

FORART LECTURE 2014

Catherine Malabou on Plasticity: The Phoenix, The Spider and The Salamander

Thursday, September 11, 6-8 pm
Litteraturhuset, Amalie Skram

In this lecture, Catherine Malabou, Professor at the Center for European Modern Philosophy, Kingston University (UK), will discuss the concept of plasticity that has been central to her work at the intersection of philosophy and neuroscience.

Catherine Malabou on her topic: “In this lecture, I would like to present the concept of plasticity, which has become a major category in fields such as philosophy, the arts and psychology, but also and mainly in neurobiology and cell biology, to name just a few. Starting with a general definition of this concept, I will then analyse how the concept helps us to move away from previous conceptions of the relationship between subjectivity and materiality and open new ones, which include a new vision of the mind, the body, and of meaning all together. In order to tie all these questions together, I chose to interpret a sentence, taken from Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*: “The wounds of the Spirit heal, and leave no scars behind.” In this sentence, Hegel speaks of “recovery,” of healing, of the return, of the reconstitution of the skin after a wound, that is, of plasticity. I would like to suggest that three readings of this sentence are possible: a dialectical reading, a deconstructive reading, and a third reading that I will call post-deconstructive. This will help me to stage three moments of the history of philosophy: Hegelianism, deconstruction and post-deconstruction. These three readings come from three ways of understanding recovery, healing, reconstitution, return, or regeneration. I will present these three readings via three paradigms of recovery: the paradigm of the phoenix, the paradigm of the spider, and the paradigm of the salamander. Each time, I will see how the central meanings of plasticity (forming, explosion, healing) are always and intimately linked together.

Catherine Malabou, Professor at the Center for European Modern Philosophy at Kingston University, graduated from the École Normale Supérieure Lettres et Sciences Humaines (Fontenay-Saint-Cloud). She received her agrégation and doctorate from the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, where she worked under the supervision of Jacques Derrida and Jean-Luc Marion. Her doctoral thesis became the book *The Future of Hegel, Plasticity, Temporality, Dialectic* (Routledge, 2005). Central to Malabou’s philosophy is the concept of “plasticity,” which she derives in part from the work of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, and from medical science, for example, from work on stem cells and from the concept of neuroplasticity. In 1999, Malabou published *Counterpath*, co-authored with Jacques Derrida (Stanford UP, 2004). Her book *The New Wounded* (Fordham UP, 2012) concerns the intersection between neuroscience, psychoanalysis and philosophy, thought through the phenomenon of trauma. An increasing commitment to political philosophy has coincided with Malabou’s exploration of neuroscience, which is first evident in her book *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (Fordham UP, 2008) and continues in the book *Changing Difference, The Feminine and the Question of Philosophy* (Polity books 2012).