegel. In her book, Malabou insists that Hegel not only wants to philosophize in one's own idiom, he also has a very specific understanding of the type of idiom one should use in philosophy. This understanding can be characterized by two Hegelian imperatives: First imperative: For Hegel, a philosopher should *never* use technical (especially Greek) terms in philosophy because these give the impression that philosophy is a universal and univocal idiom shared by all philosophers. This imperative shows that Hegel positions himself against the use of artificial terms borrowed from ancient languages. Second imperative: For Hegel, it is important to preserve in the act of philosophizing 'the strange and alien character of any and all language, that is, to preserve the irreducibility of its place and time'.<sup>14</sup> This second

imperative shows that philosophers should indeed only philosophize in their own language. The reason for this is that he or she could not use an alien idiom with the same certainty as his or her own.

In relation to Malabou's argument about the *choice* of (the) idiom for (of) philosophy, these two imperatives raise the following questions. Should an English-speaking philosopher use Malabou's French terms in the same way that she uses technical Greek (for example her recurrent use of the terms *πασχειν* – in lieu of the expression 'being acted upon' and *ενεργειν* – in lieu of 'acting') or German terms (for example, her – inevitably recurrent – use of the term *Aufhebung*)? Is Malabou not evading Hegel's first imperative when using these technical Greek and German terms and will we not be doing the same when using her new technical French terms in *English*? How should an English-speaking person use Malabou's French understanding of Hegel's German? How does one also deal with other *French* interpretations of *Platzität*? Nancy's or Derrida's? The answer to all these questions is perhaps to simply settle on *not deciding*. One cannot simply choose between etymological rigour and expanded signification, geographical relevance and universal significance. One can only accept the terms as *they come or go*, already constituted or in the process of constitution and in need of further expansion. For this reason we have to accept that, no matter what, *plasticité* or *Platzität* are simply *not* self-evident universal concepts understandable in all idioms worldwide. *They call for a test; they need to be weighed by or in comparison with another language*. Without the test of translation, without recognizing the call and its response, the English would remain *blind* to this new French interpretation inspired by the German. In order to probe this question further, it is necessary to explore the second premise supporting the idea of a Malabou-style test.

The *second premise* revolves around the issue of opening up new meaning in philosophy. Malabou addresses this question herself when she comments on the necessity of 'extending'<sup>15</sup> or *enlarging* the scope and meaning of philosophical language and – in a Deleuzian manner – that of *inventing* new concepts. She writes in *La plasticité au soir de l'écriture*, a small book summarizing her career so far: 'All thought needs a scheme, that is a motif, product of a rational imagination, that allows to break open the meaning of a period and to create for it new exegetic perspectives that are adapted to it.'<sup>16</sup> Malabou's observation primarily refers to the invention of new philosophical concepts in *history*, but it could easily also refer to the invention or translation of new concepts in or on other geographical or idiomatic shores/worlds. How does one indeed open up, extend, or enlarge the meaning of Malabou's

French interpretation of Hegel's German in another geographical and/or idiomatic context? Can one extend or enlarge the meaning of a scheme or motif *current* in one country and/or idiom to that of another? How can one not denature its idiosyncratic or parochial character?

The questions raised by this second premise really revolve around the issue of *someone's capacity* to extend or enlarge *the materiality of sense* proposed by a foreign expression. This becomes particularly acute in relation to plasticity. This concept implies that whoever addresses it is already a plastic individuality, not only receptive to form and giver of form, but also and above all, incarnating or embodying the plastic exposition underway. Commenting on Hegel, Malabou's observes: 'The philosophical reader or interlocutor are of course receptive to the form, but they in turn are led to construct and form what they hear or read. In this sense they become comparable, Hegel reasons, to Greek "plastic individualities".'<sup>17</sup> The question here is this: Where does one situate with any certainty *the* 'activity of form [*Formtätigkeit*]'<sup>18</sup> between one philosopher and another, between one philosophical exposition and another? In other words, where does one situate with any certainty the being-there of translation or the capacity of someone to transform, metamorphose, or plasticize? The answer here again, as for the first premise, is perhaps to settle on *not deciding*. One simply cannot choose (or situate the plastic process taking place) between one plastic philosopher or exposition and another, the plastic process is irreducible and never ending. As plastic individualities, our reading can *only* be plastic or transformative, that is, it is *by default* engaged in a continual process of acceptance and intervention, mutation and metamorphosis that can never be reduced to being *an* exemplary singularity *capable* of plasticizing.

These two premises bring us back to our central concern: if one is *by default* engaged in a continual plastic process, if one cannot critique or argue *against* Malabou in a conventional critical manner – for that, as we have seen, would raise the question of the form of the address – then how is one to evaluate in English Malabou's transformation of a German expression into two French ones? Perhaps the only way to remain as faithful as possible to Malabou's thought, and to make sense of this irreducible process, is to take the pulse of plasticity, to make it pass this test – a test that will show if Malabou's new post-Derridean–Hegelian 'notion' can *really* be *set in motion* in another world and under a completely different set of circumstances. This chapter will therefore aim to explore the plasticity of Malabou's expression by making it pass an *idiomatic plastic test*. This test consists of simply finding out if one

can *incarnate* or *embody* in English Malabou's German–French notion and whether it can survive, that is, whether it can *shape* and *at the same time* literally *ignite* another idiom.

Considering this test and the remit of this line of questions, there will therefore be no attempt in this chapter to further contextualize Malabou's work either in relation to Hyppolite, Koyré, and Kojève or in relation to Heidegger and Derrida.<sup>19</sup> The aim is simply to stay as close as possible to her line of thought and yet depart radically from it. In the process, I hope to show that the intended test is crucial in any understanding of Malabou's work precisely because it focuses on the idiomatic, linguistic, and philosophical *shaping* of concepts themselves. To expand a concept with another meaning specific to *our time and place* is an intrinsic characteristic of plasticity itself. To expand a concept with a meaning specific to *our idiom* is also *another* intrinsic characteristic of plasticity itself. No concept can expand without a certain idiomatic and spatio-temporal plasticity. As we have already seen, Derrida's well-known extension of the meaning of writing to that of *arche-writing* – in which writing can no longer simply mean graphic transcription, but writing *in general* – operates from a certain (spatio-temporal *and* idiomatic) plasticity of the term itself and it is this ability/capacity for transformation that needs to be studied, but *this time*, in another idiomatic context.

The following will then be an attempt to follow in Malabou's footsteps and to extend the meaning attached to her interpretation of plasticity in order to confirm its significance not only to our times, but also to a new idiomatic world. The shapes (or misshapes) contained in the following pages will therefore follow the same Kantian *scheme* used by Malabou, that of a *hypotyposis*,<sup>20</sup> that is, the exhibition of a problematic that follows a form of reflection *similar* to the problematic itself. In other words, the idea will be to perform a test *following* the strategy taken by Malabou to test Hegelian dialectics in the light of deconstruction. In a way, if one really wants to take into consideration Malabou's work, one has no choice but to follow the scheme of *hypotyposis*. As Derrida clearly points out, 'the [presentation] of this "method" . . . shows itself to itself as entirely "plastic" and urges itself to manifest itself as the "formation of concepts"'.<sup>21</sup> Overall, our test will attempt to expose whether Malabou's term is effectively *truly* plastic, *shaping* and/or *explosive*, a plasticity, a transformation, or metamorphosis that would perhaps (but then again, perhaps not) end up being totally *foreign* to Malabou's (French) or even Hegel's (German) thought. Now that the premises for the argument

of this chapter are laid out, let us return to and expand further our understanding of Malabou's notion of plasticity.

### Speculative *souplesse*

In *The Future of Hegel*, Malabou focuses crucially on the word 'plasticity' and not on the word 'plastic'. Roland Barthes analyses the word 'plastic' in *Mythologies*. For him, the word 'plastic' refers to

the idea of infinite transformation...a sudden transformation of nature...the trace of a movement. And as the movement here is almost infinite, transforming the original crystals into a multitude of more and more startling objects, plastic is, all told, a spectacle to be deciphered: the very spectacle of its end-products.<sup>22</sup>

What interests Barthes is to sublimate a utilitarian and disgraced material and to expose its philosophical and cultural potential; the fact, for example, that with plastic the very invention of forms in our modern world no longer imitates nature. Referring exclusively to the language of Hegel, Malabou, by contrast, focuses not on the material itself or its origins in modernity and its relevance to our 'postmodern' age, but on the *quality* or state of being plastic, mobile, flexible, moulding, forming, or explosive. Her aim is to expose, as she says, the speculative *souplesse* of Hegel's work. This *souplesse* is not suppleness or flexibility, but *versatility*, what is able or meant to be used in different ways. In this way, the *quality* or state of being plastic concerns neither passion (active interest or enthusiasm for change) nor passivity (inactive receptivity to change) taken individually, but the adaptability of the one towards the other.

In a first English commentary on Malabou's work, Lisabeth During remarks that the clearest antecedent of this focus on the Hegelian word 'plasticity' is that made by Jean-Luc Nancy in his 1973 study of Hegel's *Aufhebung*, *The Speculative Remark (One of Hegel's Bon Mots)*.<sup>23</sup> In this early book, Nancy highlights not only the importance that Hegel attributes to the word 'plasticity', but also the significance of this concept in any attempt to read his work. Nancy's aim is to emphasize Hegel's use of rhetoric and linguistic play in order to show that his philosophy is not exclusively systematic; it is also open to *necessary* hesitations and uncertainties. In this way, reading Hegel consists in performing a double reading that does not consist in simply following carefully the logic of argumentation (a type of ratiocinate reading), it also consists

in grasping [*fassen*] the accidental (a speculative reading). '*Fassen* is to grasp, to catch, to take something in hand [*prendre en main*]. It is a matter of grasping [*empoigner*] the proposition otherwise – and of grasping the entire philosophical writing by another end, by two ends, or still otherwise, who knows?'<sup>24</sup> To read Hegel is therefore to be transported back to the writing of the text, to its exposition, that is, to the logic of argumentation *and* in a double reading, to what *escapes* this logic. When reading Hegel in this manner – in the way Hegel wants to be read – one ends up *rewriting* the texts themselves.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, all serious reading of Hegel is essentially *formative*, *transformative*, in a word, *plastic*; it 'repeat[s] its exposition *plastically*'.<sup>26</sup> To accept this kind of reading implies that one understands Hegel's text as having been written at once in a speculative *and* accidental manner, and that one can only read Hegel in the same way, that is *plastically*, in a way that grasps the dialectical proposition *otherwise*, in a manner that is totally unforeseen. The word 'plasticity' therefore highlights for Nancy, the importance in Hegel's work not only of a certain *versatility* in philosophy, that is, of a type of work that is meant to be used and understood in different ways, but also of a certain playfulness between the two subjects involved in speculation – reader and writer.

In *The Future of Hegel*, the first of three books on the subject of plasticity, Malabou takes the Hegelian notion of plasticity in another direction. Instead of focusing, as for Nancy, on the versatility of this synthetic idea in relation to reading and writing, she proposes to focus instead on plasticity in relation to time and the future specifically. Her aim is to reject the usual understanding of Hegel's conception of time and to highlight the fact that, for him, time is essentially a plastic concept. Malabou's interpretation of Hegel's time goes like this. For her, Hegel never perceives time as a 'now' amidst a single continuum of instants or 'nows' – a time in which the future is always a 'future-now'. Malabou sees Hegel's time as an instance of dialectical differentiation that can only determine itself momentarily, i.e. 'now'. This 'now' or, to be more precise, this 'punctuality' [*Pünktlichkeit*] has nothing to do with the Aristotelian *στιγμα* [*stigma*], this term from which most readings of Hegel's time as homogeneous and empty are usually based on. This momentary or differentiating 'point' represents sublation [*Aufhebung*] itself, a point never conceived as a point of rest, not even at the end of history. Hegel's *Pünktlichkeit* is not a homogeneous milieu, but an *act*, a *movement* turned towards the future. In this way, time no longer appears as a series of points, but essentially as difference. The contradiction at the heart of the dialectical process thus becomes a differentiating tension.<sup>27</sup>

How can one understand Malabou's plastic transformation of Hegel's interpretation of time?

In order to sustain her argument, Malabou puts forward, borrowing from Hyppolite and Heidegger, the following idea: Hegel understood *two times at once*. The first time is the time of chronological differentiation. The second time is the time of logical differentiation. 'The first modality arises from what is possible to call the originary synthetic unity of a teleological movement in potentiality and in action. The other modality stems from the originary synthetic unity of apperception, the foundation of representation [*Vorstellung*].'<sup>28</sup> These two times constitute not only a state of 'separatedness' and negation that never marks a repetition or a closure, they also foreground the very possibility of *understanding* this state of 'separatedness' and as a result the constitution of a *history* of time. Hegel's time therefore becomes not a time that can only pass or be reiterated or recuperated, but a double event taking place at the crossroads between logical and chronological differences, between a teleological movement (chronological differentiation) and a synthetic mode of comprehension or assimilation that bases itself on a previous experience or perception (logical differentiation). It is therefore no longer a time defined by the closure of a single timeline (Absolute Knowledge, the End of History), but a time whose doubling or differentiation is always already open to the future, to what distance itself from itself. In other words, time, for Hegel, can only be understood *as* and *at* the intersection of two times, in the differential movement of the two. Implicit in this interpretation is therefore the fact that Hegel effectively *confuses the future and time* and that no interpretation of time can elude this confusion. Implicit also in this interpretation is the fact that since time is no longer defined by closure, there is still some future for Hegel's work.

How does this double time or this doubling of time relate to plasticity, to the *quality* or state of being plastic, mobile, flexible, moulding, forming, or explosive? For Malabou, the process of differentiation that takes place at the crossroads of logical and chronological times can only be understood *as* plasticity itself. Plasticity 'represents' the self-determination engaging these two times. It 'represents' the encounter of time with the synthesis of time, the merging or the meeting of the time of teleology and the time of representation. The simplest way to figure this 'temporal plasticity', this self-determination, is by making reference in a Nancyan move, to the process of reading Hegel. As she explains,

reading Hegel amounts to finding oneself in two times at once: the process that unfolds is both retrospective and prospective. In the present time in which reading takes place, the reader is drawn to a double expectation: waiting for what is to come (according to a linear and representational thinking), while presupposing that the outcome has already arrived (by virtue of the teleological ruse).<sup>29</sup>

The mobile synthesis of retention and projection taking place in reading is plastic. It brings together time and the thinking of time and this non-simultaneity or non-contemporaneity 'represents' the plasticity of time in the act of reading. To figure this differently and reference a Derridean understanding of writing as trace, plasticity would then be the *shaping* (in a here and now without presence) of 'the originary effraction of the trace'.<sup>30</sup>

The question that inevitably arises at this stage is this: how can plasticity recuperate itself *and* how can it give (itself) (another) shape? Inversely, how does it relate or (re)integrate that which is exterior or radically other to itself – a new time, a time unforeseen? In order to make sense of this curious formation or transformation and openness, Malabou comes up in a later publication with another word for plasticity: a *sur-prise* in its etymological sense, something that seizes or holds excessively [*un excès de prise*]<sup>31</sup>. This *sur-prise* is at once what comes about unexpectedly (it surprises) and what is excessively put under pressure (it holds [*prise*] excessively [*sur*]). In this way, plasticity is a *sur-prise* in the sense that it refers to what takes shape (plastic moulds and plastic *moulds*) but *also* surprises violently (plastic explosives). In other words, it refers to what is capable of receiving and/or giving form and to what ignites form. Plasticity, this *sur-prise*, is therefore the contradictory formation of the future [*l'avenir*]: what accepts, creates, and dislocates what appears unexpectedly. As such, it is what is essentially proceeding or differing (in the process of being accepted, created, dislocated) *and* paradoxically remains open to the future (still open to more acceptance, creation, or dislocation). In this way, plasticity does not engage a process of closure, but one of openness to the radically other. Malabou calls it an 'action-reaction prone to *différance*'.<sup>32</sup>

This explains that in Malabou's vocabulary, plasticity curiously can also be understood as or translated with the expression *voir venir* – which I leave here again, for reasons that will become clear later, deliberately in the French. Malabou is adamant about this; she repeats several times that the concept of plasticity is in fact *inseparable* from the concept of

*voir venir*. The two concepts are *interchangeable*. Plasticity is *voir venir*. And Derrida also highlights the importance of this inseparability or exchangeability. He writes in his review of Malabou's thesis:

...plasticity is not a *secondary* concept or another concept that would add itself to *voir venir* and constitute a sort of hermeneutical couple... It is the *same* concept in its differentiating and determining process. Because of its own dialectical self contradiction and mobility, *voir venir* is in itself a plastic concept, it allows plasticity to come to us.<sup>33</sup>

Now, how is one to understand, *not* this curious pairing of plasticity and *voir venir*, for that will hold our attention later in this chapter, but of *voir venir* as a *French expression*? There is a crucial difference in French between *à-venir* (the expression 'to-come' as defined in the introduction) and *voir venir*. The first term refers not to the usual temporal moment of the future, but to the unhinging of space (and) time. The latter term, Malabou's other word for plasticity, *voir venir*, is the *formation* of this unhinging; it represents the shape of what is coming, *as* it becomes an event. In other words, it represents the formation of the future itself [*l'avenir*], what can be *seen* as coming or what can be seen turning into an event. The formation of this movement is 'plastic'. As Malabou remarks, plasticity 'is nothing less than the *formation* of the future [*l'avenir*] itself. [It] characterizes the relation between substance and accidents.'<sup>34</sup> *Voir venir* therefore 'represents' the relationship between subjectivity and the un/foreseen as an instance that can only be momentarily determined in its immediacy.<sup>35</sup> There is never any possibility to actually perceive or represent the shape of *voir venir* as if it was an already constituted event; it can only manifest itself in its momentariness.

Using a more Hegelian vocabulary, one could say, following Malabou, that *voir venir* (or plasticity) represents *at once* a teleological process *and* an opening onto the contingent. *Voir venir* takes place when a subjectivity (necessarily involved in a teleological process) attempts to see what is coming and finds him or herself therefore open to what is radically unknown, what is contingent. It would be wrong to imagine that Malabou is here referring to the usual interpretation of Hegel's relation between necessity and contingency. *Voir venir* (or plasticity) is not a *mechanical* process where what is possible is essentially effective and vice versa. On the contrary, the operation is versatile in the sense that it is essentially or at least *double*. As Malabou says, 'Hegelian philosophy assumes as an absolute fact the emergence of the random in the very

bosom of necessity and the fact that the random, the aleatory, becomes necessary.<sup>36</sup> In this way, the teleological and the contingent enter into a dialogue [*un entretien*<sup>37</sup>] in which both elements feed each other and differ from each other. They both engage themselves onto each other and away from each other. In this rather contemporary interpretation, Hegelian philosophy ends up assuming the idea that the happenstance of the aleatory is right at the heart of the teleological process and that teleology itself emerges out of the aleatory. As Malabou notes earlier in the book: ‘...the Greek word *συμβεβηχος* [*symdedakos*], “accident”, derives from the verb *συμβαίνειν* [*symdanein*] which means at the same time to follow from, to ensure, and to arrive, to happen’.<sup>38</sup>

As is abundantly clear in her text, Malabou’s reading of Hegel’s notion of plasticity is a (versatile) synonym for the dialectical model.<sup>39</sup> For this reason, one should not imagine that Malabou’s intertwining of necessity and contingency suddenly leads nowhere or goes round in circles. Malabou does not eradicate this crucial aspect of Hegel’s philosophy in order to freeze it in a perpetual instant. Malabou’s revision of the dialectical model, now called *plasticité/voir venir*, is engaged in an advancement of its own and is actually going ‘somewhere’ – ‘where?’ is uncertain, but *plasticité/voir venir* is actually *moving*. Malabou goes to great pains to explain this issue in order to avoid misunderstandings. Her aim is not simply to accept the usual *movement towards* self-determination implied by the dialectical model, but to rethink this movement as a diffraction/reconstitution of the instant. This is made relatively simple when focusing on the culmination of Hegelian philosophy. Absolute Knowledge or the End of History is no longer the end of the teleological process, but is transformed by Malabou into *a moment amongst others*, a plastic instance of self-determination that is also, and this is crucial, an instance of self-differentiation (logical and chronological). Malabou’s notion of plasticity therefore takes place as if a game of fractals at all levels of Hegel’s dialectical process. *There is plasticity every time times meet*. There is therefore no moment in time that one can locate as an origin or a destination of time. Even absolute time, a time essentially sublated, is a time that can always envisage *another* time. As Malabou observes: ‘At the stage of Absolute Knowledge, the time which is sublated...leaves us always time to think what might otherwise have been... The question of the wholly other...is always in fact a question about an origin that could have been wholly otherwise.’<sup>40</sup> The issue of the origin or the destination of that which is speculative is therefore impossible to master.

This extremely brief reading of Malabou's interpretation of Hegel's plasticity shows that Hegelian dialectics will never be the same again. With Malabou, dialectics, understood as *plasticité/voir venir*, therefore becomes what marks the difference between origin and destination, a marking that has no proper destiny or destination except the *Aufhebung* to which it is bound. As Lisabeth During comments: 'If speculative thought is plastic rather than recollective, transcendental, or merely "critical", it is because it is a movement that dissolves and restores, fractures and reweaves, in the same way that plasticity allows the organ to regain resilience or the work of art to make and remake the possibilities of its material.'<sup>41</sup> In this way, like there is no centre to structure and no origins to the trace, there is no 'end' (read there is still some future) to Hegelian dialectics. The old and dusty Hegelian dialectical process rejuvenated by the Derridean deconstructive process still manages to shape a history, therefore the 'periodization' of what has been sublated.

### Wait and see and to see (what is) coming

How can one test such a complex reinterpretation of the Hegelian model? How can one weigh this speculative *souplesse* [versatility]? As announced at the start of this chapter, this test will specifically focus on the problematic of translation. How is one to translate, transform, and make plastic in English the form(ation) of coming? In other words, how is one to measure the pliability or the explosiveness of Malabou's words when faced with or surprised by a foreign language, a language totally alien to Malabou? Let us see what is at our disposal. One word of caution before going any further: in what follows, my intention is *not* to highlight problems of translation or to dispute already existing translations, but to think of the implications of translating, transforming, or plasticizing Malabou's specific double expression into another language. In other words, my aim is to weigh the exegetical economy that leads one to create/espouse English plastic readings.

Lisabeth During is the first to propose a translation of Malabou's double expression. Let us focus exclusively on what earlier was left in the French, this doubling, this other word for plasticity: *voir venir*. In a special issue of *Hypatia*, During translates the words *voir venir* with 'wait and see'.<sup>42</sup> These two words reflect a faithful rendition of Malabou's definition of this expression. Malabou writes in French: ' "Voir venir" signifie à la fois en français attendre prudemment en observant l'évolution des événements, mais aussi deviner les intentions d'une personne et pénétrer ses desseins.'<sup>43</sup> During translates this sentence into English in this

way: '*Voir venir* in French means to wait while observing, as is prudent, how events are developing. But it also suggests that there are intentions and plans of other people which must be probed and guessed at.'<sup>44</sup> This first translation has the advantage of respecting the grammatical structure of the expression *voir venir*: two infinitives. In doing so, During remains faithful to Hegel and the dyadic/dialectical/speculative character of his philosophy. There are, however, two problems that are worth highlighting here, for they allow us to begin exposing the difficulties in elaborating a test of translation for this double expression in English.

The first problem relates to the crucial conjunction 'and' between the two verbs. This 'and' has the unfortunate role of altering Malabou's original intentions. With the conjunction 'and', the act of waiting and the act of seeing are forever split as if one could just wait without seeing and vice versa. *J'attends et je vois, je vois et j'attends* [I wait *and* I see, I see *and* I wait]. The conjunction 'and' therefore represents an abyss distancing the two acts of waiting and seeing, which are so crucially and strategically entwined in plasticity.

The second problem is the verb 'wait' [*attendre*]. Although Malabou uses this verb to explain her ideas, the verb itself does not exist in Malabou's expression. It seems to be referring to the idea of staying in one place or to the idea of doing *nothing* for a period of time until something happens or in the expectation or hope that something will happen. I *wait*, here, while reading these pages, for a proper translation to come or for a translation that will take my breath away. I pass time while not seeing anything at all or I simply kill time watching the horizon. The problem is that with plasticity there is no waiting whatsoever. Plasticity is not exclusively passive. As Derrida remarks, '*Voir venir* is to *anticipate*, predict, foresee, project; it is to expect what is coming, but it is also to allow a certain coming or to let oneself be surprised by the unexpected.'<sup>45</sup> There is therefore in Malabou's expression of *voir venir* no 'waiting around', no 'hanging on', 'hanging around', or 'hanging together' for something to appear unexpectedly or in hope, but an *active* anticipation. If one were to respect Malabou's Hegelian term, there must be a reference to a plastic *task* that is also paradoxically utterly *passive*: the contradictory act of expecting *and* allowing the other to come to us. Whatever English expression is used, *voir venir* should *encourage* the opening of that which is coming (anticipation) and the total surrender to the unexpected (acceptance), and this without any prophetic prediction or the straightforward anticipation of something expected.

Furthermore, the verb 'to wait' also seems to be calling for a *face to face* with the future as if one were to quietly 'wait' *and then* 'see'

what the future throws at us and once this happens, suddenly, *without* any conjectures, predictions, or projections, one would realize that one has been *facing* the future. 'J'attends patiemment et passivement que quelque chose se passe, là devant moi'. [Uncomplainingly, I wait for something to suddenly leap in front of me.] This 'waiting' therefore betrays Malabou's reading of Hegel. It betrays it because 'to wait' implies that one can identify *a* time of expectancy or anticipation, *a* time where presence would reassert itself as *a* moment *in* time. Plasticity would then *be* an identifiable and historically determined point in space and time, curiously pivoting around an Aristotelian *στιγμη* [*stigma*], a time homogeneous and empty *in which* one would literally 'kill time'. This 'waiting' does not *call* for or *provoke* an event; it represents an attitude *entirely unrelated* to the event itself. Overall, During's translation of plasticity/*voir venir* as 'wait and see' cancels the intrinsic paradox of Malabou's expression. With 'wait and see', there are no longer any teleological consequences *affecting* or *surrendering to* the development of what might come unexpectedly.

In the subsequent full-length English translation of Malabou's book, Lizabeth During alters her original translation and proposes to understand *voir venir* by 'to see (what is) coming'.<sup>46</sup> During explains her new choice in this way: "'voir venir", which means at the same time to anticipate while not knowing what comes, [is] translated by the phrase "to see (what is) coming", the parentheses marking the reserve inherent in waiting itself'.<sup>47</sup> She adds in a footnote: 'The parentheses... mark the *waiting* or the *reserve* implicit and inherent in the *coming* and in the modality of *sight*.'<sup>48</sup> As it stands, During's final translation creates two problems that, although at first superfluous, are worth highlighting for the way they problematize the English understanding of the expression *plasticité/voir venir*.

The first problem relates to the fact that the English version of *voir venir* is above all else *a sentence* ('a phrase' in During's words) and not *an expression*. This is crucial because to translate an expression with a phrase is to lose the intrinsic character (contraction/expansion) of the original concept (the speculative nature present in the original), that is, its plastic character. I have already mentioned Malabou's insistence on the importance of extending an already constituted concept by diverting it with another meaning that would be significant to our times. I also mentioned that this extension is an intrinsic characteristic of the concept of plasticity because it shows that all concepts necessarily operate from a certain plasticity of *formation* or *deformation* (Derrida's plasticization of writing into *arche-writing*). If one then transposes or

transfers these timely and necessary interventions in philosophy to the realm of idioms and their translations (and this without leaving the operating game of deconstruction), then the question becomes this: how does the phrase 'to see (what is) coming' operate a transformation of *plasticity itself*, this word and concept that appears to easily pass from the French [*plasticité*] to the English [plasticity]? In other words, how does During's final translation do justice to the universal characteristics of the synthetic operation that Malabou calls plasticity, this metamorphosis or materialization of two negativities that exposes the *différance* of *différance*? I will argue that the cumbersome character of the English unfortunately fails to do justice to this synthetic operation of plasticity. This criticism is not intended to elevate the French above the English or to signal that the French is more suitable to translate a German concept. 'To see (what is) coming' fails plasticity because it does not stand as the hypotyposis of either the French expression or the operation of plasticity itself. In other words, During's translation does not exhibit the same problematic as the French; it does not follow the same transformation/deformation that Malabou imposes on the concise and contradictory *plasticité/voir venir*. (And if one were permitted to go even further, During's translation fails to stand as the hypotyposis of the German expression – but we will leave that enormous topic for another time.) If one simply focuses on the plastic character at play between the English and the French, then how does During's sentence fail to become the hypotyposis of Malabou's French?

In order to answer this question, let us now address the second problem with this translation. Right there, in the middle of the sentence, one sees the *presence* of the words 'what is'. Enclosed between brackets, 'what is' stares at the reader as if it was a special commentary inserted by the translator in order to clarify the simple sentence of 'to see coming'. Why this insertion? Why these brackets *there*? Why not simply 'to see coming' as can be found (paradoxically) in other parts of Malabou/During's book? The *reserve* ['(what is)'] that is implicit and inherent in the *coming* and in the modality of *sight* inserts itself *there* in full view and in English amidst the play of plasticity. This bracketed reserve is not as straightforward as the 'waiting' of During's original translation. This reserve is not a 'waiting around', but the fact that *there is* something not quite visible amidst the plasticity of *voir venir*, something hidden or hiding amongst all this coming and all this seeing, something that can only manifest itself between brackets. '(What is) it?

During's '(what is)' effectively tells us that perhaps something is *not quite right* with Malabou's *voir venir*, that something is indeed missing,

that 'to see coming' [*voir venir*] simply does not make sense *on its own*, that something needs to be included *there* between parentheses in order for it to make sense *in English*, but also perhaps *in the French itself*. How can one understand Derrida's addition, this extra *supplement* to Malabou's very own supplement [*voir venir*]? One way of answering this question is first to investigate the issue of the French verbs *voir* and *venir* *within a Gallic context*. This will allow us to move onto the issue of the English version of these two verbs.

### To see coming blind

The first issue that needs to be addressed in relation to *the French* is this: how do the two verbs *voir* [to see] and *venir* [to come] contradict and sublimate themselves in the expression *voir venir*? In other words, where is the contradiction and where is *la relève* [the sublation] in Malabou's supplementary syntagm to plasticity, *voir venir*?

As is well known, Western civilization has indeed always favoured sight over all other senses to the point where seeing and knowing are effectively synonymous, as the expression 'I see', for 'I understand' in any European language indicates. In French, the verb 'to see' [*voir*] has a number of related verbs that also indicate that something else is at stake: it is a question of possession [*a-voir*], knowledge [*sa-voir*], power [*pou-voir*], duty [*de-voir*], etc. When Derrida comments on the closeness between death and the expression *voir venir*, he makes clear that it is always a question of sight or blindness and therefore of knowledge or non-knowledge and power or powerlessness.<sup>49</sup> The verb *voir* [to see] therefore serves as the root for a number of other verbs, clearly indicating that vision is not the only field that one has to take in consideration when addressing or translating Malabou's double expression. *Voir* [to see] implies always *much more* than simple sight or foresight. This becomes clear when *voir* [to see] is combined with the verb 'to come' [*venir*].

The combination of *voir* [to see] and *venir* [to come] appears at first to refer to the issue of a coming knowledge: I *see* something coming, what? I do not yet *know*, but I'll *soon* have *knowledge* of it. At first glance, knowledge appears to surface *after* the act of gazing into the horizon, the act of seeing, contemplating, or watching with our own eyes. However, this combination of *voir* [to see] and *venir* [to come] does not paradoxically imply the organ of sight. With *voir venir*, knowledge can occur without seeing anything at all. A simple example will show this. If one conjugates<sup>50</sup> Malabou's expression, as in, for example, *je vous vois venir*

and then translates this into English, one ends up with a rather different understanding of *voir venir*. *Je vous vois venir* can be understood or translated by 'I see what you are aiming at', which one could retranslate back into French with *je vois où vous voulez en venir*. The 'I see' in this sentence does not refer to something perceptible by the organ of sight, but to the intangible acquisition of knowledge, the sharing of ideas, the moment of comprehension. In this way, *voir venir* does not mark any difference between vision and knowledge. *Voir venir* can be either of them or both of them simultaneously, and in this way remains essentially experiential.

However, it would be wrong to reduce the notion of *voir venir* to a simple empirical and/or phenomenological experience involving knowledge. With *voir venir*, the experience does not arise to become or remain an identifiable presentation or presence.<sup>51</sup> *Voir venir* can only be understood as the dialectical movement that goes from passively accepting what comes unexpectedly to transforming this unexpected through habit and repetition; and then differing and deferring it so that it evades the very possibility of presence.<sup>52</sup> And, as we will see later on, the same is true of the organic in general.<sup>53</sup> In other words, *voir venir* is experiential in the sense of a transformation or metamorphosis. In this way, *voir venir* is the experience of what comes, but where what comes can neither be perceived as the movement of confirmation of a presence that necessarily pre-exists the movement itself, nor as the foundational movement of presence. Perhaps in this sense, Malabou's expression *voir venir* owes much to Heidegger's reading of Hegel's notion of experience, for whom experience is the appearance of (a) coming knowledge, but where the appearance in its effort to be present necessarily disappears or simply goes away.<sup>54</sup> The crucial aspect of what emerges with the expression 'I see what you are aiming at' is therefore that 'to see coming' [*voir venir*] refers not so much to something visibly coming, but to an experience whereby what comes or emerges can only be differed and deferred through habit and repetition.

In relation to the act of reading, the sentence 'I see what you are aiming at' [*je vous vois venir* or *je vois où vous voulez en venir*] effectively corresponds to a form of attention mixed with speculation that *leads* to understanding. I see what this text is aiming at. However, this process of reading, apprehension/comprehension is again not a self-contained activity analysable as such. For it to be truly plastic, it also has to be a response to a stimulus, to a provocation, to something utterly unexpected – the next line. As Malabou remarks in more general terms, *voir venir* is 'to wait, while, as is prudent, observing how events

are developing. But it also suggests that there are intentions and plans of other people which must be probed and guessed at'.<sup>55</sup> The activities implied in the expression *voir venir* are therefore never clear-cut. With *voir venir*, one cannot make a clear distinction between (scientific) *observation* (*je vois* [I see]) and speculative *guessing* (*venir* [what you are aiming at]). The two come together in the understanding of what is coming. This confusion is essential because it brings together the two fundamental bases of Malabou's plasticity: the reception of form and the donation of form. In relation to the issue of reading, one could therefore say, following Malabou, that there can never be any clear distinction in the act of reading between the formation of understanding and the response to the stimulation provoked by reading and that the process is inevitably also again always already differed and deferred.

All this clearly shows that the activity of reception and donation, that is the synthetic operation of plasticity, does indeed reveal itself in all its significance in Malabou's parallel French expression *voir venir*. The verbs *voir* [to see] and *venir* [to come] *indeed* contradict and sublimate themselves in the expression *voir venir* making it the perfect *French* synonym for plasticity. However, there is one odd flaw in this French version of Hegelian dialectics, here understood as *plasticité/voir venir*. The expression *voir venir* implies a contradiction at a theoretical and temporal level (observing/guessing, necessity/contingency, reception of form/donation of form), not at a *verbal* level. As the expression 'I see what you are aiming at' shows, *voir venir* simply implies a process of understanding, therefore of giving form and/or apprehending what one can see occurring or what happens unexpectedly. In this way, *voir venir* represents a movement that *positively* makes sense of what is suddenly *or* by necessity presented to view. The flaw at a verbal level is simply that the opposite stance is only implied, never expressed. There is no strict evidence of this opposite. It is simply not *included within* the expression *voir venir*. Where is the opposition in *voir venir*? If one accepts that speculative words necessarily bring together two opposed meanings [*Bestimmungen*], then how speculative is *voir venir*?<sup>56</sup>

If one returns to Derrida's translation, then the opposite of *voir venir* is simply 'not to see (what is) coming' [*ne pas voir venir*], 'I do not see what you are aiming at' [*je ne vous pas vois venir* or *je ne vois pas où vous voulez en venir*]. The omission of this negation is a curious one in the context of such a rigorous post-Derridean rewriting of Hegelian dialectics. Malabou not only never includes both contradictions *within* the syntagm *voir venir*, but she also never explores or even mentions the *opposite* of plasticity: *ne pas voir venir*, a form of *inflexibility* or *resistance*

to the synthetic process that should effectively be the igniting *blindness* or *darkness* behind or at the heart of *voir venir*. This blindness to what can be guessed at and/or anticipated, to what gives and implodes form, calls for a number of questions: What is one to make of, for example, *self-imposed* blindness? What of a loss of sight that deliberately rejects any form of coming? What of a loss of sight that results from a moment of resigned blindness, one in which there is no other option? And finally, what of a situation in which experience itself refuses to take place and one can no longer differ and defer? In order to address these questions, it is necessary to explore the second issue in relation to Malabou's Gallic expression.

The second issue that needs to be addressed in relation to *the French* is this: When choosing an expression to encapsulate a whole theory, why give in, as we have seen, to the common pre-eminence of *vision* in the Western world? Why not choose instead an expression where the movement created by the unhinging of space (and) time ceases to be ocular-centric? With these questions, the intention is not to reduce the verb *voir* [to see] to the exclusive capacity or ability to perceive things coming *without* eyes. *Voir* [to see] evidently relates in Malabou's work to the formation of the future, to the apprehension of what is coming, to the experience of understanding. With these questions, the intention is, on the contrary, to *pervert* the motif of the 'eye' in general and specifically the motif of what Jean-François Lyotard calls the 'eye at the edge of discourse', this optical device that always assumes that there is only *one* eye or that there is a *stable* consciousness or a *stable* language that can fix us with his/her/its gaze.<sup>57</sup> To question the pre-eminence of *vision* implied in the verb *voir* [to see], is therefore simply to draw attention to the fact that what occurs between language and thought is not – even if it only takes place between the empirical and the phenomenological – necessarily governed by the economy of vision.

In his commentary on Malabou's work, Derrida clearly highlights that

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 sign and is never given at all to sight. In all cases, there needs to be some sort of blindness.<sup>58</sup>

In order to justify this argument, Derrida quotes Malabou's observation that the future is neither absolutely invisible nor absolutely visible.

Considering this undecidability in relation to the (in)visibility of the formation of the future, can one therefore imagine an expression that would take on board Derrida's radicalization of Malabou's *voir venir*? Can one imagine a verbal expression that would truly respect (or translate) the contradictory meanings of both *voir venir* and *ne pas voir venir* [to see coming and not to see coming]?

In order to address these questions, I will propose a first translation of Malabou's *voir venir*. This translation is curiously *intra-linguistic*. It is a French to French translation in a text in English. This *intra-linguistic* translation goes like this: In order to pay attention to the necessary contradiction in/of speculative words and in order to push further Malabou's French, perhaps the supplementary expression *voir venir* can only really be understood as *voir venir aveugle*, to see coming blindfolded or to see coming blind or blindly. With this extra supplement in both the French and the English, Malabou's plasticity then acquires, in addition to its theoretical and temporal 'anchorage', its verbal contradictory movement. Within the syntagm *voir venir* lies the impossibility of seeing, *aveugle* [blind]. This impossibility could also be understood as a form of madness, the frustrating impossibility of making sense of that which arrives unexpectedly. I'm blinded by too much information. The expression *voir venir aveugle* [to see coming blind] therefore exposes the fact that there must be a certain element of madness or insanity, something utterly disrupting within Malabou's synthetic operation of plasticity.

Can this be a satisfactory plasticization of Malabou's supplement to plasticity? Let us not precede ourselves. The most important element in this *intra-linguistic* translation is that the shift from *voir venir* to *voir venir aveugle* or to see coming blind, effectively helps us to fully understand the reserve imposed by Malabou's translator. Indeed, During's brackets with the added words 'what is' right at the centre of Malabou's expression represent what is effectively *missing in the French*. During in fact *completes* Malabou's incomplete supplementary French expression. With her translation, she adds what could be seen as an English translation of Emmanuel Levinas's *il y a* and places it *there*, right in the middle of Malabou's expression. By inserting 'what is', During adds a moment *or* a movement that has no author, resists objectification, and refuses to be sublated, upheld, and/or uplifted. In a subtle move, During adds the unidentifiable *atmosphere* of (and within) *voir venir*. She adds the existential *density* of the speculative (French-English) language, which I, perhaps erroneously, translated by *aveugle* [blindness]. Right *there*, in the interplay between the becoming essential of

the accident and the becoming accidental of essence, During places a non-substantive and non-essential darkness, the 'there is' of speculative thought, this density of the void, this murmur of silence, this nothing, or reserve that *provokes the originary operation of plasticity into actually taking place*.

Curiously (or perhaps unsurprisingly for he had been Malabou's PhD supervisor) Derrida sees this coming all along. He sees that the problem in Malabou's *voir venir* is, indeed, this reserve, this *il y a*, this *aveuglement*, this ('what is') at the heart of the operation of plasticity. His concern is to show that *only* the impossible can truly *come* to the subject; only what cannot be seen can affect the formation of the future. Derrida is obviously interested in the eventuation of radical alterity and how it comes to disrupt the Hegelian process of infinite sublation (a good infinite). His answer is predictable. There is always something that can come from above, 'from a very high stance, in truth, from the height of a height much higher than height itself or any height whatsoever',<sup>59</sup> that one can never expect or see coming. There is always an insanity, a madness, or a 'there is' in the act of seeing or not seeing what comes. Derrida's aim (not unlike During, but obviously for different reasons) is very much that of inserting a radical *interruption* right at the heart of Malabou's concept of plasticity, of bringing the totally accidental right at the core of her speculative language. The answer to our earlier question ('(What is) it?') is simply that within the hermetic enclosure of Hegelian dialectics, there is always what *cannot* be seen coming, what refuses our gaze, i.e. what *allows* for speculative thought *and* unexpected arrivals.

In this way, with the help of Derrida and During and their plastic interventions or interruptions, one ends up incorporating within Malabou's synthetic operation what she would later add as *sur-prise* in *Plasticité*, her companion piece to *The Future of Hegel*.<sup>60</sup> The dark void, the existential density right at the heart of the synthetic operation, this '(what is)' corresponds precisely to the radical openness of *sur-prise*: what comes about unexpectedly (what surprises) and what is put under excessive pressure (what holds [*prise*] excessively [*sur*]). What *cannot* be seen coming, what is truly unexpected *is* effectively *sur-prise* itself; *the blindness in the field of vision created by the formation of the future*. This does not mean that this is a major oversight in Malabou's work. The proof of this is simply, as we have seen, the crucial emphasis that Malabou places in the later text, *Plasticité*, on the word *sur-prise*. This only means that thanks to the English and to Derrida's exegetic commentary, one is able – perhaps surprisingly – to evade the

idiosyncrasies or limitations of Malabou's specific idiom (the French *voir venir*) and to work, *past the French*, towards another idiom: plasticity in English.

### What ought to come and go wonder . . .

If something is not quite right with Malabou's expression of *voir venir* – and there *must be* something that is not quite right<sup>61</sup> – how is one then to take on board both During's difficulties in translating *plasticité/voir venir* and Derrida's questioning? How can one plasticize the French in a foreign language without forgetting the point of sheer randomness, this blindness or madness in the field of vision created by the formation of the future? And, what does this plasticization say of the future and its coming *in English* and maybe in all other idioms? In order to answer these questions, it is perhaps necessary at this stage to take another *risk*, and to *venture* another translation and then *see* if this new translation – this time *inter-linguistic* – stands the test of plasticity, what it says again *of the French voir venir*, and how it finally reveals what is arbitrary, what is not predictable, in a word, 'what is not quite *right*' with Malabou's original reading of plasticity.

The main problem is not one of connotations or nuances between the French and the English or any other language. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the issue at stake in this attempt to translate, transform, or metamorphose a verbal expression is to test the plasticity of one idiom in relation to the complexity of another. The idea is not to offer a perfect translation as if one could create a perfect copy, but one, which, at least in this case, *plasticizes* the plastic character inscribed in Malabou's expression; one which allows one language to accommodate itself with the idiosyncrasies of another and yet remain open to what is totally unexpected. The first part of this task appears to be quite straightforward in the sense that an idiom often accommodates words or expressions of another. By now one could, for example, go against Hegel's imperative and not bother to translate *voir venir*, leaving it in the English text as two foreign words of vague intelligibility. It is the second part of this task that appears impossible. How is one to find *chance* in an idiom and/or how is one to let it come without anticipating it? In order to do this, it is necessary to forget the French and Malabou's Derridean reading and ask: How is one then to (give a) chance (to) *voir venir*, this time, *in English*?

If one were to give *an English* (or perhaps in this case a German-English) expression a chance, then one could perhaps *risk* a second

translation, this time using the very Hegelian modal auxiliary verb 'ought' [*sollen*] in the expression 'what ought to come'. Although generally linked to Kant's account of morality as in the famous expression 'you can because you ought', the auxiliary verb 'ought' taken on its own [*sollen* and not *das Sollen*] expresses the fact that something might or might not occur. In this way and unlike the other auxiliary verbs (could, should, might), 'ought' becomes *tainted* with 'probability', with what can be guessed, but remains always uncertain. This probability can be understood in expressions such as, for example, 'many ought to be enough'. Although not entirely correct, the verb 'ought' remains faithful to the original *voir venir*; it *projects* and predicts the future and yet *remains* open to the unknown. The sense of undecidability put forward by the modal 'ought' when conceived as probability and not obligation allows for a flexible (faithful), versatile (unfaithful) and/or explosive (misleading) translation of Malabou's concept of plasticity or *voir venir*. In this way, here (and perhaps *only here*), Malabou's *voir venir* can be translated into English by 'what ought to come'.

This is no straightforward translation or mistranslation. This is the chance of the English language to espouse and yet still depart from Malabou's French. The idiomatic characteristics are clear: 'what ought to come', unlike 'what is bound to come', or 'what is likely to come' shapes itself as a probability linked to a logical consequence. It is a synonym of plasticity because it brings together the *telos* of time, as in the expression 'the result ought to be infinity', a sense of expectancy as in the expression 'she ought to be here by now', and a sense of indeterminacy as in the expression 'your translation ought to work'. Malabou's deliberately contradictory interpretation of the word 'plasticity' or *voir venir* in Hegel's philosophy can now be translated as follows: "What ought to come" means at once to wait, while as is prudent, observing how events are unfolding. 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 once to the state of "being sure of what is coming" and "not knowing what is coming".<sup>62</sup> With this second expression, with this *English* expression devoid of all dark atmospheres or bracketed reserves (such as the ones we have seen earlier), one still remains, in the language of Shakespeare, open to *sur-prise(s)*. The language is pressurized to ignore the sense of duty attached to the auxiliary 'ought' and to take on a new meaning that could never have been anticipated. With 'what ought to come', both necessity and accident finally emerge *to form* and *dislocate* – through contradiction and sublation – the plasticization of that which is 'to-come'.

Unfortunately, as can be expected, satisfaction never takes place with a simple and straightforward expression that resolves everything *once and for all* or *just for a while*. One can anticipate that the future [*l'avenir*] of 'what ought to come' can only be very, very short. Its demise is easily predictable. Let us indeed not fool ourselves or become delusional; the test incurred by this second translation, transformation, or metamorphosis has failed. In a reverse translation, 'what ought to come' is really, after all is said and done, *ce qui pourrait ou devrait arriver*, yet another synonym of *voir venir*; yet another expression *not* included in Malabou's reading of Hegel's *Platzität*. The plasticization of *voir venir* has therefore failed. The test, i.e. my attempt at a second translation, remains inconclusive; the English has only managed to translate the French in an awkward and unseemly way. But all is not lost; this little diversion was *not* performed in vain. The crucial aspect of this failure is that it reveals more importantly another unsuspected and/or unexpected flaw in *the French* expression *voir venir*. This flaw, or more precisely this unexpected chance, allows us to push the test even further.

Part of this flaw, opportunity, or unexpected arrival appears again to be invisible in French, but is manifest in the English. The attempt to make sense of the *self-contained* French expression *voir venir* with a similarly *self-contained* English expression ('what ought to come'), places an unexpected emphasis on the relationship between *voir venir* and the *subject* who *sees* something coming. This emphasis comes in the form of the grammatical word 'what'. The word 'what' relates to a type of direct or indirect question that effectively has the purpose of requesting further information. As such, it is loaded with anthropological significance because only a subject with an ability to ask questions can truly ask: 'what is this?' – let alone '(what is)' it? If this question is exclusively the reserve of subjects, then how can one understand Malabou's *generalization* that *plasticité/voir venir* corresponds to the formation of the future itself? The problem here is *not*, as before, that of blindness versus vision. The problem here is really the fact that plasticity *needs* the centralizing motif of subjectivity for it to make sense. Without the *presence* of the subject, there cannot be the formation of the future.

The other aspect of this flaw or this chance is apparent in both languages. The verb 'to come' [*venir* and not *à-venir*] effectively implies a specific movement, the movement from a place, thought of as 'there', to *or* into a place thought of as 'here'. If one considers the characteristic of this movement, then it becomes quite clear that this specific movement can take any dimension whatsoever. 'To come' can take place at any stage between microcosm and macrocosm, however these

are defined. When one focuses, like Malabou does, on the question of seeing the specific movement taking place between subject and accident, one necessarily has to ask the following questions: what happens when there is no distinguishable movement whatsoever and yet something is definitely happening? In other words, how can one understand a situation where the distinction between 'there' and 'here' or between subject and accident is not visible or simply cannot be made *and yet there is a movement*, there is something that comes and this coming does not necessarily imply a (spatial) (in/visible) movement that comes [*qui vient*]? In other words still, how is one to see coming that which comes without moving? [*comment voir venir un venir sans mouvement/bouger?*] The French is not given here in a gratuitous manner. On the contrary, it shows that the French is simply not as playful as the English. In English, the expression 'without moving' can refer to both the perceiving subject and also that which moves (a moving object, for example). This playfulness clearly shows that the subject (who is actively gazing at moving objects) is also *in* movement between a here and a there. In fact, he, she, it is always in movement, in a movement that precisely puts into question the very movement of coming in *voir venir*. This movement cannot be escaped, as it lies at the core of Hegel's understanding of subjectivity as essentially active, that is, as a subject who speculatively works on his or her predications.

In order to address this two-part flaw ('to see' without subjectivity and 'to come' while moving), it is necessary to return once again to the French and entrench our translation, transformation, or metamorphosis of *plasticité/voir venir* even further.

In his commentary on Malabou's work, Derrida tells us that the human being is not the only 'thing' at stake in the expression *voir venir*.<sup>63</sup> The expression *voir venir* is applicable to all *living* beings, even those who might not be considered within the category of subjectivity. Malabou is indeed not just interested in updating through Derrida the overall Hegelian structure that constitutes the deployment of time and *subjectivity*, she simply wants more.<sup>64</sup> In order to expand her remit further, Malabou proposes to simply revise Hegel's adaptation of the organic to the inorganic as  $\theta\epsilon\omega\rho\epsilon\iota\nu$  [*theorein*]. At the level of *theorein*, both the organic and the inorganic are able to react to something unexpected and, through habit and repetition, to appropriate this unexpected as their own. With this expansion of plasticity to the organic and the inorganic, Malabou then develops with the help of a few notions borrowed from Gilles Deleuze the idea that plasticity effectively takes place in any *milieu* [oddly translated by Derrida as either 'middle point'

or 'surroundings'].<sup>65</sup> Plasticity is not restricted to the gazing subject or to the experience of understanding; it permeates all living and non-living forms. This is what Malabou calls the *plasticity of life*, not in the sense of what is organic and lives, but in its expanded definition, in terms of both the organic and the inorganic.<sup>66</sup> Life is plastic 'in the sense that life is responsible for the donation of vital forms, but also in the sense that each of these forms, to the degree that it is made of a concentrated energy, provokes an explosion'.<sup>67</sup> The issue that interests us here is this: how can this *milieu*, a milieu that is *not* a subjectivity, actually *articulate voir venir*, that is, how can a *milieu* as a mode of *theorein* shape or misshape the future, without expressing any thoughts, ideas, or feelings? How can it form the future if this *milieu* is, for example, limited to two basic reactions to what comes or is unexpected: sensibility and irritability?

Malabou appears to answer these questions by saying that the expression *voir venir* cannot be understood simply as *theorein* or within the context of organic (zoology or anthropology) and inorganic life alone, but at three Hegelian levels: logical, natural, and spiritual.<sup>68</sup> There is no space here to question Malabou's certainty about these levels. For this to be addressed properly, one would need to question in minute detail the (onto)logical, ontic, and spiritual premises of plasticity, which would require lengthy analysis. The only question one could ask in our restricted field of investigation is this: what other terms, besides those employed by Malabou's translator, could one use to translate and/or transform this expanded sense of *voir venir*? In other words, can one think of a third translation that would encapsulate Malabou's *plasticité/voir venir* without making reference to (a) sight or non-sight [*voir/ne pas voir*], (b) the realm of subjectivity or zoology, (c) any sort of movement between 'here' and 'there' (to come) and still make sense of the *formation* of the future itself?

In order to achieve this, it is perhaps necessary to abandon all attempts to translate Malabou's words into *another* idiom. In what concerns us here, such a vast set of questions cannot be answered properly if one simply focuses on Malabou's text or on the vast field in which Malabou's thinking operates. The strategy has to address itself or has to come *unexpectedly*. Let us take what appears (*as if*) *by chance* in her work. Or more precisely, let us give again all the chance in the world to all the texts at our disposal: Malabou's and Derrida's French, and Derrida's and Cohen's respective translations. Perhaps it is simply a question, following Malabou's attempt to find the unexpected (i.e. the future) in Hegel's rigid philosophical system, to also find *in our case* the unexpected

in Malabou's *own oeuvre*. The aim would then be to answer the questions above in the most plastic way: by transforming or metamorphosing the unexpected into *the* translation of *plasticité/voir venir*. The idea is *not* to go on a mission to find the unexpected, like the Dutch artist Bas Jan Ader, who in the 1970s went on a mission to find the miraculous, but *to plasticize* what appears to result from logical conclusions *into* the unexpected and to transform this unexpected into the conclusion of our reading of Malabou's expression *plasticité/voir venir*.

(Un)surprisingly, this unexpected does not come from Malabou's work. It comes from outside. This unexpected – if it can really be called that – comes in the form of an unusual verbal formation *in the English* translation of *Derrida's text*. This verbal formation comes in the shape of the last two words of Derrida's commentary. As final words, they stand oddly *at once* conclusive and strangely open to the unknown at a crossroads between two texts and two times, *neither* Malabou's *nor* Derrida's. He writes:

I do not know anymore. Here. We must believe, if we must believe, that at this point the word 'accident', as that which it opposes itself without being opposed, essence, I mean to say, and Being and all of those concepts, this word, these words belong to an idiom which I am not sure any more of being able to understand. It is as though, in history, in my history, a strange accident happened to the word 'accident' (and hence to the word 'essence'), an accident of which I am no longer sure, of which no one can be sure of being able to *sublate*. 'Farewell', the noun or the exclamation (the *performative* salutation! Yes another plastic connotation!), in the plasticity of its idiomatic values, a mobile and reflexive, specular or speculative plasticity (and so dangerous), I have not used it in the time of this dialogue, because, as with the 'perhaps', it has occupied me at great length these times, but in order to let one understand, in *this* idiom, my own incomprehension, a certain increasing and stubborn non-intelligence, on this stubbornness precisely, of an idiom, of more than one idiom, perhaps, at the crossroads of the Greek and of its other, go wonder...<sup>69</sup>

Derrida is in trouble. He can no longer explain the meaning of the words 'accident', 'essence', 'Being'. He has fallen right in the middle of his own idiom upon an accident that prevents him from going any further. The accident is devastating: it marks the end of Hegelian sublation. No more *Aufhebung*! The only exit is, following Malabou, the plastic salutation 'farewell'.<sup>70</sup> As he leaves, Derrida in his obtuse refusal

to differ/defer any longer, ends with a surprising and yet curiously predictable expression: 'go wonder...' Now, how is one to understand this 'go wonder...'? What is he referring to here when he references a crossroads of idioms and traditions? Who is the other besides the Greek? Is Derrida precisely not inverting here, in a final twist, the structure of Malabou's *voir venir* and in doing so translating it – or more precisely *plasticizing* it – for us once and for all? How can the pupil (Malabou) allow her supervisor (Derrida) this final repartee at the edge of her text?

Derrida does not write, 'go wonder...' in English. He writes in French, *allez savoir...* another peculiar French expression that means *at once*: 'go and find out' and 'who knows?' It brings together two verbs: one in the imperative [*un impératif: allez*] and the other in the infinitive [*un infinitif: savoir*]. Together, they indicate not only a state of uncertainty or indecision (i.e. knowledge as yet to be acquired), but also the possibility that one could seek out this knowledge [*allez*]. *Allez savoir...* thus brings together the formation of the future as possibility and an essential openness to what the future might hold, that is, openness to the utterly unexpected. It does not take too much to realize that *allez savoir...* effectively represents what has held our attention for so long; it represents the exact opposite of (or the reverse to – but not the contradiction of) *voir venir*. It represents the opposite or the reverse in the sense that it simply *inverts* the movement of the formation of the future itself. Instead of focusing on the (formation of the) movement of what is coming [*voir venir*], Derrida proposes instead to focus on the (formation of the) movement of what is going [*allez savoir*]. In French, the inversion is perverse: the same verbal formation consisting of two verbs, one indicating movement (a contrary movement expressed by the antonym of Malabou's *venir* – *allez*, 'to come' – 'to go') and the other indicating the acquisition, and at the same time, the non-acquisition of knowledge (simply swapping 'I see' with 'I understand', vision for knowledge).

Curiously – and this is where the unexpected comes in – in English, the inversion proposed by Derrida's translator, Joseph D. Cohen, is *at once* thoughtful and miraculous. To gauge this 'thoughtful miracle', it is necessary to stress the importance of Cohen's very own expression through the prism of another translation. The aim is simply to quickly test Cohen's translation and to reveal that effectively, he *correctly* translated Derrida and that any other translation – even a more accurate one – would simply be *un-plastic* in relation to the signification of *voir venir*.

Indeed, *allez savoir...* should have been translated with 'go figure...' and not with 'go wonder...' Understood as a self-contained verbal formation, *allez savoir...* brings together both the appearance of a shape or

form seen in outline or indistinctly and (in its intransitive form) the fact that an idea is formed or envisioned. *Allez savoir si cela marche...* [Go figure if this works...] The verb 'to figure' precisely points to the acquisition or the formation of knowledge [*savoir*], it marks the outline of what is progressively understood. Therefore, to translate *allez savoir...* with 'go figure...' would have made sense on two counts: firstly, it draws the attention to the importance of the act of seeing or not seeing and through this, to the acquisition or non-acquisition of knowledge (as previously noted, *voir, sa-voir*, etc.) in the structure of *voir venir*. Secondly, but most importantly, it retains the primacy of subjectivity as the entity forming the future. Indeed, 'go figure...' privileges the point of subjective synthesis as representation. In an attempt to address the issue of Divine Plasticity, Malabou indeed remarks that the birth of modern subjectivity is the mirror opposite but also the result of Divine Kenosis, that is, it is the result of a form of alienation [*Entäußerung*] of the subject from itself. This alienation corresponds to the distancing of self from itself, a form of human hypotyposis that marks the birth of the human form as a becoming subject. Its form is inevitably *representation* [*Vorstellung*].<sup>71</sup> The verb 'to figure' is therefore the ideal word to choose to *represent* this 'alienated plasticizing figure' – the embodiment of Modern subjectivity.

However, Derrida's translator, Joseph Cohen, did not fall miraculously or deliberately, for the easy translation of 'go figure...' He translated *allez savoir...* instead with 'go wonder...' a verbal formation that curiously radicalizes Derrida's French expression. How is one to understand this planned and/or unexpected occurrence in the plasticizing process of reading and translating an inverted version of *voir venir*?

'Go wonder...' implies the idea of speculation (I wonder if this will end with the expression 'no wonder') and/or curiosity or simply interest (I wonder how this will end?). Unlike 'go figure...' which remains very close to Malabou's original intentions, 'go wonder...' evades some of the inherent difficulties that are embedded, as we have seen, in the very concept of *voir venir*. With this unusual verbal formation, the visuality of the figuration and that of knowledge are clearly abandoned. 'Go wonder...' literally means to open oneself up to what is radically other. It means *at once* to be seized or filled with wonder about what is coming and to have doubts about what is coming. And instead of the passivity inherent in *voir venir* where the subject 'awaits without waiting', we have, and this *without any proper send-off or leave-taking*, the activity of departing (go) and, at the same time, that of disappearing (...into the unknown). Free of all constraints, 'go wonder...' thus

forms the future at once *as* 'neither invisible nor visible' and *as* 'neither inventive nor receptive' and can thus be applied to *all* milieus, even those not characterized as subjectivity and/or not endowed with sight. 'Go wonder...' with its suspension points is therefore *another* perfect synonym for plasticity, one which will no longer allow *voir venir* to have any *priority* or right of *property* over Malabou's synthetic operation.

## Farewell

There is one last question that still remains to be answered. This question will tilt our reading of Malabou's double expression in another direction. Why does Derrida reference *the other* of Greece? What is crucial about this reference when considering the opposite of or the reverse to Malabou's *plasticité/voir venir*? The answer is that with 'go wonder...' Derrida is deliberately referencing a way of understanding time that is radically at odds with the Greek, Christian, Hegelian understanding of time as explored by Malabou. Indeed, by emphasizing the act of *going*, *leaving* somewhere, and even perhaps *departing*, Derrida is highlighting the importance of a Jewish messianic and eschatological approach to time. In order to understand this, it is crucial to return again to the expression *voir venir*. This expression *secretly* implies the *direction* to which things are to *come*, that whoever or whatever is seeing, sensing, or comprehending things, they are always *coming*. There is a *direction* to this movement even if this movement is only, as we have seen, a diffraction/reconstitution of the instant. This movement is *not* going; it is *coming* [*venir*]. It (or we) form(s) or plasticize(s) (itself/ourselves) as *coming*. For Malabou, even if plasticity implies the formation of the future, i.e. what '*gives form*',<sup>72</sup> the synthetic operation is, as we have seen, necessarily *unidirectional*: *coming* [*venir*]. No matter how much Malabou tries to evade the fact, this is what the verb indicates: from the unknown, the radically other, *towards* the subject and/or milieu.

By contrast, for the Jewish Derrida, the movement of the formation of the future cannot rest on a verb that is unidirectional – no matter how many times Derrida references to the 'to-come' in his work. There is simply no specific direction from which one can apprehend the future. Hence 'go wonder...' is a simple reversal of direction (going [*allez*]) in order to show that indeed, when it comes to the future [*l'avenir*], things do *not* necessarily *come*. This – which can be seen as Derrida's repartee to Malabou – is *not* a criticism of *voir venir* as a synonym of plasticity. Derrida is not forgetting here that, for his pupil, plasticity is *an excess of time over time* and as such cannot be understood within the context

of a *telos* with a movement towards self-determination. By finishing his commentary on Malabou's first book with 'go wonder', Derrida is in fact simply *enriching* or *complicating* the operation of *plasticité/voir venir*. This complication comes in the form of a third perspective that is *not* added to the two already developed by Malabou (chronological and logical times), but is *inherent* in them. This third perspective apprehends time from a reverse position, whereby the subject or milieu is *not* facing and/or producing the future – and thereby expecting things *to come* out of this expectancy or this formation. He, she, it is in fact positioning him, her, itself *against* the future, in a reverse position – and thereby expecting things *to go* into this expectancy or this formation. The excess of time over time does not simply come; it also goes in either direction of Hegel's chronological and logical times. How can one make sense of this?

Without going into the details of this specific Jewish perspective – one for which the past necessarily has a redemptive future [*un avenir*] – and the many texts that are attached to it – Scholem, Benjamin, etc. – it is worth recalling here in the most simple terms, the Hebraic approach to the future. In Hebrew, the future is not ahead of us and the past is not behind us. With words such as *qadam* and *akhor*, the future is necessarily behind us and the past is in front of us, there, where one can scrutinize and analyse it.<sup>73</sup> Future generations appear behind us or after us, sometimes by surprise, and we face and/or produce the past. This reversal transforms the horizon of expectancy: instead of lying ahead of us in the distance, it becomes incorporated within the experience of space (and) time. It or we become(s) the horizon. Instead of coming from afar, the future surprises us from behind as if from nowhere. However, this reversal does not necessarily mean that the past that we can see going into the distance ahead of us is retained forever. What is lost to sight, memory, and history can also come back and surprise us from behind. In this way, although it goes away from us, the immemorial past can therefore also come and surprise us as if nothing had ever happened. Thus reversed, the differentiation taking place between chronological and logical times – the stage in which plasticity operates – becomes disarticulated by the past and by memory, this other 'perspective' from which things *also* come. And whoever says that there is a disarticulation or an 'unhinging', there is also, inevitably, a future. The future comes *or* goes at the same time [*hama*].

In this way, plasticity can no longer be seen exclusively from the perspective of a 'to-come' *that only* comes [*qui vient*]. The verb *venir* becomes problematic, because it is *emblematic* of a certain movement.

The come in (the) 'to-come' [(l')à-venir] also has to be perceived paradoxically from the perspective of a time that emphasizes the primacy of the past and of memory. With 'go wonder ...' one is therefore confronted with a radical questioning of the traditional Hegelian *Zukunft* as the elected horizon of intelligibility. Even if Malabou operates at the intersection between chronological and logical times, or between time and its representation, one cannot automatically assume that the plasticity operating synthetically between the two rests on a verb indicating that things simply *come*; it might be something radically different, *who knows?* In this way, Derrida's swapping of *venir* [to come] with *aller* [to go] is not just playful. *Without* undermining *at all* Malabou's careful articulation, his reversal literally *complicates* the synthetic operation of plasticity to incorporate a reshaping or a replasticization inspired by Jewish messianism, one for which the Messiah is neither coming nor going strictly speaking.

All this explains perhaps why Derrida insists so much on reading Malabou's plasticity as an experience of farewell. As he says without hesitation, 'one may as well say that plasticity is an experience of farewell'.<sup>74</sup> Not unlike his attempt to interrupt the versatile dialectical operation with a surprise element coming unexpectedly from above, Derrida attempts again, but this time with a single word – farewell – to interrupt the operation in order to *enrich* and *complicate* again Malabou's plastic exposition. How is one to understand this word? The word refers to a salutation – and more specifically, as we will see, a salutation *to* time. However, this salutation is not as straightforward as one might think. It is unsurprisingly double. On the one hand, this salutation is an *adieu*, an interjection that, for once, needs no translation. This *adieu* is radical in the sense that, whoever utters it, does *not* expect to see someone or something ever again. Because it references God [*a-dieu*, *à-Dieu*], the expectancy is therefore that the next and final encounter can only happen with God 'being present' or at least 'in sight', therefore, in death. On the other, this salutation is an ordinary goodbye, that is, a farewell understood in a situation whereby one expects or hopes to see a person or thing again.

Derrida makes clear that when it comes to plasticity, it is impossible to distinguish between the two. *Plasticité/voir venir* is *at once* a leave of absence (taken or given), *and* a drastic separation or abandonment. Derrida imposes his word(s) with the intention of sharing the invention of the future. He wants to work *with* Malabou's system, in truth 'with the gift of what she is giving', as he says. His gift to her gift is to interrupt *voir venir* with a word that enters into the yawning of the 'to-come', this space

or non-space from which plasticity operates. It is *in* the non-simultaneity of coming and going that one says adieu/farewell, or one lets go or abandons, forever. In other words, one says our salutations, however these are expressed, *as* one forms the future, in the plastic formation of that which is 'to-come'. There is no escaping this adieu/farewell in any understanding of plasticity and this because salutations represent, as Derrida says, 'a concern for plasticity everywhere you look, and however you write it'.<sup>75</sup>

The crucial aspect at this juncture is that Derrida's adieu/farewell is simply not addressed to someone strictly speaking. The words adieu, farewell, goodbye, and salutation [*salut!*] do not imply an address to someone, to some other, to the other, to otherness, or to the absolute other. The separation or abandonment implied in these expressions is not necessarily that of a 'who', or a 'what', it is that of time itself or the future. It is a farewell or an abandonment *to* time, to the all too common (Hegelian) definition of time and therefore to its unavoidable realization, Absolute Knowledge. In a way, to say 'farewell' to time and specifically to Hegel's time is to rid ourselves of the imposition of a destiny and a destination. It is to regain a certain amount of autonomy whereby we form the future and the future forms itself as we say goodbye to a time that was, so far, always already past.

Hence the fact that one cannot distinguish with any clarity between an adieu and a farewell. An adieu is a radical interjection to a time that comes to pass and will never be seen again, while a farewell is an interjection to a time that might return or come again. Who is to distinguish between the two? As Derrida says, 'we ought to think of different farewells, and different times for farewells. These will often be difficult to discern.'<sup>76</sup> And later on,

there is always more than one farewell, more than one adieu, in the farewell or the adieu; one renounces the future, the other hopes or promises, but the more it is assured or given (as the salutation inherent to salvation), the more the promise becomes a calculation, that is, the more it is lost – as future. That is why the time of these multiple farewells remains so difficult to think it never gathers or draws itself with itself or in itself.<sup>77</sup>

Between the time of one farewell and another, between one farewell and another, there is a vacillation, a plastic operation that prevents

the very recognition of this farewell as an adieu *or* a simple goodbye. The question that arises at this stage, when there is no longer any sense of direction, no longer any coming or imminence, when words no longer signify a movement per se [*venir, viens, vient, venez*] is: how is it possible to take or to give time its leave or to be more precise, how is it possible to take or to give one's self our very own leave?

To take one's leave, to say goodbye, farewell, or even adieu, is a way of passing or moving past, of going or simply lasting only a short time. It signifies, as Derrida tells us,

a movement, the pace of a passage [*commeatus*, from *commeo*], the passage through which we may pass, come, and go: become a passer, become past, or to come. The leave that we take or give one's self [*commeatum summere*], is the possibility, the permission of passing, of coming, of going: come now! Go! Go away! No future without leave [*Pas d'avenir sans congé*]. And hence without this separation in departure which we have here named or surnamed *farewell*.<sup>78</sup>

Plasticity as leave [*comme congé*] can only be taken or given to ourselves and/or to time itself (to Hegel's time) as a gesture in passing, as a passer, or as a movement always already past, in a situation where there is no discernible future, no imminence [*plus d'avenir*], only a history of the future, however paradoxical this might sound. With this leave, with this leave of absence (taken or given), plasticity still operates as a coming, a coming to sight, but one which *venir* will never look or feel as if it is coming. And at this juncture between times, between chronology and logic, time and its representation, and between Christian and Jewish times, there can be no more promises *with* a determinate content (such as the Messiah or Absolute Knowledge). At this juncture – or crossroad, to use Derrida's word – adieu, farewell, to see coming and go wonder... can only haunt each other. As Derrida says, 'one will always remain the ghost of the other, the spectre itself'.<sup>79</sup>

Is this it? Is this Derridean expression a plastic (philosophical and idiomatic) translation of Malabou's *voir venir*? Is the transformation or metamorphosis a success? And what of the test? Does it manage to open plasticity to what was totally unknown or what could not have been foreseen when first reading Malabou? Does 'go wonder...' with

its suspension points and without any reserves or brackets, measure the pliability or the explosiveness of Malabou's words? Does 'farewell' espouse and reject *at once* Malabou's Franco-German idiomatic delimitations? Does it stand tall and proud in comparison to the clumsy English-German 'what ought to come'? And above all, do these translations evade the awkward reliance on subjectivity and the ocular-centrism of *voir venir*? The questions abound and not unlike Malabou in *Le Change Heidegger*, the answers will not be given. To do so would ultimately be equivalent to evaluating or even judging Malabou's gargantuan attempt to make sense of Hegel's dialectic in the light of Heidegger's destruction and Derrida's deconstruction, something which she already does, better than anyone else, in her subsequent book, *La Plasticité au soir de l'écriture*.<sup>80</sup> What can be done, however, is to see if these queer attempts to translate Malabou's *plasticité/voir venir* endanger at any level her work. The idea of endangering Malabou's work, like that of finding a flaw, should not be taken literally. It simply consists of showing that these translations effectively *expose* Malabou's *plasticité/voir venir* to something unforeseeable, to an 'other' that would be radically other to this French post-Derridean reading of Hegel.

Malabou's interpretation of *plasticité/voir venir* could be seen to correspond to both a faithful reading of Hegel – as a reinterpretation of the dialectical – and to its total betrayal – in the way it includes something totally un-Hegelian (*différance*) in texts dating back to the 1800s. Contrary to what one might suspect, this faithfulness and this betrayal are not contradictory. It derives from a way of apprehending classical texts that defies convention, whereby Hegel's system is no longer perceived as enclosed, but open to infiltration and contamination. Inversely, it derives from a way of apprehending contemporary philosophy in a manner that defies its self-sufficiency and its pretensions of radicality. Between faithfulness and betrayal lies Malabou's synthetic operation. Opening and closing, forming and undoing, shaping and imploding both the dialectical and its de(con)struction.

If one follows this line of thought, can one therefore conclude that this chapter's modest attempts to endanger Malabou's French use of the double expression *plasticité/voir venir* also constitutes again *at once* an act of faithfulness and betrayal? The betrayal is self-evident in the way it attempts so desperately to (mis)translate Malabou's double syntagm. The faithfulness is less apparent – perhaps only in the way it stays as close as possible to Malabou's use of the French. If this double act of faithfulness and betrayal, or reliability and disloyalty, is acceptable, then do we have here at least partially, the premise for the possibility of the plasticity

of translation, of translation as metamorphosis? This is not intended as previously stated in a way that would want to establish plasticity *as* a method of translation. On the contrary, this question is only intended in the sense of seeing translation as a way of simply becoming other, of plasticizing an idiom into another even if this idiom is the same. With Malabou's playful use of Hegel and Derrida (and Deleuze), translation could indeed be seen to become a synthetic operation that organizes the same and the other in a way that the other is always the other of the other. If this is the case, then the above attempts to (mis)translate Malabou's *plasticité/voir venir* are indeed attempts to endanger her work, to provoke its crisis, but also inevitably and perhaps above all else, *to highlight its relevance*, i.e. its translatability, to our contemporary world.

Perhaps in this way, one can begin to make sense of our last two attempts. Through the curious prism of two texts (Malabou's and Derrida's) and their respective translations, *plasticité/voir venir* in a way extended or plasticized itself into another idiom. In English, plasticity no longer needs a reserve, a reassuring and explanatory *il y a*. It has become weirdly 'go wonder...' or 'farewell'. Or again, if one were to carry on reversing Derrida's Jewish messianism and reabsorb it in an idiomatic curiosity, it has become a 'farewell to *voir venir*'. The abyss created by the two idiomatic expressions plasticizes itself without reserve and without any risk of being recuperated – and this not because it is separated by a channel, an ocean or an idiomatic no-man's-land. The abyss brings together and separates the two opposite movements in any formation of the future: go wonder... *while* seeing coming [*voir venir comme un... allez savoir*], go wonder... *while voir venir* [*allez savoir comme [on] voit venir*], etc. The whole point of bridging and multiplying the outcome of two translations and/or two idiomatic shores would be to focus exclusively and inevitably on the meaning of the word 'while' [*comme*]. While, *comme*, at the same time, *hama*. We have here, again, as always with anything relating to (*l'*)*à-venir* or with any (re)articulation of Derrida's spacing (and) temporizing (*différance*), the non-simultaneity of openings and exposures, a non-simultaneity that can only make sense with an Aristotelian *hama*, which, as Derrida says in relation to the word 'as such', 'evades us forever'<sup>81</sup> and leaves us not only stranded *within* metaphysics, but also with the possibility of speech. *Between* 'go wonder...' and *voir venir*, there can only be a determination that *names* difference, and this determination at the heart of the formation of the future always comes from the metaphysical order.

What would Malabou then say of all this? What on earth could she say about her *voir venir*, now plasticized in a multiplicity of ambiguous

philosophical and idiomatic juxtapositions that, ultimately, are really only intended to expose the manifold and contradictory nature of the formation of the future itself? *Allez savoir...* [Go figure...] Malabou tells us, 'opening the question of the future always implies the risk of immediately closing it behind'.<sup>82</sup> The question is indeed, properly speaking, *never a new question*. Its philosophical antiquity, its tradition, its history, all threaten to cancel out its meaning. And in this way, the question will not go away (perhaps will never go away): Did the (now) old *voir venir*, like the even older *Platzzeit*, manage to grasp *in advance*, to understand that which arrives by surprise *as farewell*, and does it manage to foresee what could still arrive as a necessary consequence or again by surprise in yet another language and in another time? Indeed, go wonder... And perhaps we sense here the enormous *strain* we live under, this *infernal* or *diabolical* dialectical/de(con)structive storm blowing from paradise as Benjamin could have said, or maybe, more simply, from the other – the radically other – or from an irreducible plurality that does not even allow expressions such as 'go wonder...' or *voir venir*, because they can never make sense of the infinite ways the future forms itself. Under this strain or pressure, *sur-prise* holds us and surprises us with ever more complex processes of sublation and/or differentiation. As Malabou says, as if we had not had enough: 'surprise, even in a weakened form, can always surprise again'.<sup>83</sup>

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