

Metamorphoses Conference Schedule

Day 1

9:30 – 10:00: **WELCOME REMARKS** (Nidesh Lawtoo & Isabell Dahms with Catherine Malabou)

10:00 – 11:30: Paper Session One and Two

A MIMETIC THEORY OF TRANSFORMATION: METAMORPHOSES, DEPENDENCE AND PLASTICITY

- **Tom Boland:** Transformativity: The Malleable Foundations of Social Theory
- **Tatiana Llaguno:** Transforming our Dependencies: The Plasticity of Institutions
- **Jean-Claude L  veque:** Mimesis, Violence and Plasticity

QUEER FEMINIST PLEASURE, VOICES AND EROTIC PLASTICITY

- **Ida Djursaa:** ‘Sensibility, Eroticism, and the World: A Metamorphically Mimetic Relation’
- **Sandrine Rose Schiller Hansen:** “Voluptuousness and the Anarchic Pleasure of Metamorphoses”
- **Giulia Rignano:** The Plasticity of Mimetic Voices: Malabou and Cavarero on “the Essence of Woman”

11:45 – 13:15: Paper Session Three and Four

PLASTICITY AND MIMESIS IN THE CONTEXT OF NEOLIBERALISM

- **Natalie Helberg:** Depression’s Non-Mimetic Plasticity and Its Discontents
- **Matti Eskelinen** and **Eero Suorsa:** Malabou, Plasticity and Ne(ur)oliberalism
- **Kristian Sch  ferling:** Negative Plasticity and the Indifference of the Body

REPETITION AND AFFIRMATIVE METAMORPHOSIS

- **Willow Verkerk:** Gendered Mimesis and the Problem of Repetition with Nietzsche and Malabou
- **Ali Nanah:** The Primacy of Metamorphosis: Deleuze’s Treatment of (post-)Trauma
- **Ionut Untea:** Plasticity, Semioethics and the Agon for Deference

13:15 – 14:00: Lunch Break

Panels:

14:00 – 15:30: Paper Session Five and Six

MIMETIC ACCOUNTS OF TRAUMA, COLONISED AFFECT AND QUEER HAUNTOLOGY

- **Sujaya Dhanvantari:** “The world had rejected me”: Colonised Affect, Mimetic Metamorphosis, and the New Human
- **Péter Tóth:** Competitive Nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe. Collective Wounded Identity and Mimesis
- **Deniz Efsunkar:** *The Corpse of My Sister* and the Community She Haunts: Queering Hauntologies Through Destructive Plasticity

ETHICS, EPIGENESIS, ESSENCES, AND LOSS

- **Susan M. Wright:** Can a gyno-epigenesis free us from systematic misogyny?
- **Belinda Eslick:** Irigaray’s ‘Sexuate Structure’ as a Plastic Essence: Thinking with Malabou’s ‘Plasticity’
- **Marina Garcia-Granero:** Mimesis as a Bridge between Epigenetics and Metamorphoses

15:45 – 17:00 **DIALOGUE:** Plastic Mimesis/Mimetic Plasticity: Catherine Malabou and Nidesh Lawtoo

Day 2

09:45 – 10:00: Welcome Back

Panels:

10:00 – 11:30: Paper Session Seven and Eight

COGNITIVE LEARNING, ADDICTION AND MIMETIC PLASTICITY

- **Vikrant Singh:** Luria and representing Brain Trauma: Language in a Shattered World
- **Marina Christodoulou:** Ontological mimesis(=life-mimesis) as a Mimetic-Addiction
- **Maxim Miroshnichenko:** Destroying the Ecosoma: Neuromimetics, 4EA Cognition, and the Immuno-Anarchy

MIMESIS AND PLASTICITY VIA CRITICAL THEORY

- **Tianren Luo:** Malabou with Adorno: On the deterioration and the restoration of the plasticity of mimesis
- **Gabriel Wartinger:** Benjamin’s Great Criminal, a Plastic Mime
- **Tiger Liu:** Masochistic Mimesis: the Ecological/Morphological Vision of Sacher-Masoch

11:45 – 13:15: Paper Session Nine and Ten

PLASTICITY, ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE, AND THERMODYNAMIC LIMITS

- **Alice Iacobone:** Material Mimeticism. On Plasticity and Mimesis from a New Materialist Perspective

- **Gosia Wojas:** Feminist Mimesis and Female AI
- **Joel White:** Toward a Critique of Pure Plasticity and its Consequence for Mimesis

MIMETIC ENCOUNTERS AND AUDIENCE METAMORPHOSES

- **Marco Grosoli:** Paul Schrader's *The Card Counter*: a Cinematic Mapping of the Mimetic-Plastic Encounter between Human and Non-human Intelligences
- **Mark Pizzato:** Mass Audience Metamorphoses
- **Taichi Nakae:** *Homo Mimeticus* and Literary Imitation in Tournier's Robinsonade, *Friday or The Other Island*

13:15 – 14:00: Lunch

Panels:

14:00 – 15:30: Paper Session Eleven and Twelve

TEMPORALITY, MORALITY AND SIMULACRA

- **Serguei Panov:** Malabou: Plasticité et la question du temps
- **Sonakshi Srivastava:** Plas/mesis: Reading Placticity and Mimesis in *The Face of Another*
- **Alex Obrigewtsch:** To Double Mimesis Bound: Mortal Plasticity, Between Malabou and Lacoue-Labarthe

SEMIOTICS AND LITERATURE: THE CASE OF PLASTICITY

- **Ian James:** Proust's Transformations
- **Serge Zenkin:** Semiosis and Mimesis
- **Tyler M. Williams:** Neuroliterature: An Example

15:30 – 17:00: **KEYNOTE CATHERINE MALABOU**

Day 1, Paper Session One: 10:00 – 11:30 Zoom room 1

A Mimetic Theory of Transformation: Metamorphoses, Dependence and Plasticity

Tom Boland: Transformativity: The Malleable Foundations of Social Theory

A foundational assumption of Social Theory is that things change: Structures, institutions, organisations, groups, cultures, and selves all are contingent and subject to transformation. Herein, this malleable foundation is termed ‘transformativity’, drawing attention to a specific conceptualisation of change, which predominates and displaces other accounts of change – addition, reconfiguration or even metamorphosis. ‘Transformativity’ posits society as contingent, open to reconstruction, but assuming that change acts upon a substrate, which is continuous; altered, yet retaining identity through time. ‘Transformativity’ is situated culturally by tracing historical conceptions of change from ancient to modern. Next, Turner’s liminality, Foucault’s power-relations and Butler’s performativity are analysed in depth as influential contemporary models of transformativity. Beyond academia, transformativist thinking animates governmentality, neo-liberal capitalism, technological thinking and cultures of self-development. Transformativity facilitates critique and social change, but via a gradualist model of slow purification and refinement, which may be inadequate to deal with contemporary challenges.

Tom Boland is Senior Lecturer at the Department of Sociology and Criminology at University College Cork. His recent publications include articles in anthropology, sociology and philosophy. His recent books include *The Spectacle of Critique* published in 2019 by Routledge, and *The Reformation of Welfare* co-authored with Ray Griffin published by Bristol University Press in 2021. Drawing together his interests in the sociology of critique and culture and the genealogical approaches to the history of ideas and governmentality, he is currently working on the theme of ‘transformativity’ – the ontological conception of the malleability of selves and society which pervades modernity.

Tatiana Llaguno: Transforming our Dependencies: The Plasticity of Institutions

In this essay, I put forward the idea, following Hegel and Malabou, that subjects are, as mimetic beings, first and foremost dependent beings. They are constituted by their relations of dependence with others and with nature. And even though they can transform them, they cannot fully “opt out” of them. Although Hegel is rightly perceived as a thinker of human freedom, in his philosophical framework, freedom is achieved through (and not despite) the logic of dependence that permeates life. This condition of dependence is a fundamental part of our status as spiritual beings. But, importantly, our spirituality manifests both subjectively and objectively. As a matter of fact, subjectivity cannot be grasped or understood without a reference to objectivity, to our own objectification of the world. In this paper, I assess Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit*, his study of objective spirit. In particular, I suggest that his institutional proposal in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (composed by the triadic family/civil society/the state) can be productively challenged by Catherine Malabou’s notion of plasticity. By paying attention to Malabou’s reading of Hegel in *The Future of Hegel* and subsequent works, and by bringing together a discussion of habits and the transformative mimesis that takes place through them, I will argue that the concept of plasticity holds (an insofar unexploited) potential for social and political philosophy. Indeed, I claim that Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit* is sustained by the promise of constituting *a habit of freely constituted dependencies*. However, as it will be shown, it fails at delivering its promise. Instead, it establishes one-sided dependencies that are normatively

unacceptable and that directs them towards a repudiation of their mimetic and dependent condition. Nonetheless, my point will be that the institutions of *Ethical Life* are not to be simply discarded; rather, they must be submitted to a radical and deconstructive critique in order to be transformed and freely appropriated –a critique that Catherine Malabou’s philosophy can help us bring about.

Tatiana Llaguno is a postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Philosophy in the University of Groningen. She holds a PhD in political theory from the New School for Social Research in New York, and has been a visiting scholar at the Humboldt University of Berlin and the University of Barcelona. She specializes in 19th-century European philosophy (esp. Hegel and Marx), social and political philosophy, critical theory, as well as in feminist and environmental philosophy.

Jean-Claude Léveque : Mimesis, Violence and Plasticity

Malabou exposes what could be proposed as an ethical singularity by "affirmative" assumption of a "destructive plasticity", delimited from two perspectives, the first referred to brain damage, its consequences in identity changes that generate mutations in the being and the second, from mutation processes that are generated from traumas (including old age, although it could be proposed from the South American context: the experience of systematic violence, the order of terror of war, the different processes of displacement , among others) that cause a forgetfulness of being, in which the essence, the ontological dimension that constitutes the principle of identity is affected, generating estrangements that do not allow recognition of oneself or others and that implies what Malabou proposes as a “ ontology of the accident”, in which the temporality of the accident, its occurrence provoke radical, unscheduled becomings, which due to their particularity would dismantle the economy of the unrepresentable, promoting an invention of life lost from the assumption of estrangement as an opening of nothingness and emptiness. The ambivalent “destructive plasticity” would thus be a way to confront lack, likely to cause self-destruction or destruction of others, or the diversion that causes a deconstruction of nihilism. In the case of fiction, it responds to the lack, proposing a deconstruction of "destructive plasticity", between the exhibition of aesthetics of existence that open up in the midst of a diaspora of identities, inconstant and ungovernable, that generate events. by aesthetic flows that dismantle the structure of representational regimes that sustains a transition.

Jean-Claude Léveque is a contracted research professor at the University of Turin. He has been a Researcher hired at the IFS of the CSIC-CCHS in Madrid from 2010 to 2013. He is a member of the research group of the UCM *Escritura e imagen* and member of editorial Board of *Escritura e imagen*, *Kaiak* revista elettronica di Filosofia y *Tròpos, Rivista di Filosofia (Torino)*. Most important Publications: *Forme della ragione storica. La filosofia di Ortega y Gasset come filosofia europea* (Turin 2008) y *Màrgenes de Jean-Luc Nancy* (con J.Massò y F. Rampérez, Madrid, 2014), and various articles on E. Balibar, A. Badiou y J. Rancière.

Day 1, Paper Session Two: 10:00 – 11:30 Zoom room 2

Queer Feminist Pleasure, Voices and Erotic Plasticity

Ida Djursaa: Sensibility, Eroticism, and the World: A Metamorphically Mimetic Relation

This paper investigates what I argue is a plastically mimetic relation between bodily sensibility, eroticism, and the context of patriarchy. Recent years have seen an increased interest across fields such as phenomenology, feminist philosophy and continental and analytic philosophy in the affective and pre-reflective dimension of bodily life. From a critical phenomenological perspective and in dialogue with authors such as Merleau-Ponty (1945), Al-Saji (2008), and Sparrow (2015), I conceptualise this dimension specifically as sensibility. I argue, first, that sensibility designates a plastic mimesis through which the body is always already and continuously transformed in the rhythm of responding to and being solicited by itself, the world, and others. Second, I show that insofar as sensibility designates a bodily openness to the world and others, sensibility is characterised by a certain eroticism. I follow Audre Lorde's (1984) description of the erotic as a life force – a capacity for joy, creativity, intimacy, and pleasure – which for many women is, to borrow Malabou's (2022) phrase, 'erased' in the context of patriarchy. Finally, contra the dominant presumption in popular and scientific discourse that female sexual desire is naturally low, I argue, through a mimetic notion of the erotic, that the contexts of patriarchy and heteronormativity negatively affect the erotic life force of women, not only in the sexual domain but also in other areas of their lives. How does this contextual structuring of the erotic happen at a bodily, that is, a sensible level? And, given the plastic capacity not only to receive but also to give form, how can bodies step into this process of structuring and, perhaps, structure it otherwise?

Ida Djursaa is a PhD candidate at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Kingston University London. Her research develops a critical phenomenological notion of bodily sensibility through Husserl, Levinas, and Merleau-Ponty. She employs this notion of sensibility to investigate how the particular ways in which bodies move are structured by their individual history as well as the socio-cultural-historical contexts which invisibly prescribe normative ways of moving and acting based on gender, race, class. Djursaa is the author of 'Levinas and the Time of Sensibility: A Material Transcendence?' *Études Phénoménologiques – Phenomenological Studies* (forthcoming, 2023).

Sandrine Rose Schiller Hansen: Voluptuousness and the Anarchic Pleasure of Metamorphoses

In *Pleasure Erased* Catherine Malabou shows how thinking the power of clitoridian pleasure is inseparable from the political question of subjectivization. Thus prompted, I ask how we may define this pleasure. It is well known that Freud struggled to maintain a definition of pleasure that would give direction to the human mind. In his attempt to position pleasure as a governing principle, Freud delivers a devastating blow to the feminine, categorizing the clitoridian pleasure and the pleasures of the multiplicity of the erogenous zones as infantile and preparatory relative to the genitalized and bound (male) ego. Resisting this obstruction to a positive definition of pleasure I delve on two of Freud's early letters, the so-called "Draft E" and "Draft G." In both instances sexual anaesthesia drive Freud to question the interface between somatic and psychical excitation relative to the constitution of the subject. Reading both with and against Freud the overlooked notion of voluptuousness [Wollustempfindung] becomes critical to the question of subjectivization. Unravelling first how voluptuousness characterizes the mutability of the drives and the

enjoyment of this metamorphoses, I will discuss what Freud presents as the socially imbued difference in the affective range amongst women and men. Moving to Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of voluptuousness, I will explore the intimate relation between the consummation of metamorphoses and contemplation. Here the question of mimesis returns not in the form of a phallogocentric logos restricting the affective range of the subject, but as an invocation of an anarchic multiplicity inherent to pleasure.

Sandrine Hansen completed her PhD in philosophy at the institute of philosophy at KU Leuven in December 2021 with the dissertation entitled "At the Edges of Change: Rereading Freud on Plasticity, Fluidity and Repetition."

Giulia Rignano: The Plasticity of Mimetic Voices: Malabou and Cavarero on "the Essence of Woman"

Catherine Malabou has defined the concept of 'woman' as 'an empty but resistant essence' (Malabou *Changing Difference*). This definition goes hand in hand with her elaboration of the concept of 'plasticity' as the structural capacity to give and receive form (Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brains?*). In short, Malabou reinterprets the question of essentialism within a dynamic of immanent and material, or metamorphic, transformation. In this paper, I put Malabou's plastic essence in dialogue with Adriana Cavarero's notion of the 'voice' (Cavarero, *For More than One Voice*) to explore the metamorphic nature of the concept of 'woman'. Following Cavarero, the voice is the irreducible core of individuals that crosses the boundaries between mind and body, nature and culture in a plurality of singular voices. I show how the essence of 'woman' is susceptible to metamorphosis through the mimetic contact (Lawtoo, *Homo Mimeticus*) of singular voices to the narratives that inform them as essences and, at the same time, their plastic power to re-form these narratives differently. The aim is to show that 'mimetic voices' restore the supposed essence of gender identity into a plastic narration with which they con-constitute themselves in precarious degrees of freedom and determination.

Giulia Rignano is a PhD scholar at the Institute of Philosophy & The Faculty of Arts of KU Leuven within the *Gendered Mimesis* project and Associate Member of the *HOM* group. She graduated in Philosophy at the University of Milan with a Master's thesis in Aesthetics titled "Materiality and Matter in Gilles Deleuze and the New Materialisms". Her research combines Neo-materialist perspectives, Mimetic processes and Feminist and Queer Theories. She has collaborated with the international research group *IdEm. Identification, empathie, projection dans les arts du spectacle* (CNRS, Paris). She is member of *PIS. Performing Identities Seminar* at the University of Milan and part of *CONTRA/DIZIONI*, a conference program on Queer and Feminist Theories based at the University of Milan.

Day 1, Paper Session Three: 11:45 – 13:15 Zoom room 1

Plasticity and Mimesis in the Context of Neoliberalism

Natalie Helberg: Depression's Non-Mimetic Plasticity and Its Discontents

I attend to the dimensions of Catherine Malabou's work which provide resources for thinking about depression in relation to neoliberal capitalism. Malabou suggests plastic processes can subvert the neoliberal injunction to be 'flexible,' or to function in all contexts and at all costs, as well as related injunctions. At the same time, she highlights the respects in which plasticity, the category, gives rise to new norms, or new measures, of health and illness. Mere deviance from contingent norms then becomes pathology: Illness, including depressive illness, becomes what is simply not plastic where what is not plastic is legible as what is not functional. I argue that we must distinguish mimetic forms of plasticity from non-mimetic forms of plasticity as a means of better distinguishing between the forms of plasticity which can operate subversively with respect to neoliberal work and health norms. Different varieties of plasticity effect different varieties of subversion. I understand mimetic plasticity, provisionally, as a form of transformation which transforms the norm it subverts by iterating it. Non-mimetic plasticity, conversely, involves a thoroughgoing departure from the norm. The depressed subject produced by non-mimetic forms of plasticity comes into sight as the embodiment of a disappointing form of subversion: in their dysfunctional state, they offer resistance to the field of power they find themselves locked into without being personally empowered. I conclude by considering how, in light of this, the political projects proposed by contemporary, feminist affect theorists—projects which would be founded on collective experiences of depression—would benefit from a focus on mimetic plasticity and the specific forms of depression it could yield.

Natalie Helberg is a lecturer with the Department of Philosophy at Concordia University in Montreal. She has a PhD from the University of Toronto. She specializes in 20th- and 21st-century continental philosophy, especially work by Foucault, Derrida, Catherine Malabou and Judith Butler.

Matti Eskelinen and Eero Suorsa: Malabou, Plasticity and Ne(ur)oliberalism

In our presentation we would inquire about relations between Catherine Malabou's emphasis on plasticity, especially in her earlier politically charged work of *What Should We Do with Our Brain?* (2004/2009), and ne(ur)oliberalism's flexibility. While Malabou offers a fruitful way of understanding and appreciating the emancipatory practices, it comes at times uncomfortable close to ne(ur)oliberalism as recently pointed out by Francis Russell's article "Brain power: cruel optimism and neuro-liberalism in the work of Catherine Malabou" (2020). We aim to investigate further how Malabou's plasticity can still play an emancipatory role in the meaningful social change, while taking the challenge posed to it as a form of ne(ur)oliberal cruel optimism seriously. Implementing the concept of mimetic, especially as mimetic violence, and how ne(ur)oliberal practices create and exacerbate that, we probe the possibilities afforded by brain plasticity to overcome such obstacles. In our analysis of mimesis, we use Malabou's analysis of Judith Butler's feminist understanding of mimesis, as discussed by Malabou in her *Changing Difference* (2009/2011). By looking critically at Malabou's plasticity and arming it theoretical more strongly against appropriation by ne(ur)oliberalism, the emancipatory project of plasticity started by Malabou will be more resistant to its critique.

Matti Eskelinen (he/him) is a doctoral researcher in philosophy at the University of Turku. His doctoral project addresses anarchism's political ontology. Other research interests of his include the philosophy of social change, utopias and virtue ethics.

Eero Suorsa (he/him) is a doctoral researcher in the Unit of Philosophy at the University of Turku. His doctoral research investigates the ethics of cosmetic surgery. He writes regularly about class, popular culture and the philosophy of history both in academic and mainstream platforms.

Kristian Schäferling: Negative Plasticity and the Indifference of the Body

Catherine Malabou has explored not only the 'positive' give and take inherent in plasticity, as the infinite process of (re-)shaping form, but also a more fundamentally destructive, 'negative' plasticity, which can no longer be reintegrated into identity. Negative plasticity allows for conceiving of an ontology where the accidental shapes the essential, thereby opening up an “unexpected, unpredictable, dark [pathway]”¹ along which symbolic coordinates are irretrievably lost. From the perspective of the subject, this radically negative potential of plasticity is experienced as a form of indifference. In my paper I want to discuss this connection between (loss of) subjective identity and indifference. Much of 20th century critical philosophy has taught us to vault difference and to be wary of notions of essence. By contrast, I will argue that the problem of subjective indifference revealed by Malabou's discussion of negative plasticity, points to the necessity of a critique of these philosophies of difference. For the problem of indifference indicates a bodily, material layer outside of 'difference'. When trying to formulate a political critique of the current status quo —instead of attempting to make identity 'different', i.e. to incorporate the body or affects into thought, indifference forces us to think the opposite: to come up with a form of how to think an influx of thought into the body. This, however, entails leaving behind models of representation, in order to instead conceive of the becoming of subjective identity as a process that is mimetic only insofar as it mimics something which is not preexistent. I will discuss this issue by reading together Malabou's account of plasticity both with Hegelian and Heideggerian models of indifference.

Kristian Schäferling is a PhD candidate in Philosophy at Goethe-University Frankfurt (Supervisors: C. Menke / F. Ruda) where he is writing his dissertation with the working title “The Concept of the Real Subject in Post-Hegelian Discourse“. Also, he is an adjunct faculty member at SciencesPo Paris, Campus de Reims, where he is currently teaching a seminar on “Politics, Aesthetics, and the Unconscious“. He received his M.A. in Philosophy (Goethe-University FfM, 2019, “with distinction“) with a thesis titled “Event and Periodization in Badiou“, and his B.A. in Philosophy/French (Heinrich-Heine- University Düsseldorf, 2016) with a thesis on “Kant's Conception of Good and Evil as the Objects of Practical Reason“. Before this, he earned a diploma in Fine Art and was named “Meisterschüler“ of Prof. Katharina Fritsch (2015, Art Academy Düsseldorf). Kristian's research interests lie in German Idealism (Kant, Hegel), Poststructuralism, and Freudian/ Lacanian psychoanalysis, specifically concerning the field of political philosophy and aesthetics. In his dissertation he is examining how the Lacanian psychoanalytical concept of the Real, as well as a certain relation between the comic and the tragic can help reconsider idealist subjectivity in order to critically rethink concepts of the body and the political subject. His article “Meillassoux's Reinterpretation of Kant's Transcendental Dialectic“ is forthcoming in a special issue on the Transcendental Dialectic, published in the peer-reviewed journal *Open Philosophy*. Recent conference papers include: “A Modern Philosophical Account of the Relation between *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and the Pre-Socratic *physikoi* in Derrida and Heidegger“ (10/2021, *International Ontology Congress*, San Sebastián UPV/EHU); “Shame and the Internal Negativity of the Act. Response to M. Galkina“, Workshop *Le Pouvoir en Question* (09/2022, ENS, Paris).

Day 1, Paper Session Three: 11:45 – 13:15 Zoom room 2

Repetition and Affirmative Metamorphosis

Willow Verkerk: Gendered Mimesis and the Problem of Repetition with Nietzsche and Malabou

This paper proposes a new interpretation of Nietzschean repetition in dialogue with Malabou's reading of the eternal return in "The Eternal Return and the Phantom of Difference." In this text, Malabou proposes an account of repetition in the eternal return as a movement of reduplication which is distinguished from identical sameness, Deleuze's difference, and Derrida's autobiographical. Malabou proposes that the movement of eternal return be thought of as a synthesis that involves ontological cloning rather than the eviction of a phantom. My suspicion is that Malabou's speculative Hegelianism, her critique of the French reception of Nietzsche, and her later concept of plasticity are productive for rethinking Nietzsche's notion of repetition.

This analysis provides an alternative model of repetition which brings Nietzsche's account of the eternal recurrence in *The Gay Science* and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* together with his account of disciplinarity in *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Via the *Genealogy*, I argue that repetition can be understood to function as a disciplinary mimesis at the social-ontological level in which the return of phantoms constitutes the very making of the subject (and it is this form of unconscious repetition that the thought of eternal recurrence seeks to combat). Via the *Gay Science* and *Zarathustra*, I propose that the repetition inherent in the eternal recurrence of life has not only a social-ontological dimension, but it also has a narrative aspect which potentiates self-reflection. I argue that the point for Nietzsche is not that phantoms are ever fully ejected, but that the thought of eternal recurrence has existential significance for ecstatically awakening the 'who' of the subject so they can realize their capacities (as plastic subject) to give themselves form. Furthermore, I propose that this new reading of Nietzschean repetition which centres plasticity and narrative existentiality can be employed to think about how gendered mimesis works.

Willow Verkerk is Lecturer in Continental Philosophy and Social Philosophy at the University of British Columbia and a Postdoctoral Researcher with the Gendered Mimesis Project at KU Leuven. She is the author of *Nietzsche and Friendship* (Bloomsbury, 2019) and numerous essays in continental and feminist philosophy. Her current work draws on a Nietzschean legacy in critical theory to create a dialogue between this legacy and contemporary continental feminist philosophers working with notions of gendered mimesis. New and forthcoming works include "A Feminist Genealogy of the Post Enlightenment Subject with the Marquis de Sade's Juliette," *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 42.1 (2021), "Friedrich Nietzsche" in *Rethinking Political Thinkers*, OUP, 2023, and "A Re-evaluation of the Androcentric Subject of European Philosophy," *Critical Horizons*, 2023.

Ionut Untea: Plasticity, Semioethics and the Agon for Deference

This presentation is meant as a contribution to the ongoing debates surrounding the ramifications of Catherine Malabou's concept of "plasticity." This contribution emphasizes the semiotic, and more

specifically, the “semioethic” understanding of plasticity. Semioethics is rooted in a feminist approach to semiotics, which emphasizes, like Malabou’s “plasticity,” the individual and collective openness toward affective contagion and reciprocal repositioning/re-turning to mimetic activity in the presence of Otherness. The proponent of the “semioethic” perspective is Susan Petrilli, who finds roots for her philosophical approach to the activity of signs in the work of Victoria Welby, whose insights have influenced C.S. Peirce’s theory of signs. The power of mimesis is usually translated in semiotic terms either in the dimensions of “iconicity” (which connects imitation with description and the capacity to represent a reality, or copy an image), or “indexicality” (which connects mimesis with the normative dimensions of subordinating imitators/performers following a certain master/protagonist). Semioethics calls for a “return” of attention to the phenomenon of mimesis. Again, as this turning and returning of attention is not always indexical (there is space for creativity in the very act of mimesis), Petrilli talks about a listening and looking for differences where there seems to have none. From this perspective, “difference,” gets relativized into “deference,” so the agonism attached to the search for an identity by submitting, on one hand, personal behavior to collective behavior, and rejecting, on the other hand, any manifestation of alterity, becomes an *agon* for reciprocal listening and response. It is a listening to an alterity which is not rejected, but lived through the response that this Otherness triggers in the effective performance of one’s identity. Indeed, it can be said that there is a process of plasticity through which one’s own mimetic reaffirmation of identity is evolving on one hand, via the deference given to otherness and on the other hand via the deference for, or “defamiliarization” with, what is being performed over and over by the figurant/anonymous performer.

Ionut Untea is currently a Research Fellow at the Akademie Schloss Solitude, Stuttgart, with a project connecting semioethics and aesthetics and has also been a Visiting Professor at the University of Bari, in 2021, with a project and teaching duties pertaining to semiotics and intercultural relationships, where he worked with Susan Petrilli. He also teaches philosophy at Southeast University, in Nanjing (since 2016), and was a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Geneva (2014) and a teaching PhD fellow (ATER) at the University of La Rochelle (2013). Dr. Untea obtained his doctorate in 2013 at Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (EPHE), Paris. His focus is on the modern and contemporary intersections between semiotic, moral, political and religious thought. He has published recently “Semioethics and the Average Life: Philosophical Harvesting from Arid Soils,” *The American Journal of Semiotics* 37.1–2 (2021) and “Samson, Antigone and the Charismatic Agonistes: from a ‘Pro-power’ to a ‘Pro-existence’ Political Engagement,” *Philosophical Forum* 51.4 (2020). Dr. Untea has also published philosophical essays in other academic journals such as *Journal of European Studies* (2022), *Philosophy East and West* (2022), *Semiotica* (2021), *Ethical Perspectives* (2021, 2019), *Journal of Aesthetic Education* (2020), *Politics and Religion* (2019), *Journal of Agricultural and Environmental Ethics* (2019), *The Monist* (2018).

Ali Nanah: The Primacy of Metamorphosis: Deleuze's Treatment of (post-)Trauma

Although rarely discussed in secondary literature¹, Deleuze has a remarkable engagement with the concept of trauma. Moreover, trauma occupies a *fundamental*² role in Deleuze's oeuvre. The traumatic event functions as an (un-)grounding principle that is always at work in Deleuzian philosophy, which, as per Reynolds wording, 'can be best described as a philosophy of the wound synonymous with the philosophy of the event'. This is to be understood within the context of Deleuze picking up on Nietzsche's project of the analysis and critique of nihilism, for the sake of advancing a philosophy of affirmative becoming. In this article, I will first show how Deleuze's account of nihilism and the psychology of the nihilist -given in *Nietzsche and Philosophy*- is greatly synonymous with what we may call a dogmatic image of trauma, i.e. an image of the traumatised subject (ressentiment as none other than the neurotic compulsion to repeat). Going further, it will be revealed that the traumatic event is only understood as traumatic inasmuch as it does not culminate in a metamorphosis. As such, trauma and metamorphosis are two ways of talking about the same thing, namely, the event. One active (affirmative) way which speaks only of metamorphosis, pure and innocent. The other reactive (negative) way, unable to go beyond the bare repetition of trauma.

Ali Nanah, Syrian writer and translator. I am a Research Master student at the Hight Institute of Philosophy at KU Leuven. I gained my BA in Humanities and Social Thought from Bard College Berlin. I worked as a translator, and I intermittently publish articles in Arabic-language cultural media platforms. The themes I deal with are temporality and metamorphosis, inspired by Nietzsche's work and his reception in France (most notably the work of Gilles Deleuze).

Day 1, Paper Session Five: 14:00 – 15:30 Zoom room 1

Mimetic Accounts of Trauma, Colonised Affect and Queer Hauntology

Sujaya Dhanvantari: "The World Had Rejected Me": Colonised Affect, Mimetic Metamorphosis, and the New Human

"My body was returned to me, spread-eagled, disjointed," writes Frantz Fanon, as a result of the white gaze. The deconstruction of world elicited by colonization and white supremacy conceives the racialized body as spectacle. The colonized reactively structures its own becoming via an affectivity marked by distortion and mutilation. Occluded by specularization, the lived temporalities, in which memory is woven into temporal becoming, remain unintelligible and without immediacy to the visual or discursive. Colonized affect under the colonial gaze repeats the racialization that holds what Alia Al-Saji calls "affect memory," where the subject senses its "heavy weight" and experiences an "aberration of affect" within the ontological dimensions of racial and colonial oppression. The "structuring within" of oppressive structures constitutes the living being, weighed down with pathologies and wounds that hold the colonial duration. In Fanon's work as a doctor, he sees that the medical palpitation causes the colonized body to contract and defend itself against the reduction of a western diagnostics that fails to listen to colonial pain. Fanon calls for a sociodiagnostics, to sense the feeling of social structures of oppression in lived body and consciousness. What might Fanon's theory of colonized affectivity that takes account of "the world [that] had rejected me" (Fanon) provide for the concept of mimesis (Lawtoo)? Finally, does Fanon provide the theoretical tools to think through Catherine Malabou's work on mimetic metamorphosis and the transformative potential of the new human?

Sujaya Dhanvantari is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at the University of Guelph. She was recently a SSHRC postdoctoral fellow in the Department of Philosophy at McGill University, under the direction of Alia Al-Saji. Her specializations are 20th-century existentialism, phenomenology, and social and political philosophy, especially the writings of Frantz Fanon and Simone de Beauvoir, as well as critical race, decolonial, and feminist philosophies. Her work revisits the racial and colonial pasts and histories that shape and influence the lived experiences of racialized and colonized peoples in the present. She has previously published on the work of Malabou and Fanon, in *Puncta: Journal of Critical Phenomenology* (2020) and in *Thinking Catherine Malabou: Passionate Detachments* (2018).

Péter Tóth: Competitive Nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe. Collective Wounded Identity and Mimesis¹

If we look at the history of the modern world, we can perceive that nationalism often goes hand in hand with conflict and violence. This tendency also occurs today, thus the current geopolitical situation makes it necessary to understand its nature. Because of the present Russo-Ukrainian war, the investigation of this topic is highly relevant regarding European societies and nations. In my presentation, I focus on a theoretical understanding of Central and Eastern European (hereafter CEE) nationalism. I draw on András Máté-Tóth's theory of collective wounded identity. He attempted to understand and interpret the common as well as the special sociocultural character of the region from a genuinely local perspective. The theory of wounded collective identity points out that the primary marker of the societies of CEE is woundedness or traumatising, which is the most defining common feature of the region's national self-interpretation. Historical discontinuity, non-organic social development, vulnerability to great hegemonies, political and geographical boundary changes, violent oppression, persecutions and genocides are all historical wounds which, and the transgenerational remembrance of them, are identifiable features of the collective identity of the societies of CEE. According to Máté-Tóth, the national and international political positions and aspirations of the societies of CEE can be understood in an immanent way from this wounded or victim identity. The pervasive presence and political instrumentalisation of this wounded collective identity can (and perhaps should) be taken as the preeminent explanatory factor when interpreting the present-day success of populism. This political instrumentalization of historical traumas, fear and insecurity can be interpreted as the narrative process of securitization. The main elements of it are the identification of threats (actually scapegoating), exclusive victimization and self-protection. This carries the danger of inter-group conflict and rivalry. In my opinion, regarding these hallmarks, it needs to consider Simon Anholt's concept of "nation branding" or "competitive identity", because it highlights the competitive mimetic nature of nationalism. These elements - mimetic rivalry, scapegoating and victimization - are at the core of René Girard's mimetic theory. In today's hypermedialized world, these politically instrumentalized narratives of collective wounded identity and securitization have really strong effects on Central and Eastern European nationalism and identity. The core of my idea is to attempt to reveal its mimetic inclinations and to link it to the mimetic studies.

Péter Tóth is a PhD candidate at the Doctoral School of Philosophy at the University of Szeged. He graduated in religious studies at the University of Szeged with a master's thesis concerning René Girard's mimetic theory titled "Human, Violence, Religion". His main research interest is the issue of the connection

¹ Supported by the ÚNKP-22-4-SZTE-87 New National Excellence Program of the Ministry for Culture and Innovation from the source of the National Research, Development and Innovation Fund

between hominization and religion based on Girard's concept of mimesis and religion as well as the possible application and extension of the girardian theory. Péter Tóth got 1st place in the Section of Social Sciences of the 33rd National Conference of Scientific Students' Associations (OTDK) and was 2x awarded the scholarship of the New National Excellence Program of the National Ministry of Hungary for Innovation and Technology.

Deniz Efsunkar: *The Corpse of My Sister* and the Community She Haunts: Queering Hauntologies Through Destructive Plasticity

This article attempts to stage an encounter between the recent literature on Derridean hauntology, Malabou's destructive plasticity and Mine Söğüt's short story *The Corpse of My Sister* in *Gergedan: Büyük Kujür Kitabı* (2019). The anthropological re-constitution of hauntology frames it as a form of inventive theoretical practice that connects the phantoms of the past with a retrofuturistic hope. However, such a reframing carries the risk of delimiting and dangerously familiarising the *entirely other* in the case of literary hauntings. We will argue that the encounter between hauntology and (Turkish) queer literature could allow us to formulate an alternative to "queer representation" within the literary canon. Additionally, the contemporary literature on hauntology could be supplemented with Catherine Malabou's ontology. In Malabou, destructive plasticity draws our attention to the metamorphosis when the potentiality of hope has completely abandoned subjectivity. The accident and the impossibility of registering the catastrophic event is fundamental to the construction of the subject. The interchangeability of destruction/construction presents the blueprint for affective transformations, which could encapsulate the relation between the literary phantom and the community that it haunts. Mine Söğüt's *Corpse* presents an affectively contagious case wherein a young girl had taken her life, and previously have attempted to murder her mother after the tragic discovery of her lesbianism, whose corpse remains seated with the family at their dining table. In an attempt to let the queer literary phantom haunt her community freely, Malabou's anti-messianic ontology will be paired with Söğüt's untranslated story as a critique of recent interpretations of hauntology.

Deniz Efsunkar is an independent researcher and graduate of KU Leuven. BA in Philosophy, MA in Western Literature at the Faculty of Arts. Works on the field of comparative literature, specialising in hauntology and occidentalism. Current research interests are conflicting temporalities in late- Ottoman Turkish-Armenian literatures; Turkish contemporary queer literature; Queer Hauntology and Contemporary Turkish Politics; Gilles Deleuze and geophilosophy; Antonin Artaud and the Theatre of Cruelty; Anti-modernisms in Turkish social sciences

Day 1, Paper Session Six: 14:00 – 15:30 Zoom room 2

Ethics, Epigenesis, Essences, and Loss

Susan M. Wright: Can a Gyno-Epigenesis Free Us From Systematic Misogyny?

An increasing number of American feminists, like Carol Gilligan and Kate Manne, have expressed moments of despair, as the hopes of third-wave feminism seemed dashed by a full-frontal, misogynist backlash. Manne once admitted, it may be another century before we can hope to see significant change. However, this hard reality not only exposes the extent that systemic misogyny is embedded in the West's cultural

DNA, it belies a truth we've hitherto denied: that the illusion of patriarchy and misogyny as natural order, is just one of many effects of a possible epigenesis that bequeathed us the West and its ideals of liberty, fraternity, and equality in opposition to monarchy, servitude, and tyranny. This paper will use Catherine Malabou's concepts of plasticity and epigenesis, in conjunction with René Girard's understanding of cultural *méconnaissance* to make conjectures about this deeply embedded cultural reality, while also imagining possibilities that won't be a century in the making.

Susan M. Wright is a PhD student in Jungian Archetypal Studies at Pacifica Graduate Institute in California. She has an MA in Theology from Bexley Hall Episcopal Seminary. She spent several years as a guest student attending John Caputo's graduate seminars at Syracuse University, for which she read a number of Catherine Malabou's books. Susan also attended the 2011 "Future of Continental Philosophy of Religion" conference for which Malabou was a keynote speaker. Susan's areas of research include mimetic theory, deconstruction, continental philosophy of religion, Jungian psychology, feminism, and populism. Susan is serving a second term on the advisory board for the Colloquium on Violence & Religion.

Belinda Eslick: Irigaray's 'Sexuate Structure' as a Plastic Essence: Thinking with Malabou's 'Plasticity'

In *Changing Difference*, Catherine Malabou claims: That "woman" is now emptied of her essence only serves to emphasize the fact that she does not define herself and cannot define herself except through the violence done to her.² Malabou criticises the anti-essentialist position within feminist, gender, and queer theory, suggesting that anti-essentialism is not only a theoretically *violent* position but also theoretically unsound. This is because, she argues, anti-essentialism is merely the negation of essentialism and does not transform 'essence' into something new. In a later paper, she argues for a "third moment"³ beyond both 'essentialism' and 'anti-essentialism'. Such a moment would be, she claims, the *plastic* transformation of the essentialist position—beyond its mere negation. I argue in this paper that the third moment that Malabou calls for is represented in Luce Irigaray's thinking on sexual difference. While Irigaray has been criticised for mobilising essentialist perspectives on women's identity, there remains debate within feminist philosophy on whether this charge is justified. I argue that accusations of essentialism in Irigaray's work are misplaced. This is because, as I argue, Irigaray's notion of 'sexuation' acknowledges what Malabou describes as the plasticity of essence: sexuation provides a "frame"⁴ that gives a kind of originary "structure" to our becoming without specifying an end point or Ideal form. In this sense, I argue that if there is an 'essence' in Irigaray's work, it is *plastic*. In this paper, I will consider the implications of such an ontology for debates regarding sexual difference, ontology, and gender.

Belinda Eslick is a Casual Academic lecturing in Gender Studies at The University of Queensland and a Casual Senior Research Fellow in the Griffith Asia Institute at Griffith University in Brisbane, Australia. Her research and teaching interests include feminist theory and philosophy (especially the work of Luce Irigaray) as well as ecofeminist and decolonial perspectives in feminist and gender studies. Her engagement with Irigaray primarily addresses questions of sexual difference and "essence" in feminist thought.

² catherine malabou, *changing difference*, polity press, 2011, 98.

³ catherine malabou, "post-gender theory and the feminine" filmed may 2014 at international conference, 7th subversive festival: 'power and freedom in the time of control', video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omoliskro5m>

⁴ luce irigaray, *to be born*, columbia university press, 3.

Marina Garcia-Granero: Mimesis as a Bridge between Epigenetics and Metamorphoses

The paper analyzes mimesis as a bridge between metamorphoses and epigenetics, using Malabou's books on brain plasticity, epigenesis, and intelligence (Malabou 2008, 2016, 2019) as a starting point that sheds new light on the untimely problems of mimesis. I will examine the mimetic relation between genotype and phenotype hand in hand with the Platonic (and later, Nietzschean) distinction of 'first' and 'second' natures. Plato's and Nietzsche's philosophy will not merely serve as subjects of antiquarian interest but as philosophical genealogies and wellspring of ideas containing the resources for debates currently at the forefront of the emerging field of mimetic studies (Lawtoo 2022). The dialectical relationship between genetics and epigenetics, the organism and its milieu, and first and second natures, calls attention to mimetic feedback loops that play a crucial role in human metamorphoses. These mimetic relations define the particular shape that an ever-changing form takes, simultaneously acting as conditions of possibility and limiting frameworks. As a gradual process of subject formation, epigenesis allows us to reassess past conceptions of aptitudes, development, habits, and heredity from a new perspective. At the same time, both Plato, Nietzsche, and Malabou call attention to the selective environmental imprint on the individual and the long-term stakes regarding values, habits, and behaviors that have a tremendous impact on the body because of their mimetic repetition. Education in any given culture involves many hidden principles of selectivity that morph the body through the reinforcement or weakening of synaptic connections, thus stressing the bodily reality of plasticity and the organic basis of mimesis.

Marina García-Granero is a postdoctoral researcher in Philosophy at the University of Valencia. In 2022, she was a postdoctoral researcher and Associate Member of the Homo Mimeticus and Gendered Mimesis projects at KU Leuven. Her research and teaching areas are Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, ethics, and feminist philosophy. She is the author of multiple articles on Nietzsche and a member of the Friedrich Nietzsche Society, the HyperNietzsche International Research Group, and the "Groupe International de Recherches sur Nietzsche" (GIRN).

Day 1, Dialogue: 15:45 – 17:00 Zoom room 1

Plastic Mimesis/Mimetic Plasticity: Catherine Malabou and Nidesh Lawtoo

Catherine Malabou was professor at the Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy at Kingston University London, UK and is a professor of comparative literature and European languages and studies at the University of California, Irvine. She is author of numerous that explore the concept of plasticity. Starting with the philosophy of Hegel, she extended the research to contemporary neurobiology, in which plasticity is a central concept. Neural plasticity designates the ability of the brain to shape itself under the influence of experience, education and culture, but also of accidents and trauma. In her book *The New Wounded*, she proposed a rereading of Freud in the light of the most recent neuro-psychoanalytic studies and redefinition of traumatic events. Her latest books are *Morphing Intelligence, From IQ Measurement to Artificial Brains* (Columbia UP, 2019), *Pleasure Erased: The Clitoris Unthought* (Cambridge: Polity, 2022, trans. Carolyn Shread), *Au volour! Anarchisme et philosophie* (Paris: P.U.F., 2022) and *Plasticity: The Promise of Explosion* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022, ed. Tyler M. Williams).

Nidesh Lawtoo held positions at the University of Lausanne, Johns Hopkins University, and KU Leuven, where he led the ERC-funded project *Homo Mimeticus* (2017-2022). He is currently professor of modern and contemporary literature and culture at Leiden University and PI of the *Gendered Mimesis* project (2020-). His interdisciplinary work crosses continental philosophy, literary theory, film studies, political theory to explore the contemporary avatars of imitation beyond realism, including identification, influence, mimicry, contagion, simulation, mirror neurons, and plasticity. Among his publications that open up the new transdisciplinary field of “mimetic studies” are *The Phantom of the Ego: Modernism and the Mimetic Unconscious* (MSU P, 2013) and *Homo Mimeticus: A New Theory of Imitation* (Leuven UP, 2022).

Day 2, Paper Session Seven: 09:45 – 10:00 Zoom room 1

Cognitive Learning, Addiction and Mimetic Plasticity

Vikrant Singh: Luria and Representing Brain Trauma: Language in a Shattered World

Alexander Luria was a Soviet Psychologist inspired by the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky advocated an intersubjective perception of language through vocalised behaviour and the next stage internalisation of subjective language. The idea of children learning language by following a public practice in externalised world and later internalised subjective language presents a possibility of dialogue with Malabou's theory of cerebrality of trauma. The difference between the future repetition of symptom and excess of event of trauma provide the point of discussion of construction of invented memories. The neurosis of a brain poised to repeat the surplus experience and sometimes capable to forget the ideality of the trauma in a return to the normal suggest a dependence of the subject in a language disconnected from the outside. The discussion of language in representing trauma of the event in a never ending repetition of necessity of facing the symptom is seen either as a failure of logic of exteriority of language. We will discuss the repetitiveness of interiority of language and out of sequence of exteriority of a sensory experience. The case of Luria's Man with the Shattered World will provide the discussion of a logical extension of the world through language and writing in a present.

Vikrant Singh completed Engineering studies and then completed an MA degree in Philosophy at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. He is currently pursuing a PhD on 'Donald Davidson's Philosophy of Mind and Meaning'. Earlier, he presented a paper at the 51st NeMLA Convention, Boston on "Disaffection and Lack of Will in Italo Svevo's *Senilita*" and more recently at UMCS Lublin (Online) on "Strangeness and Transitivity of Human Nature".

Marina Christodoulou: Ontological Mimesis (= Life-Mimesis) as a Mimetic Addiction

Being influenced by Catherine Malabou, I propose that addiction is a fundamental, I would call it, ontology and concept, and, if the human, as she argues with other historians (Dipesh Chakrabarty and Daniel Lord Smail), is a geophysical agent, then (see, Anthropocene), I would, also, add that addiction can be a geological physical force. And this geological physical force is a mimetic force, which the living mimics or imitates or inherits from the inorganic/the geological. Thus, here, I aim to make a further addition to my previous doctoral research, where I proposed and argued that life is an addiction ("Life as Addiction"), which addition would be that mimesis is central to addiction-as-a-geological-force. Addiction is core to deep history and it is then mimicked and inherited by the organic and the living, and thus shapes the brain and the life itself of the living (*plasticity*), becoming an *ontological* addiction to life, at first, and then manifesting in all other *ontic* aspects of the habitus/the everyday life of individuals (mostly humans, but also other organisms). This *addiction as mimesis* is urgent to be further examined, since, due to the human forming its own geological age, of the Anthropocene, this *mimetic addiction* can become catastrophic, except from life-giving (as a mimesis which is *life-mimesis*, or *addiction to the mimesis of life*, that is, as a mimesis that the inorganic bequeathed to the living, so as that life will go on). All the consequent *mimeses* (gender, political, ethical, etc.), are deriving from this *ontological mimesis* (= *life-mimesis*), which is a *mimetic-addiction*.

Marina Christodoulou has recently completed a *Dr.Phil in Philosophy* in a co-supervision (co-tutelle) between the Alpen Adria Universität Klagenfurt (Austria), under the supervision of Univ.-Prof. Dr Alice

Pechriggl, and the University of Toulouse -Jean Jaurès, under the supervision of Dr Jérôme Lèbre. The title of my Thesis is “Life as Addiction”. I defended my Thesis on the 17th of June 2022, receiving the highest possible, which is the grade of 1, with Distinction. After that I have been a visiting postdoctoral fellow at the University of Fort Hare, and currently I am a fellow at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, and an honorary fellow at the Center for Advanced Studies - South East Europe (University of Rijeka, Croatia). I have previously completed a 4-year *Degree in Philosophy* at the University of Cyprus, with a specialization in Ancient philosophy and Classics, where I graduated as a valedictorian, a *MSc in Ancient Philosophy* at the University of Edinburgh, a *MSc in Film Studies* at the University of Edinburgh, and a *Diploma in Digital Filmmaking* at SAE Athens. I have also attended a psychotherapy counselling training at a Psychotherapeutic Centre in Athens. During the nearly six years of my doctoral research, apart from working in the filmmaking industry, and teaching in secondary education, I have also completed three postgraduate university diplomas in France on the topics of *Philosophy of Psychiatry* (Toulouse III), *Gender Practices: Education, Medicine, Psychoanalysis and Society* (Paris VII), on *Addictions-Addictology* (Paris VII), and a *Certificate in Gender Studies* in Klagenfurt, too. In the meantime, I was a free auditor for a number of seminars at the *EHESS* [École des hautes études en sciences sociales].

Maxim Miroshnichenko: Destroying the Ecosoma: Neuromimetics, 4EA Cognition, and the Immuno-Anarchy

The 4EA (embodied, embedded, extended, enactive, and affective) proposal in cognitive science equates cognition with the sensorimotor enaction of the individual’s vital functions. Enactivists confer subsystems of the living being with “zero degree” cognitive capabilities, even the non-neuromimetic ones. In Francisco Varela’s account, the self-assertion of the immune network launches an ontogenetic “molecular identity” as a positive, coherent unity in the phase space. During the late stages of embryonic development, it learns to sustain the organism’s internal harmony. Immunity is not an organism’s defense system that protects it from invading foreign bodies but a system of identifying its borders. Recognition is aimed not at exterminating potentially toxic elements but at integrating and incorporating extraneous elements of the environment. It makes negotiations, alliances, and compromises with molecular “guests.” These interactions lead to peaceful ecological coexistence, tolerance, and hospitality. Hence, it is an epigenetic ecological auto-affection system, to use Malabou’s framework. The immune system’s self-recognition leads to the multiplication of internal images of all possible antigens. The epigenetic reorganization of the anti-idiotypic network is contingent and enacts an anarchic molecular and imaginative *eigenbehavior*. In pathological cases of immunity’s malfunction, the plastic ontogenetic trajectory opens up to its destructive potential, realizing the *horror autotoxinus*.

1. I want to show how the enactivist view of the immune system’s cognitive auto-affection presents several points:
2. It moves from brain-centeredness to organism-centeredness in its ontological and bioethical/necropolitical aspects, especially regarding the phantom of the self.
3. It reassesses the role of imagination, mimetics, and intra-active eigenbehavior in the system’s self-recognition. I will concentrate on the pathologies of imagination in immune diseases.
4. It utilizes the anarchic/contingent/epigenetic immune agency to establish the enabling social cognitive institutions.

Day 2, Paper Session Eight: 09:45 – 10:00 Zoom room 2

Mimesis and Plasticity via Critical Theory

Tianren Luo: Malabou with Adorno: On the Deterioration and the Restoration of the Plasticity of Mimesis

Admittedly, it seems weird to deem Theodor Adorno as a predecessor of Malabou. However, this article insists that their heterogeneous bodies of works can be covertly communicated through a “dark precursor,” viz., mimesis. Mimesis, a Janus-faced or plastic concept, which implies the play between pathos and pathos of distance, pathology and patho-logy, passivity and creativity, the capacity to “receive forms” and to “give forms,” lies in the heart of the writings both of Adorno and Malabou. On the one hand, for Adorno, a plastic form of mimesis based on the non-conceptual exchange between humans and nonhumans should be distinguished from another degraded form of mimesis (Mimesis ans Verhärtete) that results from the domination of the “compulsion of the form” exerted on the conceptualized thought, which can be diagnosed as a symptom of the degeneration of the active or creative capacity of mimesis, leading to the prevail of disabling pathology over the creative path-logy. On the other hand, this article unveils that Malabou has already discerned in her dissertation on Hegel such capitulation of thought to compulsion brought forth by the ruling of universal concepts or such degeneration of creative power in mimesis (though she does not refer to this term explicitly) as a disorder within the self (to be more precise and use Hegel’s own term, this disorder can be deemed as both idiocy and alienation), to which only the restoration of plasticity brought by the establishment of habit can serve as a remedy. Moreover, this article will compare the role of “remembering” for Adorno and Malabou (which is mentioned in her recent works on anarchism and mutual aids) in guarding the plasticity of mimesis against its degradation. Therefore, in a Nietzschean way, this article eventually aims at performing the task of a “cultural physician” who gives treatment through analysis.

Tianren Luo is an undergraduate student majoring in philosophy at Fudan University. His recent research interests include contemporary critical theories, Marxism, radical political theories, and contemporary French theory. He is also a freelance translator who has translated several articles by Catherine Malabou into Chinese. His research is currently focusing on speculative realism, trying to uncover the potential political dimension implied in the ontology provided by SR (which is believed as indifferent to political problems). Also, he has done some other research that attempts to re-vitalize the radical potential of the practices of the minority and seek a way for possible resistance in the future, which can be genuinely deemed as counter-power.

Gabriel Wartinger: Benjamin’s Great Criminal, a Plastic Mime

Benjamin’s *Kritik der Gewalt* (Critique of Violence) has been an enigmatic contribution to readings that attempt to consider the violence of the state, the conceptual state of violence, and the (non-) violent potential to overcome the former and the latter. Most often left aside, the Critique also portrays the figure of the “great criminal”. This figure induces awe, is read as a Promethean motive, and benefits from the sympathy of “the” people. Benjamin’s analytic terminology distinguishes between a form of violence which is able to annihilate the law (divine or revolutionary), and another, mythic, form which merely instates new law. The great criminal falls into the purview of so-called mythic, hence reaffirming, violence. Thus, Benjamin does not bestow the criminal with law-transcending potential. To a certain extent, the criminal is a plastic mime, forming –and being formed by– the law. In the (great) criminal’s mimesis, one spots the promise of another law. Turning to Benjamin’s *Mimetisches Vermögen* (Mimetic Faculty) and to his *Lehre*

des Ähnlichen (Doctrine of the Similar), I will develop how the (mythic) law itself is always already destabilized by the potential of its own eclipse. Hence, I will proceed to argue that the “great criminal” of Benjamin’s Critique, read through a plastic frame, enables us to think a notion of law-without-law, an anarchic or mimetic contagion of the law.

Gabriel Wartinger. Between 2018 and 2020 Gabriel has been enrolled in a PhD programme at the European Graduate School’s Division of Philosophy, Art, and Critical Thought (Saas-Fee/Malta). Research was conducted under the supervision of Professor Catherine Malabou. In September 2020, a doctoral thesis, titled: “The Negative Possibility Against the Law. The Plasticity of Dialectic’s and Deconstruction’s Chiasmic Relation.” was defended. The viva was honoured Magna Cum Laude. Between fall 2020 and summer 2021, Gabriel proceeded to conclude a Postgraduate Certificate in Philosophy at Cambridge University. Since September 2021, he is enrolled at University College London, to conduct an additional PhD project at the Centre for Multidisciplinary and Intercultural Inquiry. The project is titled: “Deafening ‘the’ Political? Interrogating the Non-Identity of Sovereignty.”

Tiger Liu: Masochistic Mimesis: the Ecological/Morphological Vision of Sacher-Masoch

This paper will be discussing the conception of nature, life, and death in the work of the Austro-Ukrainian writer Leopold von Sacher-Masoch’s work. To conceptualise Sacher-Masoch’s thoughts, the paper will be focusing on Sacher-Masoch’s lesser known work “Jewish Tales” and his ambitious yet incomplete project titled “the Legacy of Cain”. Specifically, the paper will be focusing on Sacher-Masoch’s notion of “nature” as cold and indifferent, seriously engaging with the question of what it means for nature to be dead. To do so, the paper will be employing theory from Freud’s death drive, Deleuze’s criticism of Sacher-Masoch, Bataille’s general economy, as well as developments in biological and botanical studies influenced heavily by thermodynamics. The goal of the presentation is to investigate the relation between mimesis, plasticity, ecology, and energy, in order to present a novel conception that can help us in understanding the anthropogenic ecologies which we inhabit. Lastly, the paper will also be returning to the work for which Sacher-Masoch is best known by, *Venus in Fur*, to explore the ways in which mimesis becomes entangled with masochism and argue for a masochistic mode of mimesis.

Tiger Liu. I am a postgraduate student at the CRMEP at Kingston University currently in the process of applying to begin PhD research at CRMEP. The topic of the PhD project is on the artist Robert Smithson and the concept of extinction. I have just finished my MPhil degree under the supervision of Howard Caygill and written my thesis on masochism, Freud, and Bataille. During this project, I discovered the lesser known works by Sacher-Masoch, whose philosophical and ecological vision deserve their own merits, which has led me to submit an abstract for this conference on mimesis presenting my reflection on his works. As I have never presented nor submitted anything at a formal academic conference before, I apologise for any informality in the email or abstract.

Day 2, Paper Session Nine: 11:45 – 13:15 Zoom room 1

Plasticity, Artificial Intelligence, and Thermodynamic Limits

Alice Iacobone: Material Mimetism. On Plasticity and Mimesis from a New Materialist Perspective

The concept of plasticity, coming from the Greek *πλάσσειν* (“to model”, “to mould”, “to form”), refers first of all to a process of material formation and to the ambiguity of both receiving and giving form. Already in ancient times, however, the term underwent two shifts in meaning: one towards human subjectivity, the other towards the semantic area of imitation. In this last sense, *πλάσσειν* took up meanings such as “to simulate” or “to lie”, thus relating to the concept of mimesis. Plasticity is fundamentally related to mimesis also for theoretical reasons, as the two concepts function in the same bijective way when engaging with subjectivity. Subjectivity then seems to be the main field of application of the concept of plasticity (as in Catherine Malabou’s reflection) and human subjects appear as the place in which the encounter between plasticity and mimesis can occur. The paper aims at broadening Malabou’s non-reductionist new materialism by circling back to the first meaning of plasticity (“to materially form”) and entangling it with the third one (“to simulate”). It will be argued that plasticity and mimesis can meet not only on the field of human subjectivity, but also as embodied by plastic materials that are capable of behaving in imitative ways. The paper analyzes the cases of wax, whose plasticity can mimic living flesh (*incarnato*), and plastics, born as «materials of mimesis», in order to show the manifold implications between non-human activity, plasticity and mimesis.

Alice Iacobone is PhD student in Philosophy at the University of Genoa, Italy, and visiting fellow at the Institut für Kunst- und Bildgeschichte at Humboldt Universität Berlin, Germany. She graduated from the University of Turin and studied in Paris (Université Paris Ouest – Nanterre La Défense; EHESS) and Berlin (Freie Universität). Her main research areas are philosophical morphology and aesthetics, new materialisms, and contemporary artistic praxes. Her doctoral project concerns plasticity in sculpture and aims at rethinking the relations between matter and form through a renewed understanding of imprint-making.

Gosia Wojas: Feminist Mimesis and Female AI

The paper outlines a recent artistic practice and theoretical research into a female AI sex doll object, its materiality and signification. It is a culmination of a two year long study and intervention into the coded systems of control and sites of resistance that play out within the context of an artificial female body. Machine learning algorithm is the mediator between sex robots, their users and cloud data storage, facilitating learning from their inter-actions. I examine this engagement and materiality of the sex robot through notions of feminist mimesis, substitute and simulation against emancipatory politics of the artificial subject / *object* formation. I consider these strands of thought through the work of Catherine Malabou’s scholarship on plasticity (*Plas+city, the promise of explosion*, 2022; *Morphing Intelligence*, 2019), Luce Irigaray (*Speculum of the Other Woman*, 1974) and *Unmaking Mimesis* (1997) by Elin Diamond, as well as recent scholarship on digital data science.

Gosia Wojas (b. in Poland) is an ar/st and writer currently based in Los Angeles, CA. She holds a BFA in Fine Art from California Institute of the Arts and an MFA in Art from University of California, Irvine with a Cri/cal Theory emphasis from UCI’s School of Humanities. Considering materiality of objects as a

departure for research and to think through the entanglement of power and agency, Wojas probes at the poli/cal, social and economic signification of objects, materials and gestures often regarded as peripheral or insignificant. In employing strategies of proximity, mimesis and performativity within installations, she references the phenomenological experience of a human body, subjectivity, identity and community. Between the years of 2011-2021 Wojas organized talks, screenings, exhibitions and performances, independently and as *The Absent Museum* and *Projekt Papier*, at venues in Los Angeles, Berlin and Gdańsk. (www.gosiawojas.com)

Joel White: Toward a Critique of Pure Plasticity and its Consequence for Mimesis

The task of this paper is to begin answering the question: What are the thermodynamic limits of possibility of plasticity, and what are its consequences for mimesis? This question is central to a major critical project underway which carries the title *thermodynamic architectonics*. Thermodynamic architectonics undertakes what could be called a thermodynamic critique of *pure plasticity*, with “pure” plasticity understood as an infinite plastic recursion between deformation and transformation. The necessity of posing this question is, thus, to determine the critical energetic limits of plasticity and to show how plasticity, like any energetic system, is dependent on the exhaustion of its conditions of possibility. By outlining the extent to which plasticity functions as a pure idea in the Kantian sense—one that does not consider its entropic conditions—it may then become possible to assess how mimesis itself may be critically judged. For instance, if it is to be demonstrated that pure plasticity is critically impossible and that entropy is a condition of plasticity, then it might follow that entropy is likewise a condition of mimesis. Both conscious and unconscious repetition, imitation, and metamorphosis must be energetically fueled by a concurrent general entropic deformation of the conditions of the possibility of mimesis. This is to say, the reserve that keeps plastic mimesis going can only run out.

Joel White is a research affiliate of the Research Network for Philosophy of Technology and executive editor of *Technophany*, the Network’s academic journal (Radboud Press). His research is situated in the emerging transdisciplinary, field of continental philosophy of science and technology, currently focusing on how 19th-century thermodynamics was received into philosophy, and how scientific concepts, including ‘energy’ and ‘entropy’ and ‘information’ have become philosophical concepts. He has published articles and book chapters related to this research, including on the notions of signification, energy and education in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*; art and entropy in *Aesthetic Literacy*; entropy and form in *Pli: Warwick Journal of Philosophy*; Kant and Digital Immortality in *Aesthetics and Phenomenology*, information overloading and the internet in *Parallax* and has a book chapter coming out on life’s entropic indeterminacy in *Contingency and Plasticity in Everyday Technologies* (Rowman and Littlefield), edited by Natasha Lushetich, Iain Campbell and Domonic Smith.

Day 2, Paper Session Nine: 11:45 – 13:15 Zoom room 2

Mimetic Encounters and Audience Metamorphoses

Marco Grosoli: Paul Schrader's *The Card Counter*: a Cinematic Mapping of the Mimetic-Plastic Encounter between Human and Non-human Intelligences

William Tell, the protagonist of Paul Schrader's 2021 film *The Card Counter*, is a professional gambler talking his young protégé out of avenging his father's death through violence. *Vengeance* is a typically *mimetic* narrative pattern (an action modelled after another against which it retaliates). But in *Card Counter*, this mimetic pattern is there only as a thin disguise concealing a subtext patently more important than the main narrative: the mimetic-plastic relationship between human intelligence and artificial intelligence. Even before algorithms were around, the likes of William Tell had to be human algorithms in order to win at the gambling tables: they had to memorize and instantly analyse all cards having been played at a given moment in order to “see coming” what could be next. With the massive introduction of artificial intelligence even in gambling milieus, human gambling intelligence had to inevitably undergo a metamorphosis in response to it. My paper will analyse the subtext of *The Card Counter* revolving around the metamorphoses elicited by today's mimetic-plastic encounters between human and non-human intelligences, relying particularly on Malabou's *Morphing Intelligence*. Particularly, it will show that the film implicitly theorizes a “plastic” form of intelligence alternative to the algorithm, binding together essence and accident, universal and particular, necessity and contingency as opposed to keeping them apart like quantitative systems tend to do. References will be made as well to Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations*, quoted in the film and studied already by other scholars in the context of Malabou's plasticity⁵; and to *Wild Grass* (2009) by Alain Resnais (a filmmaker Malabou herself listed among those who most accomplishedly illustrated the plasticity of the brain).

Marco Grosoli is currently a Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Bologna, after having been a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the University of Kent (2012-2015), an Assistant Professor in Film Studies at Habib University (Karachi, Pakistan, 2016-2021), and a Humboldt Research Fellow in Potsdam and Frankfurt (2022). Besides several academic articles and book chapters, he has published *Eric Rohmer's Film Theory* (Amsterdam University Press, 2018), and the first Italian language monograph on Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr (*Armonie contro il giorno*, 2014).

Mark Pizzato: Mass Audience Metamorphoses

In ancient Greece, over a thousand people gathered in outdoor theatres to witness tragedies, satyr plays, and comedies, during religious festivals honoring the god of wine and fertility, Dionysus. Respect for that god's wildness, possessing his followers, including female bacchae who mythically tore apart animals and ate raw flesh (*sparagmos* and *omophagia*), was later seen by Friedrich Nietzsche as a key element in the “birth of tragedy” through the spirit of music, with the dithyrambic chorus in the orchestra projecting Apollonian ideals onto the actor's mask onstage. Not long after Nietzsche developed that dialectic in the 1800s, film evolved as a new art form, eventually reaching mass audiences of millions on multiplex screens and then on digital devices. This presentation explores Dionysian and Apollonian aspects of audience metamorphoses, with current mass and social media, through various mimetic theories: from ancient

⁵ Georgia Mouroutsou, “Plasticity of the Mind: Reflecting on and Discussing Marcus Aurelius's *Meditations* with Catherine Malabou”, in Thomas Wormald and Isabell Dahms (eds.), *Thinking Catherine Malabou: Passionate Detachments*, Washington: Rowman & Littlefield International Limited, 2018.

Greece (Aristotle's *katharsis*) and India (Bharata's and Abhinavagupta's *rasa* effects) to current neuroscience (mirror neurons, emotion contagion, cognitive reappraisal, and mindfulness). Which networks of the brain's "inner theatre" are potentially altered, within the spectators of in-person theatre, cinema, or personal screens? Gendered aspects of such media mimesis, developmental metamorphoses, and neuro-social plasticity are also considered through Nietzsche's, Lacan/Kristeva's, and Malabou's interdisciplinary work, by focusing on melodramatic and tragicomic extensions of animal-human emotional drives, between outer and inner theatres.

Mark Pizzato, MFA, PhD, is Professor of Theatre and Film at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (USA). His publications include *Mapping Global Theatre Histories* (Palgrave, 2019), *Beast-People Onscreen and in Your Brain: The Evolution of Animal-Humans from Prehistoric Cave Art to Modern Movies* (Praeger, 2016), *Inner Theatres of Good and Evil: The Mind's Staging of Gods, Angels and Devils* (McFarland, 2011), *Ghosts of Theatre and Cinema in the Brain* (Palgrave, 2006), *Theatres of Human Sacrifice: From Ancient Ritual to Screen Violence* (SUNY, 2005), and *Edges of Loss: From Modern Drama to Postmodern Theory* (University of Michigan, 1998). He also co-edited, with Lisa K. Perdigao, *Death in American Texts and Performances: Corpses, Ghosts, and the Reanimated Dead* (Routledge, 2010). Short films, produced from his screenplays, have won New York Film Festival and Minnesota Community Television awards.

Taichi Nakae: Homo Mimeticus and Literary Imitation in Tournier's *Robinsonade, Friday or The Other Island*

The desert island novel (robinsonade) has been a privileged literary topos for re-examining what it is to be human since the 18th century. I discuss *Friday or The Other Island*, a rewrite of *Robinson Crusoe*, for this philosophical novel proposes *Homo Mimeticus*, which contrasts with Defoe's independent and individualistic Robinson, often considered as the typical image of modern humanity. The desert island is a world without others, who are "the structure of the possible world" for the transcendental subject according to Deleuze. How does the hero act in this world where the imitation of other humans is no longer possible? It is the animals and plants surrounding the hero in the process of "dehumanization", which take the place of absent human beings. Robinson of Tournier takes them as a model in order to survive on the desert island and to harmonize with the cosmos, at the same time as he imitates another, Friday. Far from constituting the Cartesian self, mimesis extending to non-human beings allows for the plasticity and metamorphosis of the hero, culminating in the scene of "becoming a plant" where Robinson merges with a tree to enter the world proper to plants. We must not forget that not only does Tournier's robinsonnade put forward a kind of *Homo Mimeticus* (influenced by Leibnitz and Nietzsche), but also that this novel is an adaptation of a canonical work, and thus an example of literary mimesis. I will therefore explore the relationship between these two imitations.

Taichi Nakae is a doctoral student at the University of Tokyo and currently an exchange student at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris. His research focuses on literary imitation and the vision of *Homo Mimeticus*, particularly in the story of *Robinsonade* (Defoe, Verne, Chamoiseau, etc.) and in the novels of Michel Tournier.

Day 2, Paper Session Eleven: 14:00 – 15:30 Zoom room 1

Temporality, Mortality and Simulacra

Serguei Panov: Malabou: Plasticité et la Question du Temps

La plasticité pour Malabou est l'inscription d'une trace de la différence. La trace, comme le montre Malabou, est une capacité d'un accident à se transformer à la base du rien. On revient à la thèse d'Heidegger : l'être de l'étant comme le temps n'est rien. Rien, comme nous nous en souvenons, chez Heidegger est la condition de possibilité pour tout étant de se révéler à l'être humain. Mais pour Heidegger, la décision de Schelling reste encore valide: la plasticité est l'harmonie indifférenciée de l'essence et de la forme, de l'idéal et du réel. La mimesis de la nature indifférente que nous observons chez Heidegger plonge la conscience dans l'attente de la réponse gratifiante de la nature et, donc, de l'harmonie préétablie des sons prononcés et entendus. Pour qu'une telle harmonie devienne concevable en philosophie, il était nécessaire de surmonter le projet de Hegel, où la plasticité est la capacité de l'esprit à se développer à travers les formes de son propre aliénation de soi, dans le but de l'autohumiliation de l'infini et de l'incarnation qui est présumée terminer le temps lui-même. Comment sortir des réflexes de l'incarnation métaphysique et de l'attente post-métaphysique? Malabou voit cette possibilité dans la trace qui rompt l'identité du logos et nous ramène au mimesis du dieu juif de la parole comme source d'effacements et de ruptures. Est-ce que ça suffit de dépasser la métaphysique et la postontologie si l'on pense toujours le temps comme condition d'apparition des moments abstraction faite de leur contenu ?

Serguei Panov (né à 1972) est HDR (2022), professeur (chaire de sciences sociales et technologies) à l'Université nationale de Technologie MISIS, à Moscou, Russie. Son principal domaine de recherche est la anthropologie philosophique de la culture artistique et la déconstruction pragmatique de la culture littéraire et théâtrale ainsi que l'esthétique romantique et postromantique. Les publications de Panov incluent «L'écriture, semiosis and discours» (Moscou, 2010), «Repliques de la littérature» (Moscou, 2010), «La culture littéraire russe dans la prosopopée judéo-chrétienne» (2022), «L'expérimentation littéraire de la nature» (2022). Il est membre de l'Association internationale de la critique littéraire (France) et du Centre d'études supérieures en littérature (France).

Sonashki Srivastava: Plas/mesis: Reading Plasticity and Mimesis in The Face of Another

Emmanuel Lévinas writes, "It would seem that the human individual should be thought of first within the formal framework of his belonging to a genus- the human genus. He is part of a whole, divided into species and culminating in an undivided unity, in the logically ultimate identity of the individual, situated among empirical data and recognizable by specific spatial and temporal indices, in which that unity presents itself as a 'being' in its particularity, and which according to Aristotle, 'alone exists', beyond the ideal or abstract existence of genera". Lévinas' dwelling on "uniqueness" can be read as an interpretation of the idea that binds human beings to a particular form, a particular group that they must stay true to. Any aberration is bound to tease the senses into unease, evoking emotional reactions, and/or ostracization. Kobo Abe's surrealist novel, "*The Face of Another*" revolves around the glaring idea of mimesis, uniqueness, and identity, revealing the canker eating away at the soul (?), "the fundamental emptiness of content" of the modern man. The story revolves around a chemist who, (in a certain Frankensteinian strain) disfigures his face in an experiment. Ashamed, he tries to reintegrate into the society as well as win the affections of his wife through the aid of a prosthetic mask provided by his doctor. The employment of the mask, however, allows

him to delve deep into what appears to be at the surface. He deliberates over “form”, leading the readers into a visual field wherein there is a universal value attached to “form”- only agreements, no disagreements. The novel problematizes the idea of subjectivity and identity through the various ruminations of the narrator – “is what you think to be in reality your real face, or is what you think to be your real face really a face?”- allowing one to ponder over this overstepping of boundaries, the spilling of the personal into the public, the mundane into the unique. By considering and integrating Baudrillard’s concept of “simulacrum”, and Malabou’s concept of “plasticity”, I will attempt to read the configuration of “masks” and the protagonist’s attempt to retrieve his old face (or an attempt to be his old self) in the novel. How do masks as a simulacrum of the face disturb the boundaries between the authentic and the inauthentic self? How does the sex appeal of “plastic” masks figure in the text? And how does Malabou’s own dual-definition of “plasticity” as one capable of giving form as well as receiving form influence our own perception of the technologies of sign systems – the use of masks/surgeries/augmentations by the beauty industry? How do we address this plastic turn, this plasmesis? These are some of the questions I will seek to answer in my paper.

Sonakshi Srivastava is a writing tutor at Ashoka University, Sonapat, India. She previously graduated from the University of Delhi where she read English Literature. Her MPhil dissertation is on the biopolitics of ability and debility in contemporary fiction. She is a resident researcher for ForeignObjekt. She is one of the recipients of South Asia Speaks mentorship programme, working on translating the Hindi novel, “Titli” into English under the mentorship of Arunava Sinha. She is a contributing translator columnist at “The Bilingual Window”. She was also shortlisted for the 2020 Serendipity FoodLab Residency, and was a Tempus Public Foundation Fellow in 2021. Her works have previously appeared in or are appearing in Hakara, potluck zine, orangepeel mag, and Rhodora among others. She is widely passionate about discard studies, food literatures, astromancy, posthumanism, zines, and animal studies.

Alex Obrigewitsch: To Double Mimesis Bound: Mortal Plasticity, Between Malabou and Lacoue-Labarthe

Mimesis is, perhaps, the most plastic element of thought there is, persisting from the origin, despite the many efforts to exile or forbid its intransigent refusal of sure conceptual grasp. Said otherwise, we cannot escape mimesis, for it moulds itself in the space of origin, in the plasticity of the origin which moulds and forms our mortal existence. By re-examining the relation between mimesis and plasticity (as figured in the thought of Catherine Malabou), through a reading guided by the thought of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, this paper shall explicate how mimesis is ineluctable insofar as it underwrites the figuration of plasticity itself, marking its very origin under the sign of a doubling-displacement. If the origin of mortal existence, its plastic figuration, is grounded in mimesis, then there is from this primal instance a double movement by which this existence is also ungrounded, let play in the repetitional figurations of mimetic plasticity. The primal scene of mortal existence is undecidably suspended between plasticity and mimesis. But does this leave us subject to the law of prior inscription? Is there no way that mimetic repetition might double its original lack of figure? By considering the “originary theatre” and “miming of nothing” proposed by Lacoue-Labarthe, this paper will close by tracing the absence of originary figure inscribing mortal existence to an impossible death which affords us a plastic possibility treading the limit between the finite and the infinite.

Alex Obrigewitsch is a Canadian PhD research student studying at the University of Sussex in the UK. His doctoral research centers around rethinking the relation between philosophy and literature through

tracing a reconsideration of mortality and the tragic through the thought and writings of Maurice Blanchot and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, intervening in the texts of such thinkers and writers on these topics as Aristotle, Nietzsche, Hölderlin, and Heidegger. Alex has published papers on Nietzsche and Ethics, Blanchot and translation, and Blanchot and psychoanalysis. He has also given conference papers on Bataille and communism, Blanchot and literature, Levinas and Blanchot on mortality, Tragedy and the Tragic, and Lacoue-Labarthe and lyricism.

Day 2, Paper Session Eleven: 14:00 – 15:30 Zoom room 1

Semiotics and Literature: The Case of Plasticity

Ian James: Proust's Transformations

This paper takes a materialist and, following Deleuze, semiotic view of Proust's *Recherche* in order to shed light on the way in which the novel recasts the mimetic function of literature in terms of the transmigration of the immanently lived sense of life into aesthetic form. Such a transmigration can be understood in terms of the transformation and metamorphosis of the natural sign relations that constitute life as such. From this perspective it can be argued that the work of art is understood by Proust to be an imaginary form that exists in a relation of immanent superimposition over the lived world of subjective perception and of shared material and biological existence. In this way it can be understood as a special kind of mimesis predicated on the non-identity that results from the metamorphic transformation of lived historical worlds into aesthetic form. Mimesis emerges here as an anamnesis, mapping, or modelling of anterior and successively superimposed layers of refractory experience. The discussion proceeds by examining the way in which the obvious incorporations into the *Recherche* of Proust's biographical material always entail a creative-imaginative transformation of that material which can be understood as an interpretation of its concealed, immanent sense relations. This transformation involves a displacement, condensation and metamorphic *depersonalisation* of sense elements in an interpretation of the 'signs of life'. On this basis, the 'livre intérieur de signes inconnus' (RTP, IV, 458) evoked by the narrator can be understood in terms of Proust the author's own relation to his lived experience as mediated by the experimental and creative medium of his novel.

Ian James completed his doctoral research on the fictional and theoretical writings of Pierre Klossowski at the University of Warwick in 1996. He is a Fellow of Downing College and Professor of Modern French Philosophy and Literature in the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics at the University of Cambridge. He is the author of *Pierre Klossowski: The Persistence of a Name* (Oxford: Legenda, 2000), *The Fragmentary Demand: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Jean-Luc Nancy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), *Paul Virilio* (London: Routledge, 2007), *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012) and *The Technique of Thought: Nancy, Laruelle, Malabou and Stiegler after Naturalism* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2019). His next book, *Rethinking Literary Naturalism: Proust and Quignard After Life*, is forthcoming with Liverpool University Press.

Serge Zenkin: Semiosis and Mimesis

Mimesis quite often serves as a means of communication between people or animals, and therefore it should be compared with another form of communication, grounded not upon imitation but upon exchange of signs. Since the latter has been deeply investigated in semiotics, the distinction of two forms will contribute to delimit the field of that discipline and to outline a new object of research beyond this field: the mimetic, and not semiotic communication. The very notion of mimesis should be revised in order to replace the mimesis of representation (artistic or not) by a mimesis of communication which takes place not between two objects (original and copy) but between two or more subjects (independent partners). Mimetic communication differs from the semiotic one by 1) its close, and not distant pragmatics, including in certain cases an immediate corporeal contact between partners or even an “excessive mimesis”, that is their identification, 2) a continuous syntactics of its messages, modelled in an analogous rather than in a digital way, 3) a prevalence of energy over information in its “semantics”, i.e. in what is transmitted from one partner to the other, so that mimetic communication can violently deform or reshape its addressee. These differences may be partly explained through the categories of exemplification and denotation, distinguished in analytical philosophy; they might also correspond to the opposition of plastic/rigid structures. Although mimesis of communication has not necessarily an aesthetic purpose, it can be observed in literary texts too, combining and making alternate semiotic and mimetic effects.

Serge Zenkin is professor of the Free University (an independent Russian institution), as well as of two other Russian universities, unfortunately politically compromised now. Specialist of literary theory, history of ideas and French literature, he has published more than 500 books and articles in Russian, French and English, including 6 books in France. Member of the Academy of Europe.

Tyler M. Williams: Neuroliterature: An Example

Critical reception of Catherine Malabou’s work often takes issue with what initially appears to be its analogical style of argumentation. For example, in response to her argument in *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* that neural connectivity and brain plasticity offer a model of political resistance to corporate forms of global capitalism (which model the corporate network on the neural network), Alberto Toscano argues that analogizing the corporation to the brain is no more persuasive in the 21st century than analogizing the economy to an organism in the 19th century or to the hydraulic machine in the 20th century. Additionally, when one considers the frequent presence of literature across Malabou’s work, particularly at moments when she seeks to destabilize the boundary between the material and the symbolic, one might be tempted to characterize Malabou’s interest in literary formation as arguing that it behaves *like* neuroplastic formation. However, such arguments assume that Malabou’s articulation of plasticity’s relevance outside neurobiology remains *strictly* analogical. In recent essays and interviews, Malabou offers a defense of the “exemplarity” of plasticity, addressing how examples of plasticity are not anterior to—and are therefore not merely analogies for—the plastic formation they describe. In this paper, I focus on Malabou’s elaboration of the concept of “neuroliterature,” an underdeveloped yet, I argue, immensely fruitful concept in her oeuvre, to show that literary texts—or, more specifically, the literarity of the literary text—is not just analogically relevant to the work of plasticity but indeed announces its potent philosophical force. After distinguishing “neuroliterature” from its false cognates “neuroaesthetics” or “cognitive literary studies,” which merely apply exteriorly neuroscientific discovery to literary works (or, which amounts to the same, place value on literary works to the degree they reconfirm neuroscientific claims), I show that neuroliterature signals a philosophic codetermination between the literary and the scientific. The literature that preoccupies much of Malabou’s thought are not, therefore, analogical examples of the brain;

neuroliterature announces the moment of *encounter* between the neural and the literary as philosophy's "outside."

Tyler M. Williams is assistant professor in the Department of English, Humanities, and Philosophy at Midwestern State University. Recently, he is cotranslator of *The Vocation of Writing: Literature, Philosophy, and the Test of Violence* by Marc Crépon (2018). Currently, he is editor of *Plasticity: The Promise of Explosion* by Catherine Malabou (forthcoming) while completing a book manuscript on William Faulkner, racial violence, authority, and the antinomies of tradition.