Deconstructive Plasticity

Malabou’s Biological Materialism

As we saw in the previous chapter in Caputo’s critique of Malabou, Derrida expresses his reservations about Malabou’s understanding of the plasticity of Hegelian Spirit in his Preface to her first book, *The Future of Hegel*. Derrida’s Preface is called “A Time for Farewells,” and he asks whether one could ever finally bid farewell to Spirit, or would it necessarily always return? In this chapter, I explore Malabou’s development of the destructive plasticity of being, form, or Spirit, partly in response to Derrida’s critique. Malabou’s understanding of plasticity accomplishes two things: First, she argues that plasticity replaces writing as a motor scheme, and second, she advocates a biological materialism that remains faithful in some respects to the legacy of deconstruction.

Although Caputo and Malabou are faithful to Derrida in very different ways, I am suggesting that they are both reading Derrida from beyond the vantage point of writing as a motor scheme. Malabou does not share Caputo’s Derridean faith, and she is much more critical of Derrida’s later work, but she does so out of an effort to graft plasticity onto writing as the shift from an earlier to a later Derrida. Caputo, as we have seen, attends to this religious or messianic passion to which Derrida increasingly gives voice, and he situates religion without religion in the context of a broader economy than other English speaking readers. Caputo over-reads Derrida’s religious passion, perhaps, but he is right to see, to celebrate, and to liberate it. Malabou does not share this religious passion, but her desire for plasticity can be seen as complementary to Caputo’s reading of Derrida’s faith.
As already mentioned at the end of the previous chapter, I do not think that Malabou’s notion of plasticity simply fits into Caputo’s critique, which follows Derrida’s response to her interpretation of Hegel. At the same time, I think that Malabou develops the negative or destructive aspect of plasticity partly in response to Derrida’s critical questions in his preface to her Hegel book about whether Spirit could explode. Here again I want to distance my interpretations of Caputo, Malabou, and Derrida from any exegetical questions about Hegel’s texts. First, I will focus on Malabou’s contrast between plasticity and writing as a motor scheme, and then I turn to her elaboration of the destructive elements of plasticity. Finally, I will show how Malabou’s interest in biological plasticity generates a new materialism.

In her book *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, Malabou reflects on the philosophical trajectory of her entanglement with Derrida, Heidegger, and Hegel to her breakthrough work in theorizing the brain sciences. She says that Derrida’s concept of “arche-writing” represents an enlargement and a modification of writing, and that this enlarged conception of writing functions for Derrida and other philosophers as a motor scheme. This scheme is connected in an important way to temporality and history. Malabou says that “all thought needs a scheme, that is, a motive, produced by a rational imagination, enabling it to force open the door to an epoch and open up exegetical perspectives suited to it.” Writing for Derrida becomes a generalized motor scheme, sufficient to explain and justify deconstructive readings of texts.

Arche-writing is the object of a new science of grammatology that liberates writing from language and linguistics in any narrow sense. Writing attends to “the general movement of the trace, the original breach without which speech would be impossible.” So writing is never simply what we literally think of as writing because it becomes much more generalized. Malabou argues that plasticity can be seen at first as yet another modification of writing, including by Derrida himself in his Preface to *The Future of Hegel*, but she comes to view plasticity as an alternative and successive motor scheme. In her book on Heidegger, *The Heidegger Change*, Malabou understands Heideggerian ontological difference as change or metamorphosis. Change is fundamental, and the presupposition for thinking anything at all. Plasticity then becomes a change or modification of writing, but one that is radical rather than derivative. Plasticity is not simply a modification of writing, but a transformation of writing into plasticity as a new motor scheme.

Malabou states that “a motor scheme, the pure image of a thought—plasticity, time, writing—is a type of tool capable of garnering the great-
est quantity of energy and information in the text of an epoch.” This pure image of thought, a Deleuzian term originally from *Difference and Repetition*, names what Deleuze calls a plane of immanence in his and Guattari’s work. Writing can be seen and named as a pure image of thought in its time now that that time is passing; it is at dusk, “the dusk of written form.”

If plasticity is now the motor scheme that replaces writing, it is because “the concept of plasticity is becoming both the dominant formal motif of interpretation and the most productive exegetical and heuristic tool of our time.” Plasticity is more adequate to the biological and neurological sciences of our time than writing is. Writing became a motor scheme during an epoch “that began with structuralism and found its mooring in linguistics, genetics, and cybernetics.” In the twenty-first century, the prevalence of the brain sciences changes how we think about thinking because we no longer operate with a simple opposition between form on the one hand and gap or trace on the other. All of these concepts transform themselves in relation to what we are able to learn and discover about cerebral plasticity, such that we no longer work with graphic metaphors but rather “assemblies, forms, or neuronal populations.” Writing cannot explain how the brain works, but plasticity can and does.

Writing contains a graphic element that is irreducible, and the notion of writing as a motor scheme necessarily implies an absent/non-absent trace. The trace defines writing as a motor-scheme because writing consists of leaving and then interpreting traces. Traces are always traces of something. The incompleteness of traces is what is changed in the transformation of writing into plasticity. Plastic traces are not signs of something else, but forms-in-formation, including transformation and annihilation of form itself. In another essay, “Grammatology and Plasticity,” included in her book *Changing Difference*, Malabou elaborates on this delimitation of Derrida. She explains how grammatology is not a strict science, but it takes on a certain scientific form, the impossibility of a “science of writing,” to illustrate what she calls in *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing* a motor scheme.

Derrida names arche-writing as “the original trace, the deferment of presence and of living speech” to suggest a “generalized writing that ‘covers the entire field of linguistic signs,’ in other words, the entire field of human activity.” Malabou argues that this modification of writing is still a re-writing, and takes place under the sign of writing in general. But what happens if and when writing comes to an end? Plasticity is what happens “after” writing for Malabou. She asserts that “it is clear today that writing, as motor scheme, is no longer pregnant in the real.” In *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, Malabou claims that “plasticity is the systemic law of the deconstructed real, a mode of organization of the real that comes after
metaphysics and that is appearing today in all the different domains of human activity.”10 The real as a locus of the motor scheme has a Lacanian resonance, and we can also recall that Alain Badiou characterizes the twentieth century as having a passion for the real.11

Deconstruction always relates to the real, whatever its motor scheme, and Malabou philosophizes beyond Derrida and beyond deconstruction because she questions writing as a motor scheme. Malabou replaces writing with plasticity as a substitute motor scheme, and I am not arguing that she is simply right or wrong, although her work is extremely convincing that plasticity is a new motor scheme, even if it is not entirely clear whether or not it is the motor scheme, or whether there can be only one at any given time. I am suggesting that something changes, and Malabou is attuned to this transformation, and she attempts to think Derrida’s philosophy in this new mode. Furthermore, even if Derrida himself refuses plasticity as a motor scheme, my argument is that this transformation is what drives Derrida to think and write deconstruction differently after 1989.

After 1989, Derrida comes to express his ideas more explicitly in terms of a paradoxical relationship between technics or the machinic, and a kind of ethical responsibility as openness to the other, including the other in me. The context for this twofold reflection is less writing in any explicit or even general sense, and more ungrounded. Malabou offers a ground, or at least a scheme, for us to help think through and beyond Derrida’s own philosophy. In constituting her understanding of a motor scheme by means of neurological plasticity, she wants to close the gap between technics and responsibility that Derrida wants to hold open. Derrida works with and through the paradoxical tension between the machinic repetition and the singular dignity of life as ethical responsibility to the other, whereas Malabou wants to unify both in her conception of plasticity. Derrida’s later work thus appears more ungrounded, and he would resist adopting Malabou’s characterization of this new motor scheme, but her idea of plasticity gives us a vantage point from which to make Derrida’s philosophy more coherent, even if it betrays some of the letter of his writings.

Malabou does not follow the religious implications of Derrida, as Caputo does, but both are attentive to something that perhaps Derrida was not fully aware of, that at a certain moment in time deconstruction twists free of writing. This liberation has religious implications, but it also has political, scientific, and other implications, whether we want to follow or endorse them or not. The question that drives this book is whether Derrida’s philosophy has a future, and its tentative suggestion is that this answer depends on the extent to which it can be released from writing. According to Malabou, “the choice seems simple: either we recognize that decon-
struction is dead and repeat that this is the case, or we accept the new change in modification, in other words, a change of difference.”

12 This change of difference names the exchange of plasticity for writing, and it names a future for deconstruction and for Derrida, at least for Malabou.

Much of the possibility of envisioning plasticity in the wake of writing lies in plasticity’s destructive power. According to Malabou, plasticity involves both the capacity to receive form and the capacity to give form, from the Greek word plassein. These two complementary aspects of plasticity in a classical sense are supplemented by the third capacity of plasticity, “the capacity to annihilate the very form it is able to receive or create.”

13 This explosive quality of plasticity involves the auto-annihilation of form. This explosive annihilation of form is necessary for repair, for healing, and for growth of neuroplastic cells, according to Malabou. In What Should We Do with Our Brain?, she argues that “the sculpture of the self is born from the deflagration of an original biological matrix, which does not mean that this matrix is disowned or forgotten but that it cancels itself.”

14 Plasticity takes place between shaping of form and destruction of that form itself. Destruction of form is an intrinsic part of the process of formation.

In The New Wounded, Malabou develops a critique of Freud by suggesting that the sexuality of the unconscious mind is changeable but not destructible. The limits of a psychoanalytic understanding of the person lie not in emotional mental trauma, which can always be recuperated into the existing self, but in brain injury. Brain injury changes the person so profoundly that we cannot simply say that it is the same person. Malabou’s careful reading and delimitation of psychoanalysis should not be seen as a crude biological reductionism, but a way to challenge the presuppositions and limits of Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis itself.

The New Wounded is important for many reasons, but primarily for the distinction Malabou makes between the psychoanalytic notion of sexuality and the neurological idea of cerebralité; that is, the understanding of how the brain works changes how we conceive of an event. The cerebral event radically transforms subjectivity, while the sexual event is always assimilated into or appropriated by the subject. What Malabou is interested in here is the destructive plasticity represented by brain wounds, whether caused by trauma as in post-traumatic stress disorder or diseases such as Alzheimer’s. This destructive ability of brain wounds to profoundly and irrevocably alter the self makes it entirely different from Freudian psychoanalysis, which always incorporates external events into internal, psychic and sexual processes, whether conscious or unconscious. She claims that “the resistance of cerebralité to sexuality, in the final instance, pertains to the manner in which the cerebral self belongs to the other without alienation.
or specularity.” Neurological discoveries expose the contingency and fragility of identity, which Malabou then draws upon to show how these processes change how we have to think about Freud.

Malabou draws on current neurological research and contemporary psychoanalytic works and applies them to a careful, penetrating and convincing reading of Freud’s primary texts, in order to fashion her original interpretation. She claims that Freud ultimately fails to get beyond the pleasure principle, despite his later intentions, because he always reduces events to internal sexual causes, and he cannot truly think the possibility of external chance or accidental events. The psychic or sexual event is the appropriation of any event whatsoever into the psyche, and this linkage forms a totality in Freud’s thought. On the other hand, Freud cannot think a purely cerebral event, one that comes from outside and cannot be mentally connected or assimilated into a subject’s psychic processes. What is so interesting and ironic, of course, is the fact that the brain is seen as “internal” in bodily terms, but its wounding or alteration is inassimilable into psychic relationships. Brain wounds so radically alter personality that someone can become someone else, and this is a loss so total that it precludes mourning, except by others.

At the end of *The New Wounded*, Malabou rewrites the Freudian death drive in cerebral or neurological terms. The death drive is beyond love and hate, sadism and masochism, because it is associated with the cerebral event, the destructive annihilation of personality by means of a wounding trauma. The death drive is the augur of a new materialism, a materialism that is completely outside the psychic subject, and the subject is exposed to a vulnerability that she cannot control or assimilate. She claims that “only profound reflection upon destruction, death, and the negativity of the wound will make possible a truly efficacious and pertinent approach to the neuro-psychoanalytic clinic.” Although her reading is a critical reading, Malabou does not simply dismiss Freud’s work and significance, or claim that neurological research makes it obsolete in a straightforward scientific or positivistic way. By re-writing the death drive from the standpoint of the cerebral event, she forces readers to confront and engage with Freud and post-Freudian, including Lacanian, thought in a different and important manner.

In *Self and Emotional Life*, coauthored with Adrian Johnston, Malabou further reflects on the theme of destructive plasticity that she has elaborated in *The New Wounded*. In her contribution to this collaboration, she focuses on the question of affect, and engages what Derrida calls “heteroaffection.” Affect for Derrida is always heteroaffection, and deconstruction shares with psychoanalysis a focus on affect as predominantly related to the subject, and loss of affect as alienation. In this model, “the loss of af-
fects is . . . the subject’s total disconnection from her affects.” In her contribution in *Self and Emotional Life*, “Go Wonder,” Malabou focuses mainly on Descartes and Spinoza, and she also considers the writings of the neurologist Antonio Damasio. She ties this reading, as she does so much of her work, to a critique of deconstruction. Malabou explains that “one of the major points of discussion between philosophy, psychoanalysis, and neurobiology concerns not only the possibility of heteroaffect, but the possibility of a hetero-heteroaffect.” \(^\text{18}\) Heteroaffect is still an affect, but hetero-heteroaffect breaks with any sense of affect and destroys the foundation of our sense of what it means to be a self.

Hetero-heteroaffect in “Go Wonder” plays a role similar to cerebrality and the possibility of brain injury in *The New Wounded*. Her argument with Derrida in “Go Wonder” parallels her critique of psychoanalysis in *The New Wounded*. She turns to Damasio for a thinking of the self that does not presuppose a baseline psyche. “The neurobiological approach to emotions,” Malabou suggests, “allows us to think a strangeness or estrangement of the self to its own affects.” \(^\text{19}\) The self can only be thought, as it can only be fashioned, in negative terms, according to this destructive plasticity, which “forms and sculpts a new identity.” \(^\text{20}\) According to Malabou, destructive plasticity does not simply destroy. It’s also forms something new, even if this something or someone is so radically different as to make recognition impossible. The result of destructive plasticity in the form of a serious brain injury “is the formation of ‘someone else,’ a new self, a self that is not able to recognize itself.” \(^\text{21}\)

Destructive plasticity marks an extreme limit of plasticity in its negative form, but it still manages to contribute to a new formation. Destructive plasticity incorporates what Derrida analyzes as the machinic repetition of technics in “Faith and Knowledge” and elsewhere. The productive promise of plasticity also generates a kind of ethical responsibility, even as it denies the transcendence that is usually associated with Derrida’s and Levinas’s ethics. How does this work? In an essay from *Changing Difference*, “The Phoenix, the Spider, and the Salamander,” Malabou responds more explicitly to Derrida’s critique in “A Time for Farewells” by offering an interpretation of Hegel’s sentence from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “The wounds of the Spirit heal and leave no scars behind.” \(^\text{22}\) We can read and interpret this sentence in at least three ways: dialectically in a conventional sense, deconstructively in a Derridean sense, or post-deconstructively, which is the reading that Malabou wants to suggest. She fastens on the example of the salamander, which heals its amputated tail without leaving a scar due to specialized trans-differentiated stem cells. “When a salamander or lizard’s tail grows back,” she explains, “we do indeed have an instance
of healing without a scar. The member reconstitutes itself without the amputation leaving any trace.”23 This example is crucial for Malabou because here destructive plasticity works to regenerate without leaving a scar or a trace. Plasticity works in a way that deconstruction, according to the scheme of writing, does not.

Plasticity is destructive, but this destructive nature of plasticity is not simply negative. It is also metamorphic. The third element of plasticity, its explosive aspect, changes radically, so radically that our presumptions of identity may no longer hold. But this radical plasticity is also a form of regeneration and freedom because it is “only in making explosives does life give shape to its own freedom, that is, turn away from pure genetic determinism.”24 An energetic explosion is the idea of nature, a Hegelian Idea in nature but not one that has to overcome itself in sublation to become self-conscious. Rather, the idea is the explosion of itself, and spirit is a bomb. As Malabou acknowledges that, “If we didn’t explode at each transition, if we didn’t destroy ourselves a bit, we could not live. Identity resists its own occurrence to the very extent that it forms it.”25 At the extreme, this destructive plasticity is so radical that we can no longer recognize who we are, but this is the case even when we think we do recognize ourselves and each other. Or as Malabou expresses it in The New Wounded, “What scorches the symbolic is the material destruction of the Thing.”26 And this material character of destructive plasticity identifies plasticity as other than writing.

A healing that leaves a scar or a trace works according to the model of writing because we can always read the traces that the injury shows. On the other hand, regeneration operates according to a different model, that of cloning. For Malabou, “when a lizard’s tail grows back, it leaves no trace of the amputation at all.”27 This finite reconstitution of an organ is for Malabou “a regeneration of difference.”28 What she calls the paradigm of the salamander permanently erases writing by means of this replication, which is a change of difference. Difference changes, it changes form, and it does so without leaving any trace. The change in form that leaves no trace is also for Malabou a response, and to the extent that we recognize it becomes our responsibility. This is the responsibility that she invokes in her question and title “What Should We Do with Our Brain?”

In her essay, Malabou says that plasticity is “the resistance of différenciation to its graphic reduction.”29 Writing is a non-present / non-absent absence, where traces manifest what they can never fully present. But according to Malabou, Derrida himself later abandoned his efforts to deconstruct presence, primarily with the shift in focus to the “undeconstructible.” The undeconstructible, “that Derrida outlined in his late work under the names of ‘justice’ or ‘democracy,’” is a name for something that comes back and
regenerates like a salamander. “The un-deconstructible is not of the order of presence,” Malabou claims, “but it is just as much a form of resistance to the text.” This means that Derrida himself grappled with the metamorphosis of writing in the name of the undeconstructible, and we have translated this change into religious, ethical, and political categories. Malabou’s philosophy helps us to understand how and why Derrida’s philosophy changes, even if it does not simply turn. And she helps us read deconstruction as a form of materialism.

For Malabou, the brain is the locus of the self, as well as the place where history, biology, and politics happen. It is also where deconstruction happens, if there is such a thing. She charges Derrida with failing to thoroughly think deconstruction’s implication in the sciences, including neurology and biology. Based on her work on plasticity, she thinks that “the time has come to elaborate a new materialism, which would determine a new position of Continental philosophy vis-à-vis the humanities and biological sciences.”

What is this new materialism?

New Materialism (sometimes called neo-materialism by Rosi Braidotti) is a name that emerges in the 1990s, centered around interpretations of Merleau-Ponty, Deleuze and Irigaray by theorists such as Braidotti, Jane Bennett, William Connolly, Manuel Delanda, and Isabelle Stengers. The New Materialism offers resources to think about materialism otherwise than as a reductionist and determinist atomistic materialism, in concert with systems theory, chaos theory, and complexity theory. Here, being is not reduced to its smallest components or building blocks, but it is always in dynamic transformation. Malabou picks up on the phrase “new materialism” as a way to situate her work on plasticity, despite her focus on Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida.

Influenced by Sartre and Bergson, Derrida resists the philosophy of materialism, seeing it as a simple deterministic and mechanistic theory of the world. His early work on Husserl showed the aporias that Husserl’s philosophy kept coming up against as he tried to steer between a transcendental logicism and a phenomenological empiricism. These aporias affect not only philosophy and epistemology but also science and mathematics. As his philosophy developed, Derrida was less and less explicitly engaged with the natural sciences, and Malabou has shifted to paradigms of neurology and biology to offer a corrective to this limit of Derrida’s philosophy.

What contemporary research in brain sciences shows is how this divide between mechanism and spirit comes undone. The brain is fully material and it is fully spiritual at the same time, provided we understand spirit in non-teleological terms. Malabou states that “we persist in thinking of the brain as a centralized, rigidified, mechanical organization, and of the
mechanical itself as a brain reduced to the work of calculation.” But this understanding is precisely what plasticity undermines because “plasticity perhaps designates nothing but the eventlike dimension of the mechanical.” Plasticity allows us to see the event in the mechanism, the “spirit” in the material, without it thereby ceasing to be material.

For Malabou, plasticity “is able to momentarily characterize the material organization of thought and being,” which is why “we should certainly be engaging deconstruction in a new materialism.” The new materialism is a biological materialism of form, the plasticity of form. In an essay on Darwin and natural selection, Malabou affirms the plasticity of biological evolution: “Indeed, plasticity situates itself effectively at the heart of the theory of evolution.” Natural selection reveals the plasticity of the organization and structure of the organism at the level of both species and individual. The organism’s variability indicates a process of transformation and selection, and this system that evolution constitutes “hinges on plasticity understood as the flexibility and fluidity of structures on the one hand and plasticity understood as a natural decision of viable, durable forms likely to constitute a legacy or lineage.” Natural selection is not teleological, but it works because of its inherent plasticity.

Malabou focuses on the key role of plasticity in Darwinian evolution, which is affirmed by Darwin himself. She argues that we need a social understanding of selection that is closer to this biological model, which is provided by Deleuze’s interpretation of Nietzsche’s eternal return. Malabou says that, for Deleuze, “selection is a return, but a return that is not the same. It is productive repetition of difference, we read in Difference and Repetition; and the eternal return signifies that being is selection.” Deleuze’s idea of selection works in the same way that biological selection does—in a plastic manner. Malabou also appeals to contemporary neurology for a biological understanding that implicitly incorporates this logic of social selection along with natural selection. She focuses on the theories of Jean-Pierre Changeux, Philippe Courrèges, and Antoine Danchin who develop a “mental Darwinism,” which constitutes a form of “epigenesis by the selective stabilization of synapses.” Genetics comprises the data for cells and organisms, while epigenetic modifications introduce “variability that depends for an essential part on environmental influence, on education, and on experience which Darwin greatly helps us to think.”

Epigenetics is a new frontier in biological evolution and neurology. Epigenetics does not replace genetics, but it shows how specific actualizations and modifications of genes occur. The genetic data comprises the envelope within which selection occurs, but epigenetics concerns the actualization of this data, or the selection of a particular history. Malabou’s
recent work shows how plasticity is “the epigenetic variable par excellence” that lies “at the heart of the relationship between variation and selection.” The environment triggers certain histones in an epigenetic manner, and these hormones shape the individual organism in a way that is inheritable, despite the neo-Darwinian dogma. The inheritance of acquired characteristics sounds Lamarckian, but this neo-Lamarckianism of epigenetics offers a new way to think the link between nature and culture. The philosophical understanding of the selection of cultural forms based on Deleuze’s reading of Nietzsche operates based on “a principle of variation-selection analogous to the one that operates in nature.” A sophisticated understanding of Darwinian evolution, the newer science of epigenetics, contemporary neurology, and Continental philosophy all converge on the plasticity of organic and cultural form.

Finally, in an essay on “The Future of Derrida,” Malabou shows how her understanding of epigenetics and biological materialism can be a way to refashion rather than repudiate Derrida’s philosophy. Here Malabou opposes the themes of messianicity and the undeconstructible that characterize Derrida’s later work because they undermine an operative notion of time. She claims that in works such as “Faith and Knowledge,” for example, “time as such has been dissolved into messianity.” This dissolution of time undoes the future except as a shadowy challenge to any concrete anticipation of it. “Exploring the neurological concept of plasticity,” however, is for Malabou “a way to look for a new systematic question of time opposing messianity.” Plasticity enters into the materiality of the biological system and offers a new form of temporality that opposes the temporality of deconstruction and engages anew the “dialogue between determinism and freedom.”

This dialogue operates at the level of the interaction between genetics and epigenetics, as we have seen. Epigenetics opens up a space for the role of education and culture to shape an organism in powerful ways. Malabou links epigenetics to a reading of Kant, who speaks in the Critique of Pure Reason of the “epigenesis” of reason. Epigenesis refers to “a biological theory that opposes preformation,” where the individual begins with an unformed material in which “the form emerges gradually, over time.” Kant cites the epigenesis of reason, but then limits it because he cannot imagine that a priori concepts or categories could evolve. For Malabou, this opens a space for the radicalization of Kantian epigenesis: “If reason is creative and self-formative, we are then allowed to say that the transcendental itself is plastic, and that there must be a kind of experience within the realm of the a priori.” She admits that Kant would not have accepted the notion of a plasticity of the transcendental, but that Hegel would and does.
At the end of her essay, Malabou contests the idea of the undeconstuctible. She says that “it arbitrarily both limits deconstruction and marks its sovereignty.” On the contrary, Malabou confesses her faith that nothing is undeconstructible. The plasticity of the transcendental means that everything, including the transcendental, is deconstructible. And this opens a genuine future, with and against Derrida. We might want to cling to Derrida and resist this understanding of plasticity, time and future. Or we might want to view deconstruction itself as plastic, which is less a betrayal of Derrida than a way of opening his philosophy to a future, which is not his own.

We know that Derrida himself tried to anticipate and affirm the future, even though he knew that he could not anticipate his future, or that of deconstruction. There is no absolute necessity that the future of Derrida be Malabou’s, but there is no a priori reason that it could not. I have tried in this chapter to read Malabou’s challenge to deconstruction in a way that is compatible in some ways with Caputo’s affirmation of the religious passion of Derrida’s philosophy, even though it reaches a limit in technical terms. At the same time, I do think that there is a perspective in which we can view Derrida’s thought genetically outside of an envelope of writing, and that this can still be faithful, at least to the spirit of deconstruction. Derrida enlarges our understanding of writing; he generalizes it. But he becomes more difficult to read and to appreciate his importance as this paradigm of writing or arche-writing recedes in significance. It’s not a simple, straightforward linear replacement of one motor scheme by another, but a complex interaction that does occur in time.

Malabou’s profound philosophical work challenges deconstruction. At the same time, there is still a relation to deconstruction, as she herself constantly affirms. She is both a critical reader of Derrida as well as a powerful philosopher in her own right. And she helps us understand the ways in which the natural sciences are crucial for what is called Continental philosophy and vice versa. This connection is vital not only for the future of deconstruction, but for humanity as well, given the ecological situation of our time, including the limits of economic growth given finite natural resources. We need a philosophical and theological ecology in a broad sense, and Derrida and Malabou, as well as Deleuze and Guattari and more generally what is called New Materialism, provide theoretical resources. In the final chapter, I delve into some philosophical aspects of theoretical quantum physics, and see how a contemporary philosopher of science, Karen Barad, uses Derrida’s philosophy to make sense of reality at the subatomic level.