

Dialogues with Catherine Malabou on biopolitics

September 3, 2016

10 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides
101 Place du Curé-Labelle, Saint-Jérôme, Canada

www.ecole.museelaurentides.ca

With Catherine Malabou (Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University, London), Érik Bordeleau (SenseLab, Concordia University), Nathan Brown (Department of English, Concordia University), Adam Dickinson (English Language & Literature, Brock University), Gareth James (Visual Art, University of British Columbia), Donald Landes (Philosophy, Université Laval), Krista Geneviève Lynes (Communication Studies, Feminist Media Studies, Concordia University), Christine Ross (Art History and Communication Studies, McGill University), Gabriele Schwab (Comparative Literature, University of California, Irvine), David Tomas (École des arts visuels et médiatiques, Université du Québec à Montréal). Moderators: Vincent Bonin and Erik Bordeleau.

This symposium seeks to create a favourable environment to reiterate the dialogical structure that Catherine Malabou has consistently adopted since the beginning of her philosophical path. By intersecting distinct voices in her writing or by co-signing works with interlocutors from several disciplines, the oscillation between question and answer has produced discursive sequences where the proximity of texts by Malabou and her peers reveals their origin in ventriloquism. That is, the act of making a body utter the words of others, while recognizing the emergence of a singularity through this delegated speech. While acknowledging the concept of plasticity that Malabou famously redefined through a transversal approach with the publication of *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic* (1996, 2005), speakers at the symposium will contribute to a debate initiated more recently by the philosopher on the boundaries of biopolitics.

In *What Should We Do with our Brains?* (2004, 2008), Malabou juxtaposed the explosive character of neuroplasticity as the brain's mode of resistance with the injunctions of economic flexibility. In *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage* (2007, 2012), she approached the ontological dimension of trauma and other extreme afflictions that render persons indifferent to their own suffering. In the same book, she also attempted to redefine the notion of trauma, which had normally been restricted to its psychoanalytic sense and, therefore, always already linked to attempts to find the origin of psychic ills. Together with the doctor Xavier Emmanuelli, she then wrote *La grande exclusion:*

L'urgence sociale, symptômes et thérapeutique (2009), providing an analysis of the state of emergency and proposing therefore to redefine the assistance provided to excluded subjects who would no longer aspire, at first, to a social reintegration. In recent years, the reception of this portion of Malabou's work goes beyond disciplinary fields. For instance, the anthology *Plastic Materialities: Politics, Legality, and Metamorphosis in the Work of Catherine Malabou*, edited by Brenna Bhadar and Jonathan Goldberg-Hiller (2015), gathers texts situated at the crossroads of psychoanalysis, forensic anthropology, gender and post-colonialism studies. Malabou's three essays published in this book offer a critical take on the conventional deconstruction in the concepts of sovereignty and the post-human, which, according to her, neglects the contingency of the biological. Avoiding all determinism, Malabou again raises the need to take into account contemporary discoveries about the brain and epigenetics to expand the scope of a definition of the mutability of subjectivity. Recently Malabou has deepened the thesis proposed in those three texts, examining the figures of the body (Michel Foucault), the animal (Jacques Derrida) and bare life (Giorgio Agamben). She proposes that the philosophical discipline has to partly let go of these conceptual formations consolidating the stronghold of the symbolic, and rather contribute to a recognition of the resistance of life, not soluble in the established discourses of power.

Part of this ongoing research will be presented by Malabou during a seminar under the auspices of the Université du Québec en Outaouais (taking place at the Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides), dedicated to the reevaluation of the concept of the sacred in Giorgio Agamben's book series *Homo sacer* (1996-2016). The content of the symposium will extend the spectrum of issues discussed during the seminar. As these events around the work of Malabou are accompanied by an exhibition at the Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides, art and aesthetics will also be addressed, while not foregrounded. Catherine Malabou will give a keynote. While some speakers intend to offer a more targeted analysis of the work of the philosopher, exegesis will be bypassed in favour of discussion. Each participant's intervention will stem from their privileged area of research. Panels will be followed by a moderated plenary, during which Catherine Malabou will also intervene.

The symposium is organized by Sophie Bélair Clément and Vincent Bonin with the collaboration of Krista Geneviève Lynes. It is made possible by the Musée d'art contemporain des Laurentides and the École multidisciplinaire de l'image at the Université du Québec en Outaouais.