For nearly twenty years, French philosopher Catherine Malabou has been exploring the unpredictable terrain of metamorphosis, through which she has evolved the important concept of plasticity (plasticité) understood as the hermeneutic motor scheme of our “new age.” By this, she means that plasticity is a singular scheme or motive that opens the door to the current epoch by enabling the interpretation of phenomena and major events as they arise. In this way, argues Malabou, plasticity has displaced the previous motor scheme of writing (écriture).

In contrast to elasticity as the capacity to return to an original form, plasticity denotes the production of form in its positive and negative aspects. Plasticity, in other words, refers positively to both the donation and the reception of form and, negatively, to the formative destruction of form. It is this latter aspect—one that both scientific and philosophical discourse consistently shy away from—that forms the subject of Malabou’s latest book, The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage.

A formidable close reader, Malabou is thus in one sense continuing along a clearly delineated philosophical trajectory with what is an important new reading of Freud. At the same time, however, The New Wounded, originally published in 2007, demands to be considered as utterly discontinuous with her earlier works. As she acknowledges in her “Preamble,” her work bears a distinct break marked by her “incursion into the domain of neuroscience” (xii). This rupture can be located precisely between the “before” of The Heidegger Change, and the “after” of What Should We Do with Our Brain?, both of which originally appeared in 2004.

As regards the “post-neuronal” texts, Malabou’s aim is twofold: first, to free neuroscientific discourse from its unwitting production of conservative criteria that
ultimately serve to regulate social functioning; and second, to produce a consciousness of the brain that emphasizes the mutual speculative relation of brain and world, and in so doing place “scientific discovery at the service of an emancipatory political understanding” (Brain, 53). Such an understanding, she argues, is urgently required if we are to respond adequately to what she maintains is a “new age of political violence” (New Wounded, 156).

Here, Malabou attempts to further this understanding by placing the “profiles” of psychoanalysis and neuroscience side by side, a long-overdue articulation that reveals a surprising specularity between the two seemingly incommensurable discourses. According to Malabou, moreover, if psychoanalysis is to move forward, it must be forced to come to terms with what she calls the new wounded (in contrast no doubt to its “old,” hysterically wounded). Exemplified by the victims of catastrophic brain lesions, the new wounded are those subjects who, transformed completely by trauma and oblivious to affect, find themselves utterly indifferent to everything around them. In short, contemporary psychoanalysis must risk a potentially destructive encounter with a new wound and thus a new form: that of the embodiment of the death drive itself.

Coming Together: Cerebrality and Sexuality

At the root of the conflict between psychoanalysis and neurology, Malabou locates a struggle for etiological dominance. As is well known, Freudian psychoanalysis is characterized by the etiological regime of sexuality, referring not to the narrow set of genital practices, but rather to a law that functions to regulate the form of causality specific to psychoanalysis. To elucidate how this apparatus works, and hence establish “the causal value of sexuality within the domain of mental illness,” thus becomes fundamental to the constitution of psychoanalysis as a scientific discipline (New Wounded, 2). Sexuality, in short, determines “the sense of the event within psychic life” (2).

By contrast, Malabou identifies a radically different causality at work in contemporary neurology, for which she coins the neologism cerebrality. Mirroring the psychoanalytic relation between sex and sexuality, here the brain refers to the narrow set of cerebral functions, whereas cerebrality designates “the causal value of the damage inflicted upon these functions – that is, upon their capacity to determine the course of psychic life” (2). As such, cerebrality “implies the elucidation of the specific historicity whereby the cerebral event coincides with the psychic event” (2). In this way, a cerebral etiology of psychic disturbances becomes possible, and this etiology, according to Malabou, will inevitably supplant sexual eventality in the psychopathology to

1 For more on the methodology of “placing in profile,” see what Malabou calls the “transformational mask” in Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing, 2-8.
As we shall see in more detail in the next section, developments in neurology have demonstrated that cerebral activity goes well beyond the merely cognitive, encompassing “the affective, sensory, and erotic fabric without which neither cognition nor consciousness would exist” (4). Indeed, the neuronal metabolism and the dynamic of emotion have been shown to be inseparable, meaning that brain lesions, for example, not only cause cognitive damage, but emotional damage as well. One can thus begin to understand the challenge posed to psychoanalysis by neurology, insofar as the latter has no need of an additional circuit of psychic energy to supplement the nervous energy of the brain. Neurology, in short, has no need of the libido, a concept fundamental to Freudian psychoanalysis.

By analyzing the nature of the psychic event, first by way of cerebral etiology, and then again by sexual etiology, Malabou makes very clear the stakes of their contrasting economies. An event, by definition, involves both the element of surprise (its external or exogenous aspect) and the way in which the psyche integrates this exteriority into the history of the subject (its internal or endogenous aspect). For Freud, sexuality is the privileged site of this encounter between external and internal or, more accurately, between “an incident and a signification” (5). With cerebrality, however, things are very different, insofar as the external character of a brain lesion necessarily remains external to the psyche. Instead of an incomprehensible event and its “making sense,” between external and internal a connection is revealed that is “distinguished by the fact that no interpretation of it is possible. … It is constitutively inassimilable” (5).

Such accidents, writes Malabou, cut the thread of history, remaining beyond any possibility of hermeneutic recovery even though the psyche remains alive. With this, the haunting figure of the new wounded begins to take shape beyond the regime of sexuality – that is, beyond the drives of life. Rather, Malabou argues, cerebral trauma constitutes the “exemplary example” of destructive plasticity. If brain damage, she writes, “creates a new identity, this creation can be only creation through the destruction of form” (17). Indeed, this is a literal form of destruction, proving that destruction may in fact constitute a form of psychic life: “not as absence of form but as the form of its absence” (18).

**Cerebral fragility, Freudian Indestructibility**

Whereas Freud argues that the nervous system could never represent the relatedness of psychic and somatic on its own, contemporary neuroscience, by contrast, insists on the brain’s capacity to affect itself; that is, to regulate itself without any outside assistance. It does this by way of primary, social, and background emotions, through
which brain and body constantly exchange information and thus regulate the psychosomatic totality. This is because the process through which the brain provides itself with information about the organism’s internal state and external relations simultaneously produces affects, i.e., modifications. Hence, while the elementary task of the nervous system is to maintain the lowest level of excitation conducive to survival, the emotions work alongside as “the elaborate prolongation of affective processes” within this homeostatic regulation (*New Wounded*, 38).

The argument for cerebral auto-affection is supported by cerebral imaging technology, which clearly shows that emotional processes are indeed distributed among several sites in such a way as to allow the brain to effectively “manage” its internal sources of excitation. These sites, moreover, are not genetically determined, but rather constitute overlapping functional systems that require, as Malabou says, “the collaboration of several cerebral agencies” (39). Most importantly, these agencies “constitute part of an ensemble of structures that simultaneously regulate and represent corporeal states” (40, emphasis added). Here, then, the brain affects itself, and affects these affects through positive feedback loops, thus producing an internal “proto-self” that is simultaneous with the externality of object relations. Requiring no supplemental displacement into psychic or libidinal energy, *identity* is simply the product of the brain’s auto-affection understood as the set of its homeostatic processes.

This has two important corollaries: first, insofar as we can gain no sense of the activity of cerebral auto-affection, the latter thus constitutes “the unconscious of subjectivity” (43). Second, given this constitutive collaboration of cerebral agencies spanning the varied orders of the nervous system, the “proto-self” must therefore produce itself from “instant to instant” and hence is “fundamentally temporal” (44). Cerebral auto-affection, in other words, is the manifestation of finitude. More precisely, writes Malabou, it is the process “by which finitude is constituted within the living core of subjectivity without ever being able to become the knowledge of a subject” (44). Hence, in contrast to the Freudian unconscious for which there is no temporality and thus no death, the cerebral unconscious, tied irrevocably to the passage of time, is always “the incessant internal announcement and reminder of mortality” (45). And so, there is no suggestion here of an indestructible self or immortal unconscious, but rather only a fundamental sense of originary fragility. In short, the core of cerebral subjectivity not only risks being destroyed when attacked but, and of equal importance, it is constantly attuned to this risk.

However, and this is a central point, while the cerebral subject always risks being utterly destroyed, psychic life can, *even then*, survive the damage inflicted upon the brain. By recognizing this, writes Malabou, contemporary psychopathology breaks absolutely with psychoanalytic practice, insofar as the personality changes that result
from brain damage cannot be interpreted as a regression to an earlier stage of an organism's being – an interpretation fundamental to psychoanalysis. Indeed, the very notion of regression depends upon the indestructibility of unconscious traces. This is to say that earlier stages of development persist and are subject to return or revival at any time, a return which defines mental illness. Neurology, by contrast, recognizes that severe brain trauma has the potential to bring into being “a new, unrecognizable person,” that is, “a new identity with loss as its premise” (48). An identity, in short, without a past, without childhood. Given this, psychoanalytic forms of treatment are clearly without relevance.

The Welcome that Arrives as a Farewell

We now reach a provocative and highly original point in Malabou’s argument: the positing of a neuronal death drive that both mirrors – and goes beyond – the Freudian death drive. She begins, however, with an important proviso: if we are to think the work of a destructive, “postlesional” plasticity, it is also necessary to postulate the existence of an internal process of destruction that “responds to the traumatic stimulus and welcomes it, in a sense, facilitating its work of annihilation” (New Wounded 70). The possibility of an external accident that arrives to destroy the self, in other words, requires an internal process that prepares for – welcomes – its own farewell. As such, argues Malabou, there must be a link between cerebral auto-affection understood as constituting “a continuous annunciation of finitude,” and the traumatic, intrusive event that destroys this same continuity, thus killing psychic identity (71). This, she continues, is the neuronal drive toward death, albeit a death that precedes death.

To clarify the distinction between the neuronal and the Freudian death drives, Malabou turns to the question of reflexivity. According to Freud, the opening of the psyche “to the horizon of its own relation to itself” begins with the anticipation of death (130). Hence, writes Malabou, the anticipation of death necessarily “pertains to the structure of anticipation that every form of anxiety – internal or external – has in common. By the same token, it is the apparatus of psychic openness to all types of events and accidents” (130). As such, the event for Freud arrives to affect a structure of anticipation founded upon “the originary possibility of leaving oneself behind” (130). This structure, moreover, is the very form of the unconscious. With this, we reach a crucial point in Malabou’s reading of Freud, insofar as, for the latter, trauma is therefore caused by “remembered or future separation; it is the cause of separation that sees itself coming” (132). Ultimately, what this means is that the anticipation of separation, that is, the structure of the effacement of the subject – the unconscious, in other words – “is the indestructible substrate of destruction,” with the result that “[n] ever, for Freud, does separation separate from itself” (132). Put simply, the anticipatory structure of the psyche cannot be destroyed by the trauma it anticipates. Hence, for
psychoanalysis the formation of a new identity can never be presented as a discontinuous process. For Freud, the cut is never absolute prior to death.

For contemporary neurology, however, the anticipation of death – which, as we know, is the process of cerebral auto-affection itself – is not insulated from danger, but rather always risks being overwhelmed. As Malabou puts it, “the neurological horizon of the anticipation of destruction is destructible” (133). For neurology, there is always, and for every one of us, the possibility, the risk of being deprived of the possibility of seeing or feeling ourselves die (133). The absolute cut, complete separation from itself, remains always a possibility.

**Metamorphosis Born of the Wound: Daphne Fleeing Gregor**

Given that the traumatic event cannot, according to neurology, be the cause of a separation that sees itself coming, the psychic past cannot therefore function as a resource for the present. Rather, in contrast to psychoanalysis, the pathological force and destructive plasticity of such an event necessarily “creates another history, a past that does not exist” (*New Wounded*, 151).

This distinction is hugely important, insofar as the “specificity of the traumatic event thus inheres in its metamorphic power. The traumatic event, in a certain sense, invents its subject. … a new subject enters the scene in order to assume this past that never took place” (152). With this, we reach the crux of Malabou’s entire argument: “Separation can no longer be anticipated but it does occur, precisely, in metamorphosis” (152, my emphasis). Indeed, it is the “radical rupture,” more even than disaffection, which defines the new wounded. However, while we indeed owe to neurology our understanding of this rupture that leaves in the place of identity only the form of its absence, Malabou argues that neurological discourse nonetheless joins with psychoanalysis in fleeing its – barely glimpsed – theoretical implications. Both neuroscience and psychoanalysis, in other words, and in different ways, recoil from the idea of destructive plasticity.

To think destructive plasticity, however, is to contend with a radical form of metamorphosis: that of a biological metamorphosis born of the wound. Indeed, it concerns the very transformation of metamorphosis itself. By far the clearest illustration of this can be found in Malabou’s *Ontology of the Accident* (2009) wherein she argues that, in the traditional conception of metamorphosis “transformation intervenes in place of flight” (*Ontology*, 10), as exemplified by the mythical tale of Daphne who, being chased by Phoebus and unable to outrun him, instead transforms herself into a tree. The impossibility of flight that lends itself to such a transformation, however, is by no means the same as a metamorphosis forged by destructive plasticity. However
paradoxical it may seem, writes Malabou,

the being-tree nonetheless conserves, preserves, and saves the being-woman. Transformation is a form of redemption, a strange salvation, but salvation all the same. By contrast, the flight identity forged by destructive plasticity flees itself first and foremost; it knows no salvation or redemption and is there for no one, especially not for the self. It has no body of bark, no armor, no branches. In retaining the same skin, it is forever unrecognizable (12).

The metamorphosis born of the wound, in other words, is a transformation both without change and at once utterly unprecedented. Put simply, when no possibility of transcendence, flight or escape remains, destructive plasticity constitutes a form of alterity “where the other is absolutely lacking. … The only other that exists in this circumstance is being other to the self” (11).

How might we imagine such an impossible figure? Malabou’s answer is superb: recall the opening of Kafka’s Metamorphosis in which Gregor Samsa awakes to find himself inexplicably transformed into a large and ungainly beetle. However, rather than accompanying Gregor into the nightmare of having his human essence captured within an alien form, let us imagine instead “a Gregor perfectly indifferent to his transformation, unconcerned by it. Now that’s an entirely different story!” (18). Such, then, would be a new figure of metamorphosis and an entirely new form of life: indifferent to anxiety and mourning neither loss nor lack.

A Beyond of the Pleasure Principle

In the last instance, Malabou’s critique of psychoanalysis comes down to its inability to think this new form of life, an inability that is a direct result of its “failure to admit the existence of a beyond of the pleasure principle” (New Wounded, 189). Indeed, she argues, Freud’s selection of sadism and masochism as “representatives” of the death drive serves only to demonstrate this failure, it being a simple matter to show that neither escape the love-hate dyad, and thus the “intrigue of pleasure” (191). This failure, continues Malabou, is inevitable because inherent in the Freudian death drive is the incapacity to form forms. Freud, in short, lacks the necessary conception of destructive plasticity. With nowhere to go but to the safety of positive plasticity, Freud thus “softens” the problem of the death drive and, as a result, is unable to extricate it from the life drives.

The specific form of the psyche produced by the presence of death or pain becomes available to us, argues Malabou, only with the idea of destructive plasticity, as only the latter makes possible the embodying of the death drive. By this, Malabou means those “living figures of death” who “purely and simply inhabit a space beyond the
pleasure principle” (198). Such, then, are psyches beyond love and hate, utterly deserted by pleasure: the new wounded.

All around us today, such forms or figures of trauma, argues Malabou, constitute a “worldwide psychopathology” that forces a rearticulation of psychoanalysis even as it consolidates its thinking of the death drive. In place of a sexual etiology, disclosed instead is a “traumatized subject who has gone beyond the pleasure principle” and in fact bears “sacrificial witness” to the deconstruction of subjectivity in the very form of her psyche (206). As such, Malabou asks, “Isn’t it time that philosophy discover the cerebral psyche as its subject?” (206).

That Fragile Partition: Heidegger, Wounded by Plasticity?

This challenge to philosophy, and to its subject above all, takes a somewhat uneasy turn, however, when we consider a different aspect of metamorphosis, and a very different figure of Gregor Samsa. Such is the transformation enacted by The New Wounded itself, and by Malabou’s “neurological turn” more generally; one which raises the question of whether Malabou’s earlier, very fine reading of Heidegger can survive the trauma it simply cannot see coming.

For Malabou in The Heidegger Change, Kafka’s Samsa again constitutes an exemplary figure. Here (and without implying any contradiction), Samsa figures the paradox of perpetual metamorphosis which, insofar as constant change presupposes the divesting of form, is thus deprived of the very possibility of metamorphosis. It is in the face of such a figure, argues Malabou, that Heidegger must provide a “proof of the plastic power of modification, of something like a form” (Heidegger Change, 231) if he is to save Being and Time from the “bad infinity” of an absolute, nihilistic relativism that ultimately reduces the Dasein to the status of “an insect stuck crawling the walls” (234).

While Malabou’s argument is too complex to be restaged here, we can note that, whereas in the later work it is cerebral auto-affection that constitutes the primitive form of identity, in The Heidegger Change this role goes to the “thin partition” between authentic and inauthentic ways of being-Dasein, which constitutes the locus of exchange where existence and identity are “written.” Of particular interest, however, is the fact that this quest for “something like a form” takes place in conjunction with what Malabou calls the “triad of change”: Wandel, Wandlung, and Verwandlung (change, transformation, and metamorphosis). Given such a focus, it therefore comes as something of a surprise that in The New Wounded Heidegger’s name is nowhere to be found. This is particularly bewildering in that in the earlier work Malabou concludes by arguing that it is the “partition” which allows for the possibility of a
Heideggerian ethics. And yet, this same “partition” is precisely that which ensures both the individuality and the continuity of identity. Because of the saving partition, in other words, Heidegger joins Freud in refusing the possibility of a discontinuous rupture constitutive of a new form of Dasein. Moreover, for Heidegger and Malabou, it is the very plasticity of the partition throughout the Dasein’s existence that prepares for the final transformation of the Dasein that is death. It is this structure, in other words, which allows for the possibility of authentic existence in being-toward-death, an authentic existence that, by way of the “call” of conscience, demands a decision.

For Malabou of The New Wounded, however, the trauma manifest in the form of absence is an event that directly threatens the ability to decide, insofar as everything becomes “just as good as everything else, so nothing is worth anything,” the traumatic disturbance producing “a sort of nihilism … an absolute indifference” (New Wounded, 50). The new wounded, it would seem, are subject to just that bad infinity which Heidegger must be rescued from – a rescue performed by the partition ensuring ontological continuity in being-toward-death in conjunction with the structure of decision – and yet this is precisely what Malabou denies to the new wounded. What is left unanswered, then, is the questionable existence of the partition in the new wounded, the absence of which would ultimately serve to negate a functioning Heideggerian ethics. Amid Malabou’s “wager” on the rupture, therefore, a different choice between rupture and continuity has been left in suspension, a suspension with equally important consequences for The New Wounded.

To Wound is to be Wounded

In The New Wounded, the “hard” truth of the death drive opens directly to ethical and political concerns, albeit an opening complicated somewhat by its unthought relation to the absent Heidegger. Central to this is Malabou’s – perhaps shocking – claim that the perpetrators of terror are themselves the victims of destructive plasticity. In a move at once rigorous, provocative, and important, Malabou once again recalls us to the fact that plasticity dictates the production as well as the reception of form. It demands, in other words, that, in addition to the traumatized form of the psyche that results from having received a shock, we must also consider the active or productive form of destructive plasticity. Thus, writes Malabou, the cruelty of executioners “emerges as the mimetic reappropriation of traumatic passivity” (New Wounded, 200). “Making suffer,” she continues, thus assumes “the neutrality and senselessness of a blow without author and without history, of mechanical violence, and of the absence of interiority” (200). In other words, those who produce forms of pure destruction are themselves disaffected individuals formed by destruction. They are, in short, the new wounded.
Crucially, argues Malabou, neuropathology provides a legitimate structural model for every type of psychic trauma, insofar as victims of brain lesions present identical behaviors to those suffering other types of trauma, including sexual abuse, terrorist attacks, and war. The new wounded emerge, in other words, irrespective of whether neuronal changes are the cause (organic) or the consequence (sociopolitical) of psychic disorganization.

Moreover, given that the victims of sociopolitical traumas, natural catastrophes, and grave accidents all present identical profiles, politics must consequently give up all hope of “endowing violence with a political sense” (155). Indeed, argues Malabou, the singular lesson of contemporary terrorism consists in its refusal to formulate a lesson – “dissimulation of the reason for the event [being] the new form of the event” (155). Political violence, in other words, has come to share the same senselessness that characterizes the pure accident, thus becoming indistinguishable from the happenings of chance. As such, all catastrophic events start to take on a natural character – a naturalization of political violence that further erases the boundaries between the biological and the social.

At the same time, however, this positing of a shared wound in which the form of the torturer appears indistinguishable from tortured forms is not without its problems. For Malabou, those who make suffer must first “make themselves other, in accord with a decision of a metamorphosis that is itself also constituted on the level of the brain as indifference to suffering” (200). Here, a question immediately arises regarding the degree of volition in this paradoxical formulation of a subject who both decides to become other, to become wounded, and is at once the – absolutely discontinuous – subject formed by this decision. Moreover, does not such a “decision” – to become indifferent to the suffering of another – always already presuppose being wounded? Again, an engagement with Heidegger’s call of conscience and the structure of decision would have served as a useful clarification in both directions as, without it, not only is a Heideggerian ethics left in suspension, but the conflation that both gathers and divides the newly wounded remains obscure.

**Tracing the Muselmann**

Finally, given its subject of sociopathic wounding, the absence throughout The New Wounded of any consideration of the Nazi extermination camps is simply baffling; especially since this absence concerning the form of absence ultimately centers upon representatives of the death drive.

As philosopher Giorgio Agamben notes in Remnants of Auschwitz (1999), in recounting their experiences, the survivors of the camps repeatedly testify to a “gray zone in
which victims become executioners and executioners become victims” (Remnants, 17). Bruno Bettelheim, for example, says of Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss, that he had to “divest himself so entirely … of feeling and personality, that for all practical purposes he was little more than a machine” (Bettelheim 238). The resonance with the new wounded is clear. It is within the camps, however, that we find the representative of extreme sociopolitical trauma coupled with the absolute disaffection of destructive metamorphosis: that of the Muselmann. Freud, we recall, lacking the idea of destructive plasticity thus fails to identify a single authentic representative of the death drive. Malabou, by contrast, finds herself quite literally surrounded by them. In spite of this, the figure of the Muselmann remains inexplicably absent.

Muselmänner (“Muslims”) was the name given to those prisoners in Auschwitz and other camps who were already dead while still living (one “hesitates,” writes Primo Levi, “to call them living: one hesitates to call their death death” [Levi 90]). Most often described as “living corpses,” the various testimonies of survivors focus on two aspects above all: first, the absolute indifference of the Muselmann to any external relations and, second, their becoming-object and/or becoming-mechanical.

It seems extraordinary that Malabou overlooks the Muselmann in her search for an exemplary sociopathological counterpart to match the “natural” example of those transformed by catastrophic brain lesions. The Muselmann is surely the representative figure of the death drive, that which most clearly encloses in a single “image,” as Primo Levi contends, “all the evil of our time” – the representative, in short, of Malabou’s “new age of political violence” (Levi 90).

There is, it should be noted, a single brief mention of the Muselmänner in The New Wounded (in Malabou’s “Preamble”). This, however, only makes things more baffling than ever, in that Malabou here not only demonstrates her familiarity with the work of Bruno Bettelheim, but also, more importantly, attests to its fundamental significance for The New Wounded as a whole (New Wounded, xvii). It was Bettelheim, she writes, who had first observed the similarities in the behaviors of autistics and Muselmänner, and it was only by “[synthesizing Bettelheim’s experience with the teachings of the treatises on military psychology” that Malabou was able to legitimate her hypothesis regarding the identical behaviors presented by the victims of brain lesions on the one hand, and those suffering from war trauma on the other (xviii). Given this founding legitimation, then, what happens to the Muselmann? In fact, not only does Bettelheim argue that the Muselmann provides the interpretative paradigm for autism and schizophrenia in children, but in The Informed Heart he also suggests an identity common to both the Muselmänner and the victims of traumatic brain lesions and, in particular, of such lesions as cause severe damage to the emotional brain.
Only now, argues Malabou, is it possible to even think the idea of destructive plasticity. To this we might add Giorgio Agamben's equally articulate contention that perhaps “only now, almost fifty years later, is the Muselmann becoming visible; perhaps only now may we draw the consequences of this visibility” (Remnants, 52). What is made visible, he continues, “is the guard on the threshold of a new ethics” (69).

**Conclusion: Regression, Transference and (the Destruction of) Psychoanalysis**

In *The New Wounded*, psychoanalysis as a discipline is offered a stark ultimatum: metamorphosis, or death. This is, however, a work of critique in its most rigorous sense: Malabou is by no means championing the demise of psychoanalysis, but seeks instead to recall the reader to the introjective openness of its original incarnation. In so doing, she explores two, interrelated questions: First, what, exactly, would a new psychoanalysis look like? And second, upon what ground might one begin to elaborate an emancipatory politics capable of responding to our new era of violence?

Central here is the vulnerability to psychic rupture, understood as both an existential possibility and a condition of being-alive. More specifically, the two questions engage critically with the core Freudian concepts of regression and transference. First of all, if it is to even begin to account for contemporary psychic suffering, psychoanalysis must, despite the risks to itself, actively address the “new signification” of traumatic violence by recognizing its link to destructive plasticity. As we know, however, insofar as the new wounded live on in the form of absence, the notion of regression is no longer germane, and this in turn means both that “the force of trauma, whether political or lesional, never derives from lifting repression,” and that “illness does not in itself constitute a form of truth with respect to the ancient history of the subject” (*New Wounded*, 214). Psychoanalysis, as a result, finds itself tasked with its own transformation.

Similarly, the notion of transference too cannot survive the encounter with neurology: existing in a beyond of the pleasure principle, and thus beyond any feelings of love or hate, the affective indifference of the new wounded leaves them constitutionally incapable of transference. Hence, the role of the analyst too is correspondingly transformed, he or she now having to somehow “become the subject of the other’s suffering” without thereby entering into transference” (215). Moreover, the stakes of such a “nontransferential” relation, one which demands the metamorphosis of both analysis and analyst, far exceed the disciplinary confines of psychoanalysis and neurology. Instead – and this is Malabou’s “wager” – such a relation would open the door to the possibility of a response, at once responsive and responsible, not only to the “worldwide psychopathology” that marks our contemporary era, but also to the senseless violence, be it “biological” or “social,” that manufactures it. This, argues Malabou, is
both the future and the promise of neuropsychoanalysis.

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