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Introduction

Museums can no longer think of the future the way art historians and museum curators thought about it in the nineteenth century.

The nineteenth century understood the future as already interpreted, as a social and historical phenomenon. It defined the future within the context of notions such as succession, periodicity, or duration. The future was a temporal category within a predetermined periodical structure. It was always a future-present, one that depended on a strict temporal (or historical) logic that clearly established what was in the past and what lay ahead in the future. The future was one element within the dominant linguistic mode of the time—the narrative. To put it extremely briefly, it conceived the future as another social or historical time (distant or not) that situated itself in the present.

As one of the key institutions of the nineteenth century, the museum was at the centre of this structured definition of the future. The traditional temporal ideology of the museum was to situate itself in relation to both a past, which it preserved, and a future into which it projected the past it contained. In this way, it turned the future as the outcome of a grand narrative of progress. In other words, inside the museum’s galleries, artefacts were segregated into specific and clearly defined movements, orchestrated by a few protagonists, and within this self-creating chain of movements with clear points of rupture and continuance, the future was the unquestioned extension of these periodicities and discontinuities. Today, the museum is forced to think of the future outside of these dusty categories. Beyond the empirical necessities of financial constraints and issues of maintenance, the museum must think of a finer kind of future.¹

This essay proposes a philosophical investigation of the issue of the future in relation to the museum—and specifically in relation to the art museum. It focuses on a specific re-formulation of Hegel’s understanding of the future recently proposed by the philosopher Catherine Malabou. The choice of this re-formulation is self-evident. With its canonical narratives, its exhibition “routes” and linear structure, the museum

is often seen to replicate a Hegelian understanding of time, one for which history is seen as the march of humanity towards freedom (which would then mark the End of History) and the future as the necessary accomplishment of this march. The chosen philosophical re-formulation of Hegel's time, one which radically alters this long-standing interpretation, should provide a way of understanding how the museum can begin to think of its future in a different way. The idea is simply to propose a renewed understanding of the future of museums, a future that has nothing to do with a march towards a greater emancipation or with projections, predictions, or prophecies (utopian or dystopian).

1. The Museum, the Event and the Dialectical

The only future the museum can contemplate today is that of *the setting into motion of difference*, that which opens itself, that which comes. If the museum is serious about the presentation of its collection, the preservation of "the past," its history, then it must think of the future quite simply as the opening of space itself, what the philosopher Jacques Derrida understands in French by *l'à-venir*, the "to-come" (Derrida 1996, 68). The expression "to-come" evades the very possibility of pinning down the future as (a metaphysical) entity located in the present. The "to-come" represents the opening of time itself, one that is without essence, origin, destination or determinable ground.

The important aspect of this opening is that it does not take place *within* a temporal succession *with* an origin *and* a destination. Examples of this destination would be Hegel's End of History or Marx's Proletarian State, *necessary* final stages within the logical and chronological development of the world. The art museum is also rich in determining destinations. Leonardo Da Vinci's *Mona Lisa* or Duchamp's *Fountain* are often considered examples of artistic achievement that put artists in a perpetual past, that is, in a situation of always having to emulate these perfect ideals. Today, the idea of origin or destination has become increasingly impossible to articulate. The changes that have affected architectural designs of many art museums of the last forty years show the impossibility of thinking an origin or a destination in relation to the temporal structure of museums. Museums are indeed no longer made up of an *enfilade* of galleries. The architecture of museums as a series of rooms *enfilade* typical of traditional museums (similar to the royal palace with the King's

bedroom at the centre) has long ago been replaced by the universal flea-market space of the modern museum (for example, the Pompidou Centre). In this flea-market space, no single gallery can be categorised as the ultimate destination of a historical development. This change highlights the importance of discarding conventional understandings of time as a teleological sequence and to re-think the museum's understanding of time outside of any form of temporal succession with an origin and a destination.

The *setting into motion of difference* simply does not need a historical origin or a destination for it to make sense. When one talks about the future, one usually makes reference to a particular a point—distant or not—usually exemplified by Aristotle's *στιγμα* (*stigma*), a point in time. To put forward the idea of this opening, this “to-come”, is not to put forward an understanding of the future as represented by (or as) a point in time. The reason for discarding the idea of understanding the future in relation to a single identifiable point is this. The “to-come”, this opening, *creates* the spatio-temporal and is itself *at once* temporal *and* a-temporal (Derrida 1982, 56-58). The *setting into motion of difference* can only take place as what differentiates and differs *from itself* and, as such, cannot be located or represented in any one place in particular. This opening therefore represents what shapes itself between possibility and impossibility and this, in remembrance and/or in actuality.

This opening or this “to-come” does not therefore refer to “the future” of museums as such. It refers to the museum as it deals with the unravelling of temporality. It is what, inside, but also outside of the museum, in an *unidentifiable* location, space takes from itself; the way space distances itself within itself and takes place. In other words, it is that which, in the museum opens space—the space of the work of art, the space of and for the artist or viewer. This has nothing to do with the endless expansions of collections or the museum's ability to open up new galleries, but rather with the space fostered by the museum to maintain its activity, to generate its own distinctive experience. This has to do with the unfolding or the exposure of the museum as eventⁱⁱ, that is, what takes place *at every instant*, at every showing. It is the *disjointing* of temporality here *or* there in the gallery and this, no matter what or to whom it is exposed (Derrida 1994; Laclau 1995).

If, aside of issues of economic projection and development, the museum abandons its old concept of the future, if it takes into consideration this opening of

time, then the museum becomes an occurrence or an event that can never form or prefigure a closure (the death of museums) or a presence (a stable or an identifiable museum). The museum is an institution that can only conceive itself as an unstable and unidentifiable form of exposure (in the sense of both display and revelation). The reason for this is simple: The museum is an institution that positions itself at the juncture of endings and openings. I use here the words “openings” and “endings” in order not to confuse them with origins or destinations.

On the one hand, the museum is only concerned with the manner in which art or artifacts are “ended.” As the International Council of Museums made clear, the museum’s remit is to acquire, conserve, research, communicate, and exhibit, for purposes of study, education, and enjoyment, material evidence of man and his environment. As such (and on a Foucauldian note), its main remit is to bring an end to the errancy of works of art (Foucault, 1993). Everything ends in the museum and the museum is therefore an institution of endings. This is what made Antoine Quatremère de Quincy and Paul Valéry so famously miserable—museums are mausoleums, repositories of carcasses of bodies that were once alive, whether attached to a cult or as part of an artistic process (de Quincy 1989; Valéry 1972).

On the other hand, the museum is the place where both the artwork and the viewer also depart. It is the place where, for the viewer the imagination is let loose, where the world is placed between parentheses in order to pursue a voyage into another world—past, present or future. It is also the place where the artwork acquires the legitimacy that will open it to a myriad of interpretations to come. The museum is the place of critical and curatorial journeys and trajectories (Adorno 1981, 175-177). This is Marcel Proust’s well-known argument that the museum *continues* the work of the artwork and that through the encounter between architecture and art, we find ourselves, as viewers, curators, or art historians always on an open road where one never knows where one is going (Proust 1960, 310-311).

Right “there”, on this unstable and unidentifiable spacing of temporality, the museum reveals itself as a dialectical institution. Such a claim should not be seen as referring to the traditional sense of the word “dialectical”, in the way used, for example, by Walter Benjamin in his *Theses on the Philosophy of History* to describe how historical materialism deals with theological messianism (Benjamin, 1973). As is well known, the museum is an institution of the nineteenth century. Unlike Cabinet of Curiosities, in which objects were assembled randomly, the museum follows a

dialectical model that sees its collections either organised chronologically (narrative) or thematically (image), but in all cases through a methodological approach intended to establish either truths or uncertainties. In this way and at its most banal semantic level, the museum is essentially dialectical. Through its series of rigid or flexible frameworks where time and space are isolated, placed in parenthesis, in other words, “aestheticised” by the curator, the museum attempts to make sense of the art or the objects it houses. This is also true of the most avant-garde of museums or public galleries such as, for example, Le Palais de Tokyo in Paris where the encounter with the work of art supersedes issues of authorship or display. Whatever its remit, the museum’s aim is always that of making the logos play or work.

Beyond this basic understanding, the word “dialectical” should be understood here, following a tradition first inaugurated by the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, as a word that marks or shapes the difference between openings and endings, a marking that has no proper destination except the sublationⁱⁱⁱ (*aufhebung*) to which it is bound. Nancy’s interpretation of the term inaugurates a new reading of Hegel, one that understands the dialectical, not as an act intended to resolve a contradiction logically, but as an act of receptivity that is also a formative process (Nancy 2001, 2002). Instead of a rigid interpretation of the dialectical, Nancy took up the more plastic (Hegel’s *plastische*) interpretation of the word (Malabou 2004, note 24, 199). The word “dialectical” conceived through the Hegelian prism of plasticity is crucial in the way it disturbs any systematicity, the possibility of teleology itself. The dialectical not only becomes supple and flexible (plastic arts), but also violent and sudden (plastic explosion). The dialectical intertwines the contradictory forces of the teleological and the contingent in an act of deferment.

I have used here this revised interpretation of the word “dialectical” not only because it is at the heart of the museum process, but also because it is inseparable from the future. In her book, *The Future of Hegel*, Catherine Malabou takes up this inaugural reading by Nancy and proposes to reject the usual understanding of Hegel’s conception of time. In order to fully grasp this new way of thinking the Hegelian future and how it might affect the way museums understand their future, a brief overview of Malabou’s key ideas is necessary.

2. Malabou, Plasticity and *Voir Venir*

Catherine Malabou's book is an attempt to rescue Hegel's philosophy of time from the museum of dead onto-theological monuments. In doing so, she offers a contemporary alternative to Martin Heidegger, Alexandre Kojève, Alexandre Koyré and Hypolite's famous readings of Hegel's time and exposes how Hegel can still be relevant to our contemporary world and this without wincing. In a way, Malabou's attempt is similar to that of Deleuze, Derrida and Lévinas who have all tried to surpass Hegel's End of History by offering notions such as "multiplicity", "differance" and the "irreducibility of the face". Malabou's key concept, "plasticity", is yet another attempt not to exceed the End of History, but to rethink the very threshold that animates it. This new attempt can, in a way, be interpreted as a continuation of Derrida's work on Hegel and a reflection on the "shape" of *differance*.

In her book, Malabou puts forward two objectives. On the one hand, to challenge Hegel's dialectic with the thought of *differance*, and on the other, to push Derrida's deconstruction one step further, in order to think a hyper-deconstruction, a deconstruction that will not end up in an absolute relativism (endless undecidability), but with a thinking of the shape that events take when related to what is irreducibly other (the unknown future, for example). Malabou's task is to think the place where *differance* does not simply differ and defer, but becomes sublated as "form", therefore as history. In a sense, her aim is to expose the shape of a double take, one in which thought is caught *at once* by a body of thought (something present at hand) and by its dissimulation or its differentiation.^{iv} As Malabou's remarked, "the philosophical signification of plasticity is today made up by the juxtaposition of two ways of playing the game, metaphysics and deconstruction, refutation of *differance* and indication of the trace..." (Malabou 2000, 319). Malabou's key concept, plasticity, is therefore a synthetic operation of two contradictory forces that exposes the *differance* of *differance*.

The most important aspect of this plasticity is that it challenges the usual understanding of Hegel's conception of time. For Malabou, Hegel never perceived time as a "now" amidst a series of "nows", a time in which the future is always a "future-now". Malabou sees Hegel's time as an instance of dialectical differentiation that can only determine itself momentarily at a point in time that is at once a moment and a movement. This mo(ve)ment or this "punctuality" (*Pünktlichkeit*) has nothing to do with the Aristotelian *στιγμα* (*stigma*), this term from which most readings of

Hegel's time as homogeneous and empty are usually based on. This "point" represents the moment or the movement of sublation (*Aufhebung*), a "point" never conceived as a point of rest, *not even at the end of history*. Hegel's *Pünktlichkeit* is not a homogeneous "milieu", but an *act* (a mo(ve)ment) turned towards the future.

Malabou's argument is to reject the idea of reducing Hegel's time to a single continuum of static and unified instants. Hegel understood in fact two times at once. The first time is the time of *chronological* differentiation. The second is the time of *logical* differentiation. "The first modality arises from what is possible to call the originary synthetic unity of a teleological movement in potentiality and in action. The other modality stems from the originary synthetic unity of apperception, the foundation of representation (*Vorstellung*)" (Malabou 2004, 16 [32]). These two times constitute a state of "separatedness" and negation that never marks a repetition or a closure and can never constitute a self-contained Aristotelian point in time. By proposing this new interpretation, Malabou's aim is to reject Heidegger's claim that Hegel only understood time in its "vulgar" sense. Hegel's time becomes not a time that can only pass or be reiterated or recuperated, but a plastic event taking place at the crossroads between logical and chronological times. It is therefore no longer a time defined by closure (the End of History), but a time, whose differentiation is necessarily open to the future, to what distance itself from itself, a time that effectively *confuses the future and time*.

Plasticity, Malabou's key word, stands for this temporal symbiosis. It represents the marriage between time and the synthesis of time, the time of teleology and the time of representation. In her words, "reading Hegel amounts to finding oneself in two times at once: the process that unfolds is both retrospective and prospective. In the present time in which reading takes place, the reader is drawn to a double expectation: waiting for what is to come (according to a linear and representational thinking), while presupposing that the outcome has already arrived (by virtue of the teleological ruse)" (Malabou 2004, 17 [32]). It brings together time and the thinking of time and this non-simultaneity or non-contemporaneity shows the plasticity of time, one necessarily open to the future.

For Malabou, the most important aspect of plasticity is indeed that all life is subjected to negativity, to the laws of contraries and how these contraries are always re-energized by the dialectical process. She goes as far as to claim in an interview that: "[she] would like people to recognize that [this] contradiction is a fundamental

law of existence... not in an attempt to reject the thought of difference or the fact that the trace cannot be given shape, but in an attempt to shape here and now the originary effraction of the trace” (Malabou 2003a). The question is how does these two times, this mo(ve)ment, this revised understanding of the Hegelian *Pünktlichkeit* relate to what is *radically other*, to the unknown future?

In order to make sense of this encounter between two times and the future, Malabou comes up with one specific French expression: *voir venir* (to see what is coming). For Malabou, plasticity cannot be understood without the complementary French expression *voir venir*, which can be simply understood with the expression *je vous voir venir*, “I see what you are aiming at”^v. The concept of plasticity is inseparable from the concept of *voir venir*. The two concepts are interchangeable. Plasticity *is voir venir*. As Derrida remarked in his review of Malabou’s thesis: “...plasticity is not a *secondary* concept or another concept that would add itself to *voir venir* and constitute a sort of hermeneutical couple... It is the *same* concept in its differentiating and determinating process. Because of its own dialectical self contradiction and mobility, *voir venir* is in itself a plastic concept, it allows plasticity to come to us” (Derrida 2004a, x. [8]).

There is a crucial difference in French between the opening of time mentioned at the start (*à-venir*, “to-come”) and Malabou’s *voir venir*. The first term refers to the disjointing of temporality, to the unfolding of time. *Voir venir*, Malabou’s other word for plasticity is the *formation* of this unfolding or exposure; it represents the shape and/or the non-shape undertaken by what is disjointing, coming or unfolding. The formation of this movement is “plastic”. As Malabou remarked, plasticity “is nothing less than the *formation* of the future (*l’avenir*) itself. [It] characterizes the relation between substance and accidents” (Malabou 2004, 12 [27]). In Malabou’s reading of Hegel, *voir venir* represents the relationship between subjectivity and the un/foreseen as an instance that can only be momentarily determined in its immediacy (Malabou 2004, 12 [27]). There is never any possibility to actually perceive or represent the shape of this plasticity as it can only manifest itself in its momentariness. Indeed, the expression “I see what you are aiming at” stands for the mo(ve)ment of thought indicating that somebody’s actions or thoughts are properly understood.

The fact that *voir venir* or plasticity represents *at once* a teleological process and an opening onto the contingent does not refer to the usual interpretation of Hegel’s relation between necessity and contingency. It is not a mechanical process

where what is possible is essentially effective and vice-versa. On the contrary, “Hegelian philosophy assumes as an absolute fact the emergence of the random in the very bosom of necessity and the fact that the random, the aleatory, becomes necessary” (Malabou 2004, 163 [219]). In this way, the teleological and the contingent enter at the crossroads of two times into a dialogue (“*un entretien*” - Malabou 2004, 169 [219]) in which both elements feed each other and differ from each other. They both engage themselves onto each other and away from each other. In this rather contemporary interpretation, Hegelian philosophy ends up assuming the idea that the happenstance of the aleatory is right at the heart of the teleological process and that teleology itself emerges out of the aleatory. As Malabou noted: “...the Greek word *συμβεβηχος* (*symdedakos*), ‘accident’, derives from the verb *συμβαίνειν* (*symdanein*) which means at the same time to follow from, to ensure and to arrive, to happen” (Malabou 2004, 12 [27]).

As is abundantly clear in her text, Malabou’s reading of Hegel’s notion of plasticity is a synonym for the dialectical model (Malabou 2003a). For this reason, one cannot imagine that the intertwinement of necessity and contingency at the crossroads of two times actually leads *nowhere* or goes round in circle like the forces of yin and yang. Malabou’s revision of the dialectical model, now called “plasticity”, *must* be engaged in an advancement of its own, it must actually be going “somewhere”. Malabou goes to great pains to intensify this issue in order to avoid the usual “*movement towards*” self-determination or emancipation implied by the dialectical model. The End of History, the culmination of Hegel’s philosophy, is transformed by Malabou’s into *one* moment or place at the cross-roads of logical and chronological times, a moment amongst others, a plastic instance of self-*determination* that is also, and this is crucial, an instance of self-*differentiation*.

Instead of a succession of rigid “times”, *voir venir* opens up the possibility of a “speculative *suppleness*” (Malabou 2004, 20 [36]). Malabou’s notion of plasticity therefore takes place, as if a game of fractals, at all levels of Hegel’s dialectical process. There is plasticity every time *times* meet. There is therefore no moment in time that one can locate as *an* origin or *a* destination of time. Even absolute time, a time essentially sublated, is a time that can always envisage *another* time. As Malabou observed: “At the stage of Absolute Knowledge [i.e. at the End of History], the time which is sublated... leaves us always time to think what might otherwise

have been.... The question of the wholly other... is always in fact a question about an origin that could have been wholly otherwise” (Malabou 2004, 163 [221]). The issue of the origin or the destination of that which is speculative is therefore impossible to master.

Not unlike Nancy, Malabou concludes that Hegelian dialectics is what marks the difference between endings and openings, a marking that has no proper destination except the *aufhebung* to which it is bound. Speculative thought is plastic rather than “recollective” in the sense that it is a movement that dissolves and restores, fractures and reweaves as it opens to the future. In this way, as there is no centre to structure and no origins to the trace, there is no “end” (*read there is still some future*) to Hegelian metaphysics. As a commentator for the on-line journal *Mul* remarked in a review of Malabou’s work, “Malabou’s plasticity gives the impression that like deconstruction, it can only descend into the hell of absolute relativism. However, this is only an illusion. In reality, the task of plasticity reveals that the abyss can only be a true abyss if it suppresses the absence of abyss that prevents it to drift into itself” (Malabou 2003b). In this way, Malabou demonstrates that the dialectical process is one which, even lost to a deconstructive process still manages to shape a history, therefore the periodisation of what has been sublated.

3. Museums, Plasticity and Temporality

How is one to understand this plastic process in relation to the museum and the way it articulates its time and its future? On the unstable and unidentifiable spacing of temporality explored above (“to-come”), the museum effectively turns dialectical (plastic). It is plastic in the way it brings together, isolates and restores works of art or artefacts within its walls, not in an attempt to provide a final eschatological view of aesthetics, history, or humanity, but in order *to perpetuate and/or dislocate the language that animates it*. In other words, its role is not to provide a teleological destination to these perceptions—the museum as the sum total of human knowledge, but to constantly present and/or challenge the usual perception of artworks and/or artefacts. How is one to understand this process?

By being located at the juncture of endings and openings, the museum is by default involved in a process of constant deferral or differentiation. This process is

that of the movement of the museum itself, the coming and goings of artefacts or art works in or out of the storeroom or gallery space and the process of acquisition, exhibition and research that constitutes the core of its activity. This process has nothing to do with the process of envisaging, realising and concluding projects. This plastic process refers to the unspoken activity of the museum, that which keeps the museum working for no apparent reason than the fact that there is another day in which things will be deferred again. The movement is constant because there is never an end to the process, there will always be tomorrow. Even museums strictly defined by their collections (The John Soane's Museum in London for example) are always engaged in a process of deferral or differentiation that effectively keeps the door open—and this does not include the staging of temporary exhibitions, another process of deferral. Without this process, there would be no museums.

In this way, the museum presents itself through the double bind that informs and justifies its existence—the constant re-hanging of objects *and* the constant advent of something new. As such, it positions itself in relation to both the foreseen (what it can study in the storerooms and/or exhibit in the galleries) and the unforeseen (what it cannot envisage at all, for example, a fire ravaging the collection). The museum therefore positions itself in relation to the future as a predictable entity (its future exhibitions) and the future as radically other. This positioning represents an instance of synthesis (a scheme) that can only be determined in its immediacy, *as* the process is taking place, *as* the decision is made—a moment that can *never* be pinned down with any true precision. The museum articulates its treasures right on this process of deferment, this instantiation of space that brings together, *at once*, the teleological and the contingent, that which curators, critics and viewers expect, but also paradoxically, can never imagine coming (Derrida 1998, 6).

This does not mean that the museum is engaged in a process of eternal rebirth. There is no reference here to a temporality of suspense or to a configuration pregnant with tensions (Déotte 1993; Déotte 1995, 215-232). The museum can no longer be seen as engaged in a temporality of incompleteness, of return, a cyclic temporality that extends across the ages. Rather, both the museum and the artworks are engaged in a plastic process, which has no proper destination except the sublation (*aufhebung*) that animates it. When thinking of an artwork in the museum, one is not thinking of it as engaged in a reliable process where past informs the future, but on the unstable and unidentifiable opening that is immanent to the creation and the experience of these

artworks. If, for example, one studies an artefact in a museum, it is not the past of the object or the context of its making alone that informs our understanding of it, but the plastic process of synthesis of that past and the experience one has of it. Its destination is not a final comprehensive understanding of the artefact, but its *further openness* to another interpretation.

In this way, there can never be a stable ground for the museum's plastic process. This does not mean that works of art or museums can only exist in the hell of absolute and infinite relativism or that meaning cannot be pinned down and is always deferred—as one might erroneously conclude after a casual reading of Derrida's work. The museum's plastic character—and this is where Malabou's post-Derridean work becomes crucial—reveals that the abyss they represent, an abyss where interpretation nosedives at every occasion, is a true abyss. It is a true abyss because it suppresses the absence of abyss that prevents it to drift into itself. In other words, the museum is never in a situation of complete achievement, it is always calling for *another* achievement. There is no rest to the way the museum organises and defines itself. In this way, the dialectical (plastic) process ruling the museum still manages to shape a history, to plasticize itself into the “periodization” of what has been sublated.

What we are left with, is not the museum as a solid entity, located on a prescribed and self-defining site, declaiming or holding forth the truthfulness of its long-established values. The museum is engaged in a temporal performativity of its own; one which can never establish any form of presence. The museum's temporal performativity has nothing to do with its other performativities. The main characteristic of this temporal performativity is that it does not end by producing an event (like the performativity of the curator in charge of an exhibition). The museum's temporal performativity does not imply responsibility. To be faithful to the structure of the expressions “to-come” and *voir venir* (the shaping of what is to come), the only thing that this temporal performativity can do is to *destabilise* all forms of performativity. By being situated at the juncture of endings and openings, by plasticizing itself (mounting / dismounting), the museum is in a permanent state of conjugation, always about to be declined, derived, or inflected.

For this reason, the museum is always in a state of dispute and contestation. The museum is not a monolithic monster that rules like a despot over various constituencies. The museum is not conservative, but argumentative in the sense that it always seeks to challenge that which enters the plastic process—that which it first

rejects as other (site-specificity in the 1960s, for example) and then welcomes as the same (off-site projects today). This explains why it is never possible to actually pin down or determine what museums are because they are always at the centre of their own redefinition, presenting themselves only in their estranged momentariness. The plasticity of the museum represents the manner in which it attempts to sustain itself between its own determination and its annihilation into the universal.

Conclusion

Can the museum therefore think of the future in a way that has nothing to do with succession, periodicity, duration, predictions and prophecies? Can the museum begin to discard its antiquated notions of time as a linear progression through galleries, a march towards further emancipation? For most flea-market museums of the twenty-first century, time *has* to be confused with the future, with what comes towards us, what shapes and misshapes itself at once, what characterizes the non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present (Derrida 1994, xix). In an age of globalisation, the museum can no longer rely on old notions such as prognosis, projection or hope if it wants to make sense of its role and mission for the future. The function of museums should no longer be the pursuit of educational *ends*, but the constant measurement of what constitute an ideal museum. This measurement is not dependent upon the realisation of some future ideal, but upon the performance of the museum today. This measurement of ideality is simply what occurs here and now in the galleries, study areas, offices and storage spaces and this whatever form it takes. This measurement is not conceived as the *evaluation* of a situation in relation to an imagined or real standard or principle, but as the *plasticization* (flexible – explosive) of a world, a world specific to the museum, one that changes every second of time.

Conceived in this way, one can indeed say that there will never be a “better time” for museums, there can only be a plastic act of differentiation, an act that will make a difference, therefore a measurement of ideality. No matter how the museum positions itself in the great swarm of possibilities and dead-ends that constitute our contemporary world, it is always in a position of productivity and of expenditure, over the edge of the abyss of deconstruction, in the hollow of the Deleuzian fold, at the heart of the creation or invention of language. No matter what future is at stake for museums, it will always have to use language to reiterate therefore measure the

museum's *ability to articulate the present* and plasticize itself towards / into the future. In other words, the museum is always amidst plasticity, in a situation of having to acknowledge or resolve a crisis, of engaging itself against or with a hegemonic structure, all in the simple process of inventing new protocols (aesthetic, economic or otherwise) that serve to actualise concepts in the field of the sensible.

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ⁱ In saying that the museum “must” think a finer kind of future, I am not implying that museums should no longer trust accountants, or cultural commentators and their predictions or projections. Practical decisions have to be made and these are always based on a certain prosopopoean vision of the future. When talking of a “finer” kind of future, I am effectively addressing the issue of the museum’s theoretical understanding of time and of the future specifically.

ⁱⁱ A distinction should really be made here between *à-venir*, to-come, advent and event. *À-venir*, as Derrida understand it, is not related to epoch-making arrivals and therefore cannot be translated with ad-vent (*ad-* to and *venire*, come). The expression *à-venir* cannot be translated either with e-vent (*ex-* out, *venire*, come). The event concerns the intimacy between consciousness and time and marks the *condition* of all appearing. The event characterises that which emerges or surges *out of* that which comes. It always-already represents *something* that is *in excess*; *something* that *adds* itself to reality and allows consciousness to perceive it as a phenomenon. An event effectively *produces* meaning and for this reason, belongs exclusively to phenomenology. By contrast, *à-venir*, which I propose to translate into English with either “to-come” or “opening” constitutes that which *provokes* an event, and as such disturbs the very possibility of the event itself.

ⁱⁱⁱ The Hegelian verb *Aufheben*, usually translated with “to sublata”, is used in the sense of “to raise”, “to hold”, “to lift up”. The term “sublation” refers here to the necessary process by which something is never left to rest. For a specific understanding of this term, see Derrida 1982, 43, note 15.

^{iv} Jacques Derrida insisted many times on the importance of the expression “at once”, in the context of an idiom’s ability to conjugate two contradictory meanings *at the same time*. “‘At once’ synchronizes or symmetrizes at the same time, simultaneously, in the Same, two contrary, sometimes two contrary salutations, one that attempts to save, the other that abandons its right to save...” In Derrida 2004a, xxxvi, translation modified. Previously published in French, in Derrida 1998, 35. All subsequent endnotes reference the English version followed by the French version between brackets.

^v There is unfortunately no space here to highlight the problems associated with the translation of this expression. Lisabeth During translated Malabou’s expression with “to see (what is) coming”, see Malabou 2004, xlix. I have chosen not to include this translation here because it not only imposes a reserve “(what is)” which does not exist in the French, it also puts too much emphasis on the (all too human) act of seeing. I develop this problem of translation in a book on the topic of futurity in contemporary French deconstruction to be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2007.