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Marshall, Peter (2025) On ideological and creative forces. Philosophy & Social Criticism.

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On ideological and creative forces

Author: Peter E. Marshall

Abstract

Literature on the relationship between creativity and ideology is comprised of two broad schools of thought: either creativity is the limit to ideology and vice-versa, or creativity is subordinate to ideological systems. These arguments are typically a response to the rejection of the concept of ideology and subsequent valorisation of a politics of creativity by the poststructuralist philosophers of the 20th century. The first school draws on poststructuralist arguments to claim that ideologies are the local limit to political creativity. The second school claims that the poststructuralist ethics of creativity is ideological as it reenforces neoliberalism. However, both positions fail to address the paradox of creativity and ideology. To surpass an ideology, one must create an alternative, but creativity is always shaped by its ideological conditions. Furthermore, ideologies always have the potential to undo themselves, and creativity can always be re-incorporated into the dominant mode of politics. Thus, I draw on the work of Gilles Deleuze, Michel Foucault, and Catherine Malabou to re-conceptualise ideology and address this paradox. I argue that ideological forces produce meaning by creatively returning to old systems of thought. Simultaneously, creative forces can only disrupt meaning if they are conditioned by the ideologies they depart from. Thus, ideology and creativity are best understood as co-constitutive forces that produce meaning. This reconceptualisation allows for a better understanding of ideologies as primarily adaptable systems of thought that avoid being transformed by events and creatively re-enforce particular ways to practice politics.

Keywords

Ideology, creativity, Deleuze, Foucault, Malabou, event

On ideological and creative forces

Introduction

Despite a renaissance in ideology studies, very little attention has been paid to the relationship between ideology and creativity.[1] Work on this relationship is done in the shadow of the poststructuralist critique of the concept of ideology. Poststructuralists argue that the concept of ideology is problematic because it is grounded in the "humanist assumptions that motivated the Enlightenment".[2] Whilst the detail of this critique of the concept of ideology differs with each poststructuralist philosopher,[3] they all broadly argue that truth is a contingent social construction, therefore it makes little sense for critique to uncover a final necessary ontological ground under ideology that

[1] For an overview of this renaissance, see Michael Freeden, *Ideology Studies: New Advances and Interpretations* (London: Routledge, 2022): 78-85 and Marius S. Ostrowski, *Ideology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022), 14.

[2] Siniša Malešević and Iain MacKenzie, "Introduction: de Tracy's legacy" in *Ideology After Poststructuralism* edited by Siniša Malešević and Iain MacKenzie (London: Pluto Press, 2002), 4.

[3] This is a consequence of the 'origins' of different poststructuralisms. See James Willams, *Understanding Poststructuralism* (Chesham: Acumen Publishing, 2005) and Benoît Dillet, "What is Poststructuralism?", *Political Studies Review*, 15 no. 4 (2017): 516-527.

can resolve politics.[4] The claim Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari make early on in *A Thousand Plateaus*, that "There is no ideology and never has been", is the clearest manifestation of this existential challenge to the concept of ideology.[5] The alternatives that poststructuralists provide in place of the politics of truth and ideology critique are similarly numerous, but all centre on creativity and difference.[6] Poststructuralist politics appeal to the difference immanent to the social body to create new meaning that breaks apart dominant political frameworks.

Recent poststructuralist-inspired scholarship has used creativity to motivate ideology critique.[7] Their argument, taken broadly, is that ideologies are local structuring

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[4] This is a rather simplistic reading for the sake of space. Future research needs to provide a much clearer exposition of this problematisation, as the poststructuralist critique is often boiled down to the argument that instead of truth, politics should simply value "diversity for its own sake" (David McLellan, *Ideology*, 2nd edn. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995), 73).

[5] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 3.

[6] On the centrality of difference to poststructuralist projects, see Craig Lundy, "From Structuralism to Poststructuralism" in *The Edinburgh Companian to Poststructuralism* edited by Benoît Dillet, Iain MacKenzie, and Robert Porter (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2013): 69-92. On the centrality of creativity to poststructuralist modes of critique, see Dillet, "What is Poststructuralism?", 522.

[7] For a non-exhaustive list, see Iain MacKenzie, "Events and the Critique of Ideology" in *Ideology After Poststructuralism* edited by Siniša Malešević and Iain MacKenzie

principles that reenforce particular answers to social problems.[8] Thus, to critique ideology one must "create ideas, create problems, create events and… create sense".[9] Other scholars, most notably Slavoj Žižek, argue that the poststructuralist valorisation of creativity simply re-enforces the ideology of neoliberal capitalism.[10] Broadly,

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(London: Pluto Press, 2002): 11-27; Robert Porter "From clichés to slogans: towards a Deleuze-Guattarian critique of ideology", *Social Semiotics*, 20 no.3 (2010): 233-245; Iain MacKenzie and Robert Porter, "Dramatization as method in political theory", *Contemporary Political Theory* 10, no.4 (2011): 482-501; Benoît Dillet, "Deleuze's Transformation of the Ideology-Critique Project: Noology Critique" in *Deleuze and the Passions* edited by Ceciel Meiborg and Sjoerd Van Tuinen (Earth: punctum books, 2016): 125-146; Ben Turner, "Ideology and Post-structuralism after Bernard Stiegler", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 22 no. 1 (2017): 92-110.

[8] For an overview of this argument, see Peter E. Marshall, "Mapping Ideology and Poststructuralism: From negative foundations to politicising thought via contingency and creativity" in *The Routledge Handbook on the Lived Experience of Ideology* edited by James R. Martel, Başak Ertür, Naveed Mansoori, and Connal Parsley (London: Routledge, Forthcoming).

[9] MacKenzie, "Events and the Critique of Ideology", 26.

[10] Slavoj Žižek, *Organs without Bodies: On Deleuze and Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2012), 164-165. See also Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2018), and Mitchell Dean and Daniel Zamora, *The Last Man Takes LSD: Foucault and the End of Revolution* (London: Verso, 2023).

neoliberalism encourages experimentation with different ways of living, which pluralises the ways that markets can commodify subjects. To valorise creativity is to ideologically re-enforce the power of capital. This tension between these two approaches is symptomatic of a paradox in ideology studies. It is both the case that ideology and creativity limit each other *and* that creativity is ideologically driven. This links to another important paradox in ideology studies, that "all views about ideology are themselves ideological".[11] If all creativity is always ideological, then are we not impossibly overwhelmed by the grip of ideology on our lives? However, if we identify creativity as a space beyond ideology, don't we ignore the ideological effects of creativity? Thus, creativity is needed to critique ideology and ideology dampens creativity, but creativity must be ideological and ideology must be creative.

This paper will offer a reconceptualisation of ideology. As I note above, poststructuralists valorise creativity because it manifests the primary, immanent force of difference to politicise and unground meaning. The possibility of meaningful critique requires creativity of some kind: one cannot subvert a dominant ideology without the creation of an alternative. Contemporary politics is ideologically upheld by the paradoxical necessity of both creativity and non-creativity. For ideology studies to remain useful, it must be able to critically engage with the creativity of dominant ideologies *and* produce of new ideologies to creatively arrange politics.

To resolve this paradox, I shall use Foucauldian-Deleuzean political theory to revive the theory of ideology. To do this, I will first outline Deleuze and Michel Foucault's

[11] McLellan, *Ideology*, 2.

theory of the event, which is crucial for any theory of ideology.[12] Contemporary poststructuralist literature conceptualises an event as the escape from existing ideological frameworks and the establishment of new ideologies that limit and structure meaning.[13] In Foucault and Deleuze's work, an event is both the actual moment in space-time that creates new meaning, but also the immanent ungrounding of meaning. An actual event then is recognised as the transformation of meaning in a way that could not have been understood prior to said event. An event undoes old ideologies and hails the creation of new ones.

This poststructuralist argument relies on the claim that an event only actually manifests if the change to meaning is significant: if the transformed meaning could not have been comprehended in the same terms prior to the event. However, the mechanism that determines significance is unclear. If all meaning is first and foremost undone by difference, then what distinguishes the significant and insignificant

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[12] I focus on Foucault and Deleuze in this paper because they affirm an ontology of abundant difference. I agree with Dosse who claims that the pair share the argument that being is fundamentally transformable, which leads to "Two Philosophies of the Event" that complement each other (François Dosse, "Deleuze and Foucault: A Philosophical Friendship" in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, edited by Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 25). Unlike theories of ideology grounded in an ontology of lacking difference, this ontology can surpass the paradox of ideology and creativity.

[13] See MacKenzie, "Idea, Event, Ideology" and Dillet, "Deleuze's Transformation of the Ideology-Critique Project: Noology Critique".

occurrence? To help answer this, I turn to Catherine Malabou's work on the concept of plasticity to explain how pre-evental meaning affects the significance of the event. Plasticity refers to the capacity of forms to shape and be shaped. To recognise an event as significant is to rely on a recognition by plastic forms that they have transformed. This demonstrates that significance is only possible if difference is situated in affective plastic forms, which allows me to re-conceptualise the relationship between creativity and the ideological.

Instead of conceptualising the creativity of the event as a break from established meaning, I argue it must be grounded by an ideological force. The ideological produces a 'return' to the plastic meaning that it abundantly escapes. Creative forces produce 'escapes' for existing plastic meaning, but this is only possible because it is conditioned by the meaning that it escapes. Thus, I claim that an actual event can only be produced by the tension between the ontological event of ideological and creative forces constituting each other to establish a break in meaning. The ideological produces the continuity that situates meaning and the creative produces a discontinuity that forms new meaning. Neither is possible without the other. Ideological and creative forces are best understood as that which produces the ground for, and after, the event. The paradox of ideology and creativity can only be resolved if creativity is immanent to the ideological, and the ideological immanent to the creative.

The Event and the event

An event refers to the moment that transforms the expression of the "states of affairs *in terms not given by* those states of affairs": an event is the production of the

capacity to recognise that an event has taken place.[14] Thus, this transformation produces a "paradoxical politics by which new and unforeseen things surge into being… unsettling an existing constellation of established identities".[15] One of Deleuze's critiques of Sigmund Freud illuminates this. Freud claims that phantasy (the imagined fulfilment of repressed wishes) is created at the event of childhood, a precursor to the event of puberty. Deleuze's problem with this understanding of desire as produced by sequential events is that the "childhood event is not one of the two real series but, rather, the dark precursor which establishes communication between the basic series".[16] Contra Freud, Deleuze argues that events are defined by their 'dark precursors', origins that produce a resemblance between events. This origin is only created after the event arranges meaning, defining the series of events "in advance but in reverse".[17]

Using Freud's example, the childhood event transforms how the child-subject understands itself in a way that it could not have before these experiences. The event of puberty is conditioned by this transformation of meaning and produces a relationship between the child and the teenager events. However, this is not the distribution of experience "within the same subject".[18] Instead of a sequential distinct *series* within a

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[14] MacKenzie, "Events and the Critique of Ideology", 20.

[15] William E. Connolly, *Pluralism* (London: Duke University Press, 2005), 121.

[16] Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patten, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019), 158.

[17] *Ibid*, 152.

[18] *Ibid*, 158.

self, events *arrange* a series of transformations to allow the self to understand itself differently. The event creates a new origin of the self. The Freudian 'phantasy formed by childhood' can only identify childhood as the beginning after the puberty-event. The event produces its own origin and emphasises "the way it appears suddenly as something new, as a beginning".[19] Events reassemble the way that meaning is produced, such that the "split in time is therefore also its [own] assembly".[20] As a result, one cannot "retrace one's path and find a point of convergence" as any series is constituted by chaos: each series "develops itself, but *in* its difference from the other series which it implicates and which implicate it".[21] The event is difference that transforms meaning by arranging abundant nonsense into something sense-able: the production of a new dark precursor, a new origin.[22]

Thus, I rely on a two-fold conception of the event: first as the plural, local, practiced instances of transformation and second as the immanent ungrounding which conditions these transformations. This is not the difference between an ontic and

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[19] Dosse, "Deleuze and Foucault", 25.

[20] James Williams, "Difference and Repetition" in *The Cambridge Companion to Deleuze*, edited by Daniel W. Smith and Henry Somers-Hall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 35.

[21] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 157.

[22] Sense in Deleuze's work refers to the folding of "differences together such that they never simply correspond to or oppose one another" so that incongruent difference is 'made sense of' (Nathan Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, (London: Continuum Publishing, 2012), 24).

ontological event, but between an actual and virtual event.[23] Each constitutes the other: the immanent event provides "a univocal sense for the diverse events that occur in time", and those diverse events affect the immanent event.[24] The virtuality of the immanent event allows us to understand the event as the play of difference in itself.

Foucault notes that this conceptualisation of the event avoids "trying to do for the event what was previously done with the concept of structure": it does not identify a final event or an origin of evental meaning.[25] Foucault identifies the importance of the event in the role of the genealogy. For Foucault, there can be no subject that is "transcendental… [or has an] empty sameness throughout the course of history".[26] A genealogy challenges the claim that concepts such as "love, conscience, [and] instincts" are without history and records "the singularity of events outside of any monotonous finality".[27] The genealogy is the practice of upending the notion of an origin

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[23] The virtual is an immanent plane of difference, "strictly a part of the real object" which is also a "complete determination" of the actual object (Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 272). See also Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 37-40.

[24] Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 50.

[25] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977,* edited by Colin Gordon, trans. Colin Gordon, Leo Marshall, John Mepham, and Kate Soper, (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 114.

[26] *Ibid*, 117.

[27] Michel Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology. Essential Works Volume 2*, edited by James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley others (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 369.

and rather looking to create a 'history' of difference-in-itself.[28] It identifies the accidents that "gave birth to those things which continue to exist and have value for us".[29] Genealogy thus engages with both practiced and immanent events. The event of a new practice isn't simply the culmination of the practices that came before it, but rather, the practice is "accompanied by a nonhistorical and untimely" abundance.[30] Any discourse produced by a practiced event is always conditioned by the immanent event. Discontinuity structures continuity, and continuities make sense of discontinuity. All "things and events have… an event-ness that ensures they are never the same as anything else, that they are always repetitions of difference".[31]

This is the disjunctive synthesis that Deleuze constructs between *Chronos* and *Aiōn*.[32] *Chronos,* particular time that "fixes things and people to some degree", is conditioned by the paradoxical *Aiōn*, where "something incorporeal and ineffectuable exceeds and opens onto the indefinite time of the event".[33] *Chronos* is "inseparable from the bodies which filled it out entirely as causes and matter… limited and infinite…

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[28] See C. Colwell, "Foucault and Deleuze: Series, Event, Genealogy", *Theory and Event*, 1 no. 2 (1997).

[29] Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, 374.

[30] Nathan Widder, *Reflection on Time and Politics*, (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008), 120.

[31] Widder, *Political Theory After Deleuze*, 51

[32] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Constantin V. Boundas, Mark Lester and Charles J. Stivale, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023).

[33] Dosse, "Deleuze and Foucault", 27.

inseparable from circularity and its accidents", *Aiōn* is "populated by effects which haunt it without ever filling it up… unlimited, the way that future and past are unlimited, and finite like the instant… [it] stretches out in a straight limitless… Already passed and eternally yet to come".[34] *Aiōn* is "the Event for all events", the border between differentiated beings.[35] This sense-making creates a present, it "constitutes the internal structure of the moment itself".[36] Difference is never resolved, only organised abundantly. The meaning produced by an event (*Chronos*) is abundantly different to itself: it is organised around the possibility that it could become something else (*Aiōn*). The actual event is the production of a new sense, but this "sense is also nonsense, expressing a difference whose only "identity" can be as that which differs from itself".[37]

An event can be distinguished from a non-event "in terms of the significance it has for… agents and subjects".[38] This is not a theory of events as a subjectivity, as the significance of the event is determined by "*a turning point* in the *material constitution*" of things.[39] Occurrences may actualise "events virtually embedded within" the social-

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[34] Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 170.

[35] *Ibid*, 66.

[36] Widder, *Reflection on Time and Politics*, 75.

[37] *Ibid*, 109.

[38] Iain MacKenzie, "What is a Political Event?", *Theory & Event*, 11 no. 3, (2008). For context, MacKenzie's paper extends this concept of the event to examine what significantly transforms political meaning.

[39] *Ibid*. 'Things' here are the corporal identities that are constituted and practiced by force relations.

political milieu, but these merely demonstrate that "events had already taken place".[40] A non-event is thus any "occurrence that is assigned meaning which merely accepts, or possibly reinforces, established conceptions".[41] An actualisation is not the completion of virtual difference but a contingent intensity. Significance "can always be counter-actualised in different ways, the pure event within the occurrence is always plural because its significance can only ever be actualised partially".[42]

I argue there are two interconnected issues with this theory of the significant actualised event. First, this theory needs to be able to identify the subject of transformed meaning. Second, it needs to explain how the transformation of meaning is 'measured'. If the events that conditioned non-events can be recognised, then this recognition presupposes a subject who can identify already-actualised events. What decides when an occurrence transforms the self-subjectivity of those subject to it? The creative event (*Aiōn*) is immanent to all production, but not all production is a significant actualised event (*Chronos*). The central problem with creativity manifests here, as the concept of significance needs to be developed to theorise how events are situated. If the creative event is immanent to everything, if all meaning is created by an escape from meaning, then it is not clear when an occurrence is not creative. This theory of the event must be entangled with particular and pre-eventual concepts used to identify it as an event by subjects. The transformation expressed by events relies on particular subjects to conceptualise the event. The production of significant events

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[40] *Ibid*.

[41] *Ibid*.

[42] *Ibid*.

must be more than just creativity, otherwise *Chronos* conceptually collapses into *Aiōn* as the particular is continually differentiated. If this were the case, then ideology would again be a meaningless term of analysis always being undone by *Aiōn*.

Plasticity and the event

The subject of the event cannot exist prior to the event which produces it, as the event produces its dark precursor. However, if the subject only exists after the event, then they have come from nowhere. An affective continuity can only be established after the event, but this continuity nevertheless needs to affect the structure of the event. The event is significant for a fundamentally contingent subject to that which transforms and creates it, which Malabou's work on plasticity helps to clarify. Whilst Malabou has engaged with Foucault and Deleuze's work on numerous occasions, she is critical of Foucauldian and Deleuzean philosophy. An example relevant to this paper is in *Ontology of the Accident*, where Malabou rejects both Deleuze's argument that metamorphosis is the repetition of form and his use of elasticity in reading Spinoza.[43] However, I bring her into conversation with the pair as the situated contingent-materiality of plasticity provides a way to explain the significance of events, and thus

[43] Catherine Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident: An Essay on Destructive Plasticity*, trans. Caroline Shread, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2021), 16-17 and 35-36. See also Catherine Malabou, *The New Wounded: From Neurosis to Brain Damage*, trans. Steven Miller (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) and Catherine Malabou, "One Life Only: Biological Resistance, Political Resistance", *Critical Enquiry*, trans. Caroline Shread, 42 no.3 (2016), 429-438.

can begin to explain the relationship between ideology and creativity. In a sense then, I mutate Malabou's argument to construct a Foucauldian-Deleuzean concept of ideology.

Malabou's concept of plasticity developed from her interest in the (dis-)continuity that happens during transformative events, or "that which remains or survives in the wake of deconstruction".[44] Malabou develops the concept of plasticity by examining different fields of research (neuroscience, biogenetics, and others) to explore how each demonstrate the contingent necessity of form.[45] Thus, the concept of plasticity is immanent to itself. Plasticity is "the form that it creates, as it creates itself through these forms": it is an ontological metaphor that is both created by and creates its subject matter.[46] Malabou's conceptualisation of plasticity is heavily influenced by her engagement with the neuroscientific understanding of the brain as an organ that both receives form and forms itself. The brain is not simply a network of neural relays that passively accepts inputs, but is "modifiable, "formable," and formative at the same time".[47] The brain forms, rewires, repairs, and destroys neuronal and synaptic

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[44] Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 84.

[45] On the importance of the relationship between necessity and contingency, see Ben Turner, "Science and Ideology Revisited: Necessity, Contingency and the Critique of Ideologies in Meillassoux and Malabou", *Theory and Event*, 21 no.4 (2018), 884.

[46] Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity: The Promise of Explosion*, edited by Tyler M. Williams, various trans., (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022), 315.

[47] Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?,* trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 5.

processes. Plasticity is thus "not only the creator and receiver of form but also an agency of disobedience": it is an explanation for how forms are able to retain *and* undermine themselves.[48] The brain is composed of neurons and synaptic links that change in a process known as synaptic efficacy. If neuronal paths and their synaptic links are traversed, these paths and links are strengthened, or they are weakened if they are not traversed. The form of the brain is always-already being made, adapting "to include modifications, to receive shocks, and to create [itself] anew".[49] Malabou argues against an essential ontology of the brain, a static brain-form, but argues the brain has a contingent necessity of form. The brain is repeatedly (re-)made within and without. The brain is biological, but crucially it is also ideological, political, social, and so on. Non-neuronal practices affect and are affected by the brain. One navigates ideologies, politics, and social arrangements, which affects the plastic form of the brain. The plasticity of the brain, in turn, affects ideological thinking, political systems, and social hierarchies.

To explain how this plasticity relates to the event, Malabou turns to developments in epigenetics, the study of "the mechanisms that modify the function of genes by activating or deactivating them".[50] Traditional geneticists understand

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[48] Malabou, *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, 6.

[49] *Ibid*, 7.

[50] Malabou, *Plasticity*, 162. For more on Malabou's engagement with epigenetics, see Catherine Malabou, *Before Tomorrow: Epigenesis and Rationality*, trans. Caroline Shread (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2016); Malabou, *Plasticity*, 253-262, and Christopher

genomes as containing genes that produce instructions such that cells can form the entity they constitute. However, since the early 2000s, gene sequencing research has shown that "genes only make up 5 per cent of the genome".[51] Genome formation is not merely the application of DNA coding, but an epigenetic process of modification. Malabou takes this in conjunction with the etymology of epigenesis, something above genesis but not after it. Malabou exposits this via the geological usage of the prefix 'epi-', as in epicentre. Epigenesis isn't "an extension that comes 'over' something else", rather it is "a *surface effect*".[52] Epigenesis isn't the search for an origin-point, but rather it looks to "where [something] *occurs*, at the contact point between" the surface and the movements below with no reference to "a hidden ground".[53]

Epigenesis is an event, in that the 'ground' can only be understood after epigenetic production, a dark precursor. Epigenesis produces meaning by lying at "the medium point between pure repetition of the archaic and the dissolution of the archaic in a constant dialectical sublation of the past".[54] A metaphorical-ontological plasticity is one that is epigenetic. Instead of truth under plasticity, forms are epigenetic effects between their particular coding *and* the transformation of this coding. To understand reality as plastic is to treat form as that which *makes itself* different, transforming what

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Watkin, *French Philosophy Today: New Figures of the Human in Badiou, Meillassoux, Malabou, Serres and Latour* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018): 110-140.

[51] Malabou, *Plasticity*, 162.

[52] *Ibid*, 160.

[53] *Ibid*.

[54] *Ibid*, 161.

it understands as outside of itself. A plastic reality does not have a predetermined origin, nor is it pure contingency. Rather, it is the contingent epigenetic transformation of necessary form.

Plasticity is not just a description of gradual transformation or creation, it also describes the radical destruction of form.[55] If neuroscientific plasticity is traditionally understood as the accumulative progression of identity, that which "constructs, sculpts and models", then destructive plasticity is its "sombre double".[56] Destructive plasticity splits an identity into "a new, unprecedented persona', unrecognisable from the prior identity".[57] Malabou's point is that plasticity isn't necessarily positive and creative, it can be destructive too: an imposition of "a new form on [the] old form, without mediation or transition or glue or accountability".[58] The event of destructive plasticity radically transforms meaning through the loss of subjecthood, a sudden destructive lesion between the old and new self.

This concept of plasticity transforms the problem with ideology, creativity, and the significant event. Malabou's work provides a way to conceptualise how 'pre-eventual' forces shape the significance of the event. An event is the transformation of plastic matter, either productively or destructively. In the productive sense, an event is

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[55] The example commonly used to explain Malabou's work on destructive plasticity is Alzheimer's disease. See Malabou, *The New Wounded*; James, *The New French Philosophy*, 105, and Watkin, *French Philosophy Today*, 126-127.

[56] James, *The New French Philosophy*, 105.

[57] Malabou, *Ontology of the Accident*, 1.

[58] *Ibid*, 6.

the creation of new meaning reliant on a situated necessary epigenetic form. In the destructive sense, an event is the "sudden rupture" of an existing form and the creation of new meaning defined by its erased past.[59] In both instances, forms are necessarily contingent but also contingently necessary.[60] The event is the production of new meaning, but this new meaning is only possible because of the particular contingent-necessary structures that produce it.[61] Plasticity provides the event of difference with a situatedness to explain the continuity of discontinuity.

Ideological and creative forces

Taking Malabou's theory of plasticity forward, we can conceptualise events (*Chronos*) as the epigenetic constitution of a subject, necessarily-contingently constituted by an immanent event that establishes a new origin. If the subject of the event is understood as contingent plastic matter pre-event, then when they are arranged by the event they can identify their contingently necessary self in sequence post-event. A metaphor I shall take forward to illuminate this relationship between plasticity and the significant event is the echo. An echo sounds 'the same' as the voice which spoke it, and one can have a 'conversation' with it, but it speaks differently such

[59] *Ibid*, 41.

[60] See Turner, "Science and Ideology Revisited".

[61] Or, to use Deleuze and Guattari's turn of phrase, "a pure nomad does not exist: there is always and already an encampment" (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 148).

that the conversation couldn't have existed before its creation. Both the sound waves and the conversationalist are transformed by the echo. The pre-evental matter cannot be returned to, but the plasticity of the soundwave-form leaves echoes in the shape of the new transformed matter. Soundwaves are transformed by the event but are still echoing something.

Whilst Malabou's work explains how significance is made necessary, I argue this definition of plastic matter risks being understood as ontologically neutral and equivocal. Why would, to continue the metaphor, the difference of the soundwave become significant post-wall-reverberation, rather than when it reaches an arbitrary distance from the speaker? It is here that we return to the paradox of creativity. If creativity is the fundamental ungrounding of meaning (the *Aiōn* Event), then even the instigation of the uncreative (a repetition of a sound-wave) is itself differential.[62] What allows plasticity to be subject to a significant event? It is evident that the creative Event (*Aiōn*) instigates both productive and destructive plasticity: the ungrounding of meaning simultaneously produces new forms and destroys old ones.[63] How, then, can we distinguish between destructive and productive plasticity? The answer is that the Event (*Aiōn*) is comprised of two co-constitutive forces: creativity and ideology.

Instead of disentangling the two processes of creativity and the ideological, I conceptualise them as the different-same plastic process: the ideological and creativity are merging forces of production. The ideological is not a denial of creativity, as the poststructuralist accounts that I identified in the introduction claim. Instead, it is

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[62] See Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*.

[63] Deleuze, *Logic of* Sense, 172.

more akin to power as conceptualised by Foucault; a positive force that arranges meaning. Foucault and Deleuze argue that power comprises "every relation between forces".[64] Force relations refer to the agonistic relationships of difference that comprise and produce meaning.[65] The "Emergence" of social cleavages "is thus the entry of forces; it is their eruption, the leap from the wings to center stage".[66] The victory of one force does not eradicate the other, but it transforms both forces into new ones. If we are to avoid a reliance on an oppositional or subordinate logic, then the relationship between creativity and ideology must be understood as forces that produce meaning by co-constituting each other.

Just as creativity does, I argue that ideological forces bring the future to face them, as the metaphor of the echo can explain. The conversationalist who calls out in the cave can hear the echo that speaks back. These echoed sound waves are recognised *after* the event of their transformation, and only then can the conversationalist be amused at the sound of their voice reverberating around them. However, it is not possible to imagine the echo as simply the creation of a new form in terms that are divorced from the pre-event. If the conversationalist were confused at this new voice, for example if they called back 'who's there?', this lack of understanding is produced in (discontinuous) continuity. The conversationalist assumes the presence

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[64] Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Seán Hand (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019), 59.

[65] On Foucault's concept of force, see Kojiro Fujita, "Force and Knowledge: Foucault's Reading of Nietzsche", *Foucault Studies*, 16 (2013): 116-133.

[66] Foucault, *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology,* 377.

of someone who can respond to their question, thus returning (through difference) to a particular linguistic idea of conversation. Creativity necessarily relies on continuity. Creativity has an ideological force immanent to it that is contingent and necessary as part of plastic transformation.

As Foucault asks of power, I ask if ideology "were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it"?[67] Creativity does not simply supersede 'dogmatic ideological formations that limit thought' after the event. The ideological-soundwave-form is not displaced by the creation of the echo. Rather, the produced significant event is the result of a contest of plastically merging ideological and creative forces. For the echo to be significant, a creative-ideological force must produce a distinction between systems of meaning over an ideological-creative force that produces meaning as repetition. Neither creativity nor the ideological escape production 'untainted': the ideological is immanent to creativity, and creativity to the ideological. This requires that the ideological is not understood as a secondary ontological untruth but as a force that primarily produces meaning. Thus, ideological production always has the potential to be highly creative. The production of an event is a disjunction of ideological and creative forces, the transformational (creative) repetition (ideological) of meaning. The two are functionally different within production but are nevertheless inseparable components of it. The ideological is the force that returns to (an old) form and creativity is the force that diverges from (the old) form. I shall now take each in turn.

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[67] Michel Foucault, *The Will to Knowledge: History of Sexuality Volume 1*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1998), 119.

I conceptualise as ideological force as one that desires the reproduction of a particular plastic form and exercises power such that said plastic form 'returns' to a desired 'self-form'.[68] Ideological production desires continuity and exercises power to this effect, differentially producing a continuity of meaning. This production relies on a unification of the post- and pre- occurrence to create meaning in a way that returns to the prior form. Or, the ideological produces meaning as if there were no event (*Aiōn*). This then produces limits to the possibility of any particular event (*Chronos*). The event (*Aiōn*) produces new meaning, but this is understood as continuity. The differential production of form is primary: soundwaves are first organised such that they can be understood as in continuity with each other before the limits of an echo is identified. This speaks to the immanence of creativity in the ideological. Reproduction creates this continuity differently before it induces the limits that arise from this production. Within events, the force of the ideological novelly transforms limitations to maintain meaning differently. Identities are structured and difference is denied only *after* a form is produced by difference.

I conceptualise a creative force as one that desires the discontinuity of plastic reality. It exercises power to push beyond the limits of form: the plastic form desires to no longer be what it was. Creativity is the desiring of the event (*Aiōn*), it produces an explosive force that transforms the plastic form into something unrecognisable, both productively and destructively. Creativity is thus the force that actualises events (*Chronos*). The production of the event actualises incompossible differences into

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[68] The use of power and desire here is in the Foucauldian/ Deleuzean sense. See Foucault, *Will to Knowledge* and Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*.

something new, transforming old forms, fracturing previous forms of existence. However, this creativity is immanently structured by ideological forces. To escape limitations that claim certainty over difference requires a break from particular forms. This requires a recognition of how forms operate as affective structures to break away from them, an identification of the form that creativity escapes. The escape is haunted by the form: 'escape from what; escape how?'. Creativity is the production of possibilities to surpass limits, and the ideological can only produce these limits if it is creative. Creativity can only surpass limits if it is conditioned by the ideological force it seeks to surpass, and so on. Hence my claim that creativity is immanent to the ideological, and the ideological immanent to the creative. Ideological production differentially returns to establish limits to meaning by changing it.

Is productive ideology politically useful?

At this point, two crucial objections to my argument must be raised. First, is it not the case that this theory of ideology erases the possibility of a meaningful political account of ideology? Consider how others have critiqued Foucault's argument about the immanence of power to the social body.[69] If power constitutes all social relationships - if power has no outside - then political thought that attempts to think about power is *de facto* meaningless.[70] Any challenge to power is itself constituted by

[69] Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, esp. Part 4.

[70] See Gayatri C. Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?", *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, edited by Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988): 271-313; Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, Or, The*

power, thus one cannot escape it. The same point could equally be made of my theory of ideological production. If all meaning is ideological, then the concept of ideology loses its political relevance outside of a post-positivist cartography of thought.[71] Second, doesn't this theory of ideology fall into the trap that all critical accounts of ideology are vulnerable to: it is a theory of ideology that does not account for itself? If all production is ideological, so too is the production of my concept of the ideological. Both objections return me to the other important paradox in ideology studies, that "all views about ideology are themselves ideological", concerned with the ontologising of a particular subject beyond ideology. [72] Thus, I address them by reflecting on how this theory relates to the ontological.

Force relations and plasticity are both ontological concepts, but only insofar as they relate to a differential production of meaning: they are contingent *and* necessary. Power relations emerge from everywhere, but that is because power is exercised "*within* the social body".[73] Unlike the universal form of the human (humanism) or the

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Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (London: Verso, 1992); Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity: Twelve Lectures*, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Oxford, Polity Press, 1998); Siniša Malešević, "Rehabilitating Ideology After Poststructuralism" in *Ideology After Poststructuralism* edited by Siniša Malešević and Iain MacKenzie (London: Pluto Press, 2002): 87-110.

[71] See Michael Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory: A Conceptual Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and Freeden, *Ideology Studies*.

[72] McLellan, *Ideology*, 2.

[73] Foucault, *Power/Knowledge*, 39.

structure (structuralism), power refers to “matrices of transformations” that produce “constant modifications” and “continual shifts”.[74] Power relations are networks of shifting agonistic force relations that constitute the way meaning is made, distributed, and understood, but are also structured by said meaning. As Deleuze rightly claims, “power is not a form” but instead there are “categories of power”.[75] Disciplinary practices are one example of how power is practiced, but these practices don’t have a monopoly on power. Power relations are force relations of abundant difference that produce identities, which then structure how difference undermines meaning. Power puts “into operation differences that are, at the same time, its conditions and its results”.[76]

This is the reason that I read Malabou with Deleuze and Foucault, as she argues that plasticity is conceptually “fragile” and thus will surpass itself: it has been produced in a particular moment by looking at particular practices.[77] An event could transform plasticity and produce a new concept that explains plastic production. Upon such an event, it will be clear how such a concept both ‘has always been there’ (the immanent event) and ‘could only be produced now’ (plastic matter). The relationship between plasticity and the event is “a process of production”, where production is

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[74] Foucault, *Will to Knowledge*, 99.

[75] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 59.

[76] Michel Foucault, *Power. Essential Works Volume 3*, edited by James Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley and others, (London: Penguin Books, 2020), 344.

[77] Malabou, *Plasticity*, 312.

never constant or the same.[78] Production is an immanent cycle of "producer-product", where the flows from machines being interrupted changes said machines.[79] Desiring machines are comprised "of heterogenous parts", both directing and being affected by flows of desire.[80] The ethical question that derives from Deleuze and Guattari's theory of desire then is not ask what something is "in principle (their essence), but by what they can do, what they are capable of".[81] Technologies of power and desiring machines are plastic: they have affective form that immanently structures force relations that are fundamentally abundantly contingent. The arrangement of difference by desire or power is always practiced differently.

I extend this plasticity to ideological and creative productive forces, which are immanently shaped by and shape the same-different forces that constitute them. Meaning is the consequence of self-affecting forces that produce situated, affective, and transformative forms. Necessity is already-always plastically transforming, and the situated form ideologically-creatively affects this process. Ideological-creative production is ontological in the sense that it is plastic. Ideological forces produce all meaning, but this production transforms and is transformed by local forms. Production

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[78] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 3.

[79] *Ibid*, 5.

[80] Widder, *Political Theory after Deleuze*, 108.

[81] Daniel W. Smith, "The doctrine of univocity: Deleuze's ontology of immanence", *Deleuze and Religion* edited by Mary Bryden (London: Routledge, 2001), 178.

is ontological only in the sense that it refers to a differential (thus non-universal) production of meaning; production is constituted by univocal difference.[82]

This is evident in how I reconsider the production of significance in the event. Events (*Chronos*) are the actualisation of the virtual event (*Aiōn*), the immanent problematisation of meaning.[83] However, as I identify above, the significance of the event (*Aiōn*) determines whether an event (*Chronos*) becomes actualised. This significance is determined by the plastic-matter that is constituted by the event (*Chronos*) thus the actualisation of an event requires ideological-creative production. The plastic machine must produce a discontinuity in relation to a continuity for an event (*Chronos*) to be significant. Thus, it is crucial to differentiate between *an ideology-machine* and *ideological production*. The former is a particular plastic-machine that affects and is affected by the latter's plastic continuity-discontinuity to produce meaning. Earlier poststructuralist theories argue that ideologies are fixed solutions to

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[82] See Nathan Widder "the univocity of substance and the formal distinction of attributes: the role of duns scotus in deleuze's reading of spinoza", *parrhesia*, 33 (2020): 150-176.

[83] See Michel Foucault, *The Use of Pleasure: The History of Sexuality Volume 2*, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1992), 11; Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 258-259, and Colin Koopman "Critical Problematization" in *Between Deleuze and Foucault*, edited by Nicolae Morar, Thomas Nail, and Daniel W. Smith (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2016), 89.

problems.[84] However, to avoid the claim that limits are the origin of meaning,[85] and in lieu of this plastic 'travel' between meaning pre- and post-event, this relationship between problems and ideology requires adaption. An ideology is a plastic machine produced by events, plugged into the problem that it creatively-ideologically produces as significant. Thus, different ideologies always exercise ideological-creative production differently. Events (*Chronos*) can always actualise to produce new problems and new ideology-machines that answer them.

If an event (*Chronos*), E2, transforms meaning to produce a problem, P2, then this event can only be significant if the ideology-machine creates this problem. The ideology machine transforms the network of ideological-creative forces to constitute itself in relation to this new problem. As this production is ideological, the problem is the result of a transformation, but transformation as understood as situated in continuity. The ideology machine is transformed to produce a series of problems that explain the cohesion of difference. If the ideology machine does not create a problem after an event (*Chronos*), then it ideologically reproduces P1, despite the event (*Aiōn*) of creativity. The ideology-machine reproduces P1 as the problem that it addresses differently. Ideology-machines produce meaning as significant when they arrange the discontinuity of continuity to produce a new problem. This is how ideological continuity

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[84] See MacKenzie, "Idea, Event, Ideology" and Dillet, "Deleuze's Transformation of the Ideology-Critique Project: Noology Critique".

[85] See Foucault, *Power/*Knowledge, 118-119 and Gilles Deleuze (2007) *Two Regimes of Madness: Texts and Interviews 1975-1995*, edited by David Lapoujade, trans. Ames Hodges and Mike Taormina, (New York: Semiotext(e), 2007), 125.

is possible despite the continual transformation that it undergoes by the event (*Aiōn*) or by actualised events (*Chronos*), E2, E3, etc., that transform meaning for other ideology machines.[86] To understand ideologies as answers to problems can only be satisfactory if these answers are plastic machines that produce the continuity-discontinuity of meaning.

Ideology-machines produce the ideological differently, and this conditions how the ideological shapes ideology-machines. An ideology-machine exercises an ideological force that tries to escape transformation by the event, and in doing so creates the conditions for the recognition of the event. The ideological creates new-same ideologies differently. In this sense, an ideological concept of the ideological (and the event) is unavoidable. I also produce an ideology of the ideological, however I do so in a way that can account for the contingent forces which condition this thinking of the ideological.[87] Whilst I do rely on an ontology of ideological production, the plasticity of both the ideological and ideologies is key. I do not identify a final origin of the ideological, which is a force of this difference-in-itself. Rather, I speak to the necessarily contingent and contingently necessary ideological force that produces meaning. The ideological force is constituted by its particularity, and particular ideologies are constituted by differential creative and ideological forces.

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[86] E1, E2, E3, etc. are not denotive of a 'real' chronological series outside of their arrangement by an event.

[87] Dillet discusses the importance of reflecting on "the technical conditionality of our modes of thinking and being" (Benoît Dillet, "For a Critique of Noology", *Parallax*, 23 no. 2 (2017), 179).

As creativity is a force within production, the actualisation of difference requires a transformation of the subject and how it becomes subjectivised. Thus, ideology-subjects are contingent and always open to change. The subject returns here, not as a universal identity, but as a post-eventual ideology-machine. Particularity is not measurable but instead refers to how a subject is arranged within a particular social milieu. The subject, as I use it here, is the way that plastic forms become experiential. Instead of an *a priori* subject of ideology, the subject is a contingent term to describe the way that ideology-machines ideologically relate to production. For production to instigate a significant event, the ideological and creative must produce a subject of the significant event. The plastic relationship between them requires that subjective meaning is transformed but also retains a notion of continuity. The transformation of the plastic form produces local affective forms, and these forms can only be understood because of their eventual production.

How, then, can ideological production be politically useful? The solution often utilised in other quasi-ontological ideological approaches is to rely on an 'outside' to ideology. For example, Žižek and Ernesto Laclau rely on ontological lack as the grounds upon which ideology critique begins.[88] For others, such as Gayatri Spivak, ideology naturalises certain identities and practices and erases others, with Spivak's example being the ideological invisiblisation of Indian woman.[89] However, as is apparent, my

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[88] Slavoj Žižek, The Sublime Object of Ideology (London: Verso, 2008) and Ernesto Laclau "Ideology and post-Marxism", *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11 no. 2 (2006): 103-114.

[89] Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak?".

concept of the creative ideological cannot rely on an outside in the same way. As creativity is immanent to it, the classic 'outside' is inside the ideological. However, as ideology-machines produce and are produced by creative-ideological forces, they have an 'outside', other ideology-machines.[90]

Whilst there is not space to completely address this problem, we must recognise that a politics which simply valorises contingency or creativity cannot significantly critique ideology. Instead, critical scholars must reflect on how they transmit power and desire, how they creatively and ideologically produce meaning. Thus, any meaningful critique will be situated in a political project grounded in the capacity to challenge to its own ideological reproductions: the cultivation of a critical-ideology-machine. These critical-machines will produce ideological justifications for political action that are grounded in the possibility of the transformation of this justification.

One example of this approach can be seen in Malabou's turn to anarchism. In her search for a politics of plasticity, Malabou argues that any attempt to produce fixed values is like building "walls against the ocean", always-already transformed by what it

[90] This is not to rely on a philosophy of interiority as seen in Deleuze and Guattari's critique of Hegel (Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Graham Burchell and Hugh Tomlinson (London: Verso, 2009), 95). Subjects and forces here are plastic, the untimeliness of events is conditioned by abundant ideological and creative production, which is in turn conditioned by the plastic forms they relate to.

tries to shape.[91] Any politics that derive from plasticity need to deal with the self-contradiction that it will be challenged by the necessity of its own "mutable character".[92] Anarchist thought faces a similar problem as it idealises the principle of politics without hierarchy. This undermines any normative schema for political practice, which would hierarchise one set of principles over all others. To resolve this, anarchists incorporate the necessity of transformation into their politics and demonstrate that it is "possible to invent political forms that can be transformed".[93] Anarchists develop a set of principles that are designed to undermine themselves. This can be seen in Malabou's exposition of Peter Kropotkin's theory of mutual aid.[94] To simplify, mutual aid is a theory and practice that derives from and describes the simultaneously biological but also political practice of living organisms providing support for those outside of particular social groupings.[95] This is a necessary-

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[91] Catherine Malabou "What Should We Do with Plasticity? An Interview with Catherine Malabou", Benjamin Dalton, *Paragraph*, 42 no.2 (2019): 246.

[92] *Ibid*.

[93] Malabou, *Plasticity*, 318.

[94] See Catherine Malabou "Politics of Plasticity: Cooperation without Chains" in Unchaining Solidarity: On Mutual Aid and Anarchism with Catherine Malabou edited by Dan Swain, Petr Urban, Catherine Malabou, and Petr Kouba (London: Roman & Littlefield, 2021): 15-28.

[95] Biological in the sense that this practice underlies all inter-group interactions but political in the sense that this practice is historically and geographically contingent,

contingent consequence of the immanent difference that underlies the relationship between and within social bodies. Mutual aid transforms social relationships to creatively reproduce systems of support across and within said bodies.[96] Anarchism appeals to this ideological-creative-biological principle to justify its politics.

Malabou subsequently draws on mutual aid to critique two oppositional schools of thought: bioessentialism and poststructuralist informed post-Marxism. Where bioessentialism argues that the subject is entirely derived from apolitical biological functions, the post-Marxist argues that the subject is a construct of political socio-linguistic operations. However, Malabou identifies that both rely on the notion that meaning is articulated through a logic of chaining: either a biological or socio-linguistic chain determines the identity of the subject.[97] The post-Marxist may note that their chain is the arrangement of negative difference, such that A is not B, is not C, and so on. Unlike bioessentialists, who claim necessary positive identities, signified meaning is fundamentally contingent on the arrangement and articulation of this difference. However, Malabou challenges the notion that 'objects' either have a necessary character or that they cannot exist outside of their discursive articulation. Mutual aid

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e.g., mutual aid existed between humans and wolves and between different groups of humans. One system of mutual aid can be radically different from another.

[96] Malabou speaks to the importance of memory in this mutual aid. To simplify greatly, the plastic form being epigenetic means it retains traces of the prior forms even though it cannot return to them. This tracing is what instigates mutual aid, as the social body 'remembers' its prior form.

[97] Malabou "Politics of Plasticity", 22-23.

demonstrates that social bodies are fundamentally contingent, but this contingency is a consequence of a necessary, pre-discursive, political-biological process of differentiation, connection, and alliance.

Anarchism thus provides "a *historicization of the biological*": a politics grounded in a biological imperative that manifests epigenetically (and thus differently) in contingent political circumstances.[98] Anarchist ideology-machines must (re)produce mutual aid as a creative onto-political condition of sociality to make this critique. Mutual aid is ontological because it is differential and creative, which demonstrates the contingency of the ideology-machine that produces it. Thus, the force of anarchist critique is found in the ideological reproduction of mutual aid as a (contingently) necessary ground of politics: critique is justified because mutual aid simultaneously justifies particular politics and demonstrates that this politics is open to transformation. It is not my claim that Malabou's anarchist politics are *the* answer of how to critique ideological production, but they are *an* answer. They demonstrate that political-ethical question for a critique of ideology (via creativity): which ideology of creativity can best ground its (self-) critical practice?

The future of ideology analysis

To conclude, I would offer two areas of scholarship that this redefinition of ideology can both problematise and develop. The first is the dominance of post-positivist topological ideology analysis. Developed primarily by Michael Freeden, topological ideology analysis traces the "internal structures" of ideology and identifies

[98] *Ibid,* 26.

the “relationships among salient ideological families, as well as hybrids” to understand how ideology “both reflects and shapes” reality.[99] Ideologies aren’t dogmatic structures, but a plurality of historically and geographically situated “combination[s] and arrangement[s] of ideas”.[100] However, this topological ideology analysis is limited by its reliance on a structuralist framework. Ideologies are argued to *have* a core set of ideas and periphery adaptations. Systems of thought outside of this framework are designated as ‘thin’ ideologies: limited to core concepts without a broader cohesive political framework.[101] However, I would argue this demonstrates how the abundant difference immanent to the topological concepts of ideology undermines this theory. This is why contemporary neoliberal politicians, such as Keir Starmer, *appear* to be devoid of ideological thought. Pragmatism, an apparently non-ideological principle, is constituted by an immanent ideological reproduction of neoliberal practices that co-opt dissent. A reliance on a trans-historical structure to ideology limits the study of this kind of adaptive political thought where creative forces immanently re-enforce, and are immanently re-enforced by, ideological production.

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[99] Michael Freeden, “Editorial”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 1 no. 1 (1996), 8. See also Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*.

[100] Ostrowski, *Ideology*, 47.

[101] For example, see Ben Stanley, “The thin ideology of populism”, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 13 no.1 (2008): 95-110 and Rob Manwaring, Grant Duncan, and Charlie Lees, ‘‘Thin labourism’: Ideological and policy comparisons between the Australian, British, and New Zealand labour parties”, *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 26 no.1 (2024): 39-61.

The second is the importance of critique in political thought. As I noted earlier, Foucault and Deleuze's ideology-free philosophy has been criticised by a plethora of thinkers for seeming to erase the possibility of political critique. In their philosophies of power and desire as productive forces of production, they flatten difference out to a plane of difference immanent to all meaning. Everything is a power or desiring relationship. Thus, Foucault and Deleuze are accused of producing a "total system or logic" where the "theorist wins… by constructing an increasingly closed and terrifying machine" that means "the critical capacity of his work is… paralyzed" and any move towards social transformation is "increasingly perceived as vain and trivial in the face of the model itself.[102] Or, as Jürgen Habermas asks, "why fight at all" if we cannot escape our political system?[103] The impossibility of a neutral space from which to develop critique leads to dire political consequences. As Bruno Latour identifies, we can see that climate scepticism draws on poststructuralist discourses about the social construction of truth. The valorisation of a critical philosophy of difference means there "is no sure ground even for criticism".[104] Everything is cynically critiqued, nothing can be defended, and conspiracy theories become the basis of politics. Critique has run out of steam for Latour because it no longer provides a grounded direction of political travel. What is there to do when critique offers nothing for political progress? Clearly, for my conceptualisation of the creative-ideological forces of production to have utility,

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[102] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 5-6.

[103] Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 284.

[104] Bruno Latour, "Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern", *Critical Inquiry*, 30 no. 2 (2004), 227.

it must be able to address this problem. Whilst there is not space to develop this in detail, it seems to me that Latour's argument rests on criticism being a literary practice of critique, and as such is ideologically produced within particular spaces. Thus, critique runs out of steam when it predominantly manifests in journal articles, grant applications, and Twitter spats.

In this preliminary outline of a new concept of ideology after poststructuralism, it is evident how the field of ideology studies should change in the future. This picture of the ideological and creativity as co-constitutive forces of production is just the first step in developing a broader theory of ideology. The preliminary identification of 'actual' ideologies as unstable production machines needs further expansion and development. However, like the concept of plasticity, this will have to be done by identifying the ideological in practice *and* allowing practice to shape how the ideological is understood.

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