

Is (It) Time to Leave Eternity Behind? Rethinking Bildung's Implicit Temporality

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Motivated by Gadamer's identification of Bildung's 'Vorbild-Bildung-Nachbild' (model-process-result) structure, a historical tracing of the Christian messianic heritage in Bildung is conducted. As Bildung grows into an educational concept with global aspirations, this heritage might prove a substantial theoretical obstacle. As an alternative to the Christian messianic conception of time, Crockett and Malabou's concept 'plastic time' is presented. Whereas Christian messianic time collects its drive from the eternal which is (not) to come, plastic time collects its drive from the 'synaptic gap' instead, the creative and constructive space located and organised in the human body. Crockett and Malabou argue that plastic time might allow the deconstruction of Christianity, and, this article suggests, consequently also of Bildung. A formulation of Bildung that can go beyond Western thinking would be a shift that might have consequences for education generally.

RETHINKING BILDUNG'S IMPLICIT TEMPORALITY

A certain model of time appears implicit in the German educational concept Bildung. This model might be called Christian messianic thinking, and thus ties Bildung it to a specific metaphysical history, the present article suggests. The aim is to contour that model and present an alternative called 'plastic time'. Elaborated from Catherine Malabou's ontological principle 'plasticity', 'plastic time' appears as a model of time that might challenge teleological thinking in education.

As Malabou's philosophy is not yet widespread in philosophy of education, a few words on her main concept plasticity before we go further are in order. As part of what might be called the post-linguistic materialist turn in French philosophy (James, 2012), Malabou establishes a theory of form on the basis of the concept 'plasticity'. In Malabou's dressing, this concept represents the meeting point between form's capacity for change, resistance and accident. Plasticity understands form as neither totally rigid nor totally fluid, but as the dialectical intermediary between these two extremes. Plasticity centres on form's (temporal) difference from itself and not form's

difference between from other forms (Malabou, 2005). Plasticity is in other words an ontological principle focusing on development and change.

Reading Hegel, Malabou (2005) identifies and elaborates ‘plasticity’ into a lens through which to read Hegel’s oeuvre. From there, Malabou continues to develop plasticity by allowing her to counter his critics Heidegger, Kojève, Kant and others, informed by deconstructionist theory and neuroscience, Malabou presents plasticity as the material and materialising process where creation, resistance and accident come together (Malabou, 2008, 2010, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2016a, 2016b; Peim, 2017, 2020). It is the ‘void’ that allows the unexpected, the intended and the given, to give form to form (Malabou, 2015a).

While this ‘void’ is relatively new to educational theory, some thinkers have approached plasticity already. Bojesen (2015) argues that plasticity’s emphasis on changeability opens up for a view on education that extends beyond childhood into all stages of life, and outlines a concept of re-education appropriate for all ages. He insists that our capacity for plasticity should instil in us a certain responsibility in the teacher but also the learner. Ulmer (2015) has elaborated an approach to educational policy and methodology incorporating Malabou’s ‘plastic reading’, a creative, material and materialising hermeneutic. According to this hermeneutic, structures – be they policy, concretes or persons – can be shaped and reshaped, but never return to their original shape. Rathe (2020) argues that plasticity’s material connotations can provide the grounds for a rethought biological conceptualisation of rationality.

Peim (2020) argues that plasticity forces us to face the ontology of life itself in educational thinking. This approach lets us understand education in terms of biopower and simultaneously dismiss education’s ‘redemptive’ aspirations. Oral (2020) puts plasticity’s emphasis on changeability together with Buddhist thinking, arguing that plasticity gives us the apparatus to challenge conceptualisations of subjectivity, (non-)humanity and variations thereof. Kouppanou (2020) conducts a plastic reading on Malabou’s examination of Heidegger and extends this to a rethought conceptualisation of metaphoricality and childhood. While these studies are diverse to the extreme, they convene on a single principle: plasticity as the void that allows for change even in formerly thought static entities.

One example of a formerly thought static entity is found in Malabou’s likening of the ‘I’ to the brain. While the brain had previously been thought as an unchanging machine, neuroscience reveals that the brain is continually changing (Malabou, 2008). For Malabou, the ‘I’ is nothing but ‘[a] brain that changes itself. That is exactly what “I” am’ (Malabou, 2010, p. 82). The prevalence of neurobiological metaphor in our age is one reason why Malabou chose this particular word as her main concept. In a similar reasoning to Derrida’s (1998, p. 10 ff.) when he ‘enlarged’ writing to an ontological principle, Malabou identifies plasticity as an already prevalent metaphor in neuroscience and other fields (Malabou, 2005, p. 192; Malabou, 2007, 2010). Asking why this metaphor, with all its potential philosophical salience, remains unexplored in Continental philosophy, Malabou ‘enlarges’ plasticity to a ‘motor scheme’ (Malabou, 2010, p. 12 ff.).

Motor schemes are models or metaphors that resonate in the *geist* of our age and give shape to our thinking. Tying together language, thinking, culture, imagery, imaginaries, mood and materiality, Malabou defines motor schemes thus:

A motor scheme, the pure image of a thought – plasticity, time, writing – is a type of tool capable of garnering the greatest quantity of energy and information in the text of an epoch. It gathers and develops the meanings and tendencies that impregnate the culture at a given moment as *floating images*, which constitute, both vaguely and definitely, a material 'atmosphere' or *Stimmung*. (Malabou, 2010, p. 13)

In certain ways, Bildung clearly resembles a motor scheme. It relates to our outlook on epistemology, thinking, power and individuality (Masschelein and Ricken, 2003), and its content is under constant negotiation (Gustavsson, 2014). Horlacher writes that 'Bildung [is] something important and significant; it is on everyone's lips, but no one knows what it really means' (Horlacher, 2004, p. 410). Even so, Bildung is an explicit part of schooling and school policy around the world (Ministry of Education and Research (MER), 2019; Sjöström et al., 2017). Bildung, then, seems to be a concept tightly linked to culture and the thinking of culture, to capture and develop educational thinking. It appears that vague and definite moods, and other material instantiations are gathered in, and emanate from it. It is a motor scheme.

As an educational concept, Bildung incorporates culture, aesthetics, self-cultivation, political awareness and engagement (Gadamer, 2013; Løvlie and Standish, 2002). Its conceptual heritage is Christian, and it is being used around the world in increasingly global conceptualisations (Gustavsson, 2014; Horlacher, 2016; Sjöström et al., 2017; Sørensen, 2015). The concept is often promoted as an alternative to instrumental education (Tröhler, 2012). Bildung can be found as an explicit goal for education in the Norwegian national curriculum (MER, 2019). The concept lends itself to educational thinking and practice that emphasises self-development and self-reflection, with the aim to break up preconceptions and stiffened categories for thinking (Gadamer, 2013). Furthermore, it establishes the individual as embedded in a cultural and social context (Løvlie, 2006; Sørensen, 2015; Vásquez-Levy, 2002).

This article begins from two interconnected premises. The first is that that Bildung can be thought of as a motor scheme. As this premise establishes Bildung as a Malabouian semiotic instantiation, it implies the second premise: that Bildung is fundamentally plastic. It is a concept under continual formation and transformation, unable and unwilling to permanently settle. It reflects the educational thinking of our age, but developing it demands revealing its tacit presuppositions, i.e. its undiscussed metaphorical content.

The present article suggests that one such presupposition is a Christian understanding of time. This must be faced if Bildung is to be understood in a cosmopolitan, global or ecological way, an ambition often found in

contemporary theorists (Biesta, 2002; Bohlin, 2013; Gustavsson, 2014; Taylor, 2017). The point is not to dismiss the concept's Christian legacy, but to expose it to contribute to the concept's capacity for global perspectivation, examination and use. Contrary to a common trend in *Bildung* research (Tyson, 2016, p. 361), the aim for this article is not to arrive at normative conclusions but to focus on the aforementioned point of contention to raise the possibility for new questions and new educational thinking with other implications. This article should in other words be read as an attempt to set the scene for new questions and new thinking in *Bildung* and education.

In the following section, what will be called the 'Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild structure' will be identified as an underlying premise of temporality in the thinking of *Bildung*. This premise, it will be suggested, has a Christian messianic basis, which ties *Bildung* to what might be called Western history and thinking. Then, a historical tracing of what could be seen as the messianic metaphorical heritage in *Bildung* will be drawn. In the subsequent part, that heritage will be contrasted with a 'plastic' way of thinking time, developed by Crockett and Malabou (2010). In the last part, some new questions and suggestions for further research in educational thinking will be presented.

VORBILD–BILDUNG–NACHBILD

The Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild structure refers to the relationship between *Vorbild*, i.e. the model or ideal; *Bildung*, the process by which the ideal is sought; and *Nachbild*, the resulting image. This tripartite structure is discussed by Hans-Georg Gadamer in *Truth and Method*:

the word *Bildung* evokes the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself. (...) in *Bildung* there is *Bild*. The idea of 'form' lacks the mysterious ambiguity of *Bild*, which comprehends both *Nachbild* (image, copy) and *Vorbild* (model). (...) In accordance with the frequent transition from becoming to being, *Bildung* (...) describes more the result of the process of becoming than the process itself. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 10)

In Gadamer's presentation, *Bildung* is what contains, relates and overarches *Vorbild* and *Nachbild*. Sven Erik Nordenbo clarifies the relation between the result and the process thus:

[T]he fact that somebody or something becomes an image assumes, in a certain sense, that somebody or something is depicted. [*Bildung*] does not, therefore, refer primarily to somebody or something that does something to somebody or something, but to an image – a model – *of which* somebody or something is to become an image or model. (Nordenbo, 2002, p. 341)

According to Gadamer and Nordenbo, the ideal (which resides in the past) and resulting image (which is projected into the future but is only ever realised as past) meet in the process of *Bildung* – which happens

continually. Both writers agree that the subject's active engagement is required in 'the standard German understanding of the concept as an educational idea' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 10; Nordenbo, 2002, p. 341). It seems that a linear temporal phenomenology is assumed in order to make sense of the Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild structure: the Vorbild must be formulated before it is thought to come to achievement. Thus it resides in the past and the future simultaneously, as it refers to a projected future which was formulated in the past, before they all come together in eternity.

The Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild structure might be read as concurrent with Christian messianism in the sense that it seems to depend on a future that is (not) to come. In short, this article presents the argument that the structure Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild depends on what will be called a Christian model of time. Derrida (2006) has challenged and reformulated this as 'messianicity without a messiah'. Derrida cautiously considers the notion that 'the messianic appeal belongs properly to a universal structure, to that irreducible movement of the historical opening to the future, therefore to experience itself and to its language (expectation, promise, commitment to the event of what is coming, imminence, urgency (...))' (Derrida, 2006, p. 210). The notion that 'the [Christian] messianic' remains in Bildung is the starting point for this article. Let us move to the Christian heritage of the temporality of Bildung.

Bildung's Christian Heritage

In order to be able to discuss Bildung's implicit temporality, it is useful to try to establish a meaningful point of reference. It is of course not possible to distil an element or a temporality that is common to all theories of Bildung or its heritage. Therefore, this article will centre on a point of concurrence between Christian thinking and the thinking of Bildung. As there are many variants of Christianity and Bildung thinking, this article will not be able to represent them all. Instead, it will focus on what might be called Christian messianic thinking, a common model of Christian temporality.

This model implies linearity from Creation until Salvation, when radical change occurs. Christian messianism is often seen as an integral part of Christianity's history as its radical break with Judaism (Barua, 2011, p. 155; Robbins, 2007, pp. 10–11). Even in radical and liberal theology this appears to be the case. Hans Küng argues, radically, that Christianity is only one among many possible expressions of God: 'Christianity appears in world history just as relative as all other religions' (Centore, 1992, p. 400). Küng writes:

As far as the future goes, only one thing is certain: At the end of both human life and the course of the world Buddhism and Hinduism will no longer be there, nor will Islam nor Judaism. Indeed, in the end Christianity will not be there either. In the end no religion will be left standing, but the one Inexpressible, to whom all religions are oriented, whom Christians will only then completely recognize – when

the imperfect gives way before the perfect – even as they themselves are recognized: *the* truth face to face. (Küng, 1988, p. 255)

The pattern remains: At the end of time, time and thinking will not end, but bring about a new reality. Time gives way to salvation, which gives way to ‘*the* truth’. This minimal version will be called ‘Christian temporality’ in this article.

The claim has been made that Western philosophy in all shapes remains concurrent with this dimension of Christianity (Centore, 1992; Toulmin, 1990). The theologian Clayton Crockett and the philosopher Catherine Malabou argue that

after deconstructing western metaphysics and onto-theology, one sees that the most pervasive, profound and problematic spirit of what we call the West is named Christianity, and the need for its deconstruction coincides with what has been called ‘the return of religion’ in contemporary society and thought. (Crockett & Malabou, 2010, p. 16)

The consequence, they argue, is that deconstruction itself needs to confront itself with its Christian heritage, specifically the structure mentioned above. Even in Derrida’s (2006) later work, where ‘messianicity without a messiah’ is developed, the general structure of radical change on a distant or never-occurring temporal ‘horizon’ is retained as an indispensable feature. The structure of linear time running from Creation to Salvation appears to Crockett and Malabou as the seemingly unshakeable foundation and drive of deconstruction, Christianity and Western thinking in general. Therefore, it needs to be challenged to afford deconstruction, Christianity and the West to move beyond themselves. Philosophy needs to point out aporetic ‘knots’ that can be untied to allow deconstruction to happen. The authors argue that the attempt to separate the West and Christianity will remain unsuccessful as long as the Christian temporal element in Western thinking is left uncriticised (Crockett and Malabou, 2010). If it is the case that the concept *Bildung* was established and developed within the framework of Christian temporality, and remains within it, it is worth scrutinising this point to open up the concept for a post-Christian, post-Western discussion.

In what follows, I aim to show that the concept *Bildung* remains within the logic of Christian temporality. This implies that the concept remains geographically and politically Western, impeding *Bildung*’s capacity for renewal and moving beyond itself. A way of solving this might be to criticise its Christian temporal logic.

A History of Bildung

Any remaining connotation of representation, creation and the giving of shape contained in the word *Bildung* has a long etymological history. In medieval times in Germany, *Bildung* simply meant the shape, form or appearance of a human being (Hermeling, 2003, p. 168), quite literally – for instance, their face (Nordenbo, 2002, p. 342). The word was related to the word *Bild*, which was used for ‘image’ and holy pictures. Today, *Bild* can

be translated to 'image, picture or metaphor'. In the Middle ages, there was a strong relation between *Bild* and *bilden*, which means 'to build, to shape, to form and to create' in a Biblical sense: In Genesis 1, 27, God creates man in his image (*Bild*) (Hermeling, 2003, p. 168). As we shall see in the following, *Bildung* has historically been closely tied to Christianity. It is the suggestion of this article that these ties remain today.

The mystics in the 13th century were the first to associate *Bildung* with creation and rebirth, mirroring their image of God being reborn in the soul of humans. As God gave birth to himself in Adam, God can be born in us. But after the Fall, there is a gap between God and the humans which has to be transversed if God is to be reborn in the soul. The process to achieve this is tied to a Neo-Platonist tradition which teaches that the soul is capable of receiving both sensual and spiritual impressions. The mystics thought that the only way for the soul to take on the form of God was to free itself from any sensual impressions, by what was called *entbilden*. 'This act of rebirth of God and man alike, the mystical process of *inbilden* (imprinting), *überbilden* (transforming) or *bildwerdung* (becoming the image) reverses the separation of God and human being' (Hermeling, 2003, p. 169). To Meister Eckhart (1260–1328), *Bildung* was a continual shaping and reshaping of the soul that was a result of God's working on the individual. The ultimate hope was that the soul, by divine control, would eventually take on the form of God (Welz, 2011, p. 83).

Gadamer (2013) argues that around the end of the 18th century, 'between Kant and Hegel', *Bildung* underwent a transformation. *Bildung* differentiated itself from *Kultur* into an inwardly oriented form of self-cultivation with clear conceptual undertones of religiosity. This differentiation evoked

the ancient mystical tradition according to which man carries in his soul the image of God, after whom he is fashioned, and which man must cultivate in himself. (Gadamer, 2013, p. 10)

This cultivation is not simply about self-forming or self-formation, as *Bildung* evokes a richer heritage through its etymology. As we have seen, *Bildung* has the 'ambiguity of *Bild*' and recalls both *Vorbild* and *Nachbild*, in contrast with the terms 'form' or 'formation'. In this way, *Bildung* connotes more strongly 'the result of the process of becoming than the process itself' (Gadamer, 2013, p. 10).

During this time, the poet Friedrich Gottlieb Klopstock's (1724–1803) was one of the writers responsible for a religious elaboration of *Bildung* (Gadamer, 2013, p. 9). He presented the artist as the 'god-like' creator and shaper of art, and the lover as giving form to the heart of the beloved. Entering deeper into a synergy between the material and the immaterial, *Bildung* during Klopstock's time became the 'realization of the genuine self' as well as the unification with God. In the words of Friedrich Schlegel, a Klopstock contemporary, 'Becoming God, being human, educating (*bilden*) oneself are expressions that mean exactly the same'. From then on, the association of *Bildung* with self-development remained (Hermeling, 2003, p. 171).

The idea that *Geist* represented the essential medium for thinking, the idea of the collective soul of a society, was pursued by Georg F. W. Hegel (1770–1831). In Susanne Hermeling's interpretation, Hegel proposes a successive development towards the unification of Geist with God, through stages and by the propulsion provided by dialectical doubt. Hermeling suggests his view on history could be said to follow the same pattern: Geist, in the form of The Holy Ghost's apparition, realises itself in the Geist of a people (a *Volksgeist*), which then represents the stage which the development of the world's Geist (*Weltgeist*) has reached. To Hegel, this shows how Geist's development is reflected in secular history (Hermeling, 2003, p. 172).

Since Hegel is such an important figure in the history of Bildung, I will pause here for a moment. Hegel's view on Bildung has been described as a process by which one 'overcome[s] nature through the inculcation of beliefs, norms, and customs, which thereby become second nature' (Odenstedt, 2008, p. 559). This inculcation should happen early in life and prepare the child for formal education, which then may give rise to a third nature of 'acquired Bildung'. When this has happened, the individual 'no longer simply takes the validity and significance of his [sic] culture for granted through the resources already available to it, he [sic] achieves reconciliation (Versöhnung) with it through the adoption of a more reflective, universal point of view' (Odenstedt, 2008, p. 560). At this point, a more active and deliberate self-engendering takes place.

This self-engendering is a dialectical process where the subject encounters contradictions, gradually overcomes and incorporates them, and then run into new contradictions. In the passage 'Lordship and Bondage' from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Hegel, 1977, p. 111 ff.), the dialectic is explained thus:

Self-consciousness is faced by another self-consciousness; it has come *out of itself*. This has a twofold significance: first, it has lost itself, for it finds itself as an *other* being; secondly, in doing so it has superseded the other, for it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self. (...) It must supersede this otherness of itself. This is the supersession of the first ambiguity, and is therefore itself a second ambiguity. (...) This ambiguous supersession of its ambiguous otherness is equally an ambiguous return *into itself*. (Hegel, 1977, p. 111)

The realisation that there is an *other*, someone who is like the self-consciousness but is another, is a contradiction and condition for self-consciousness. It has to acknowledge that there is another, and that the other is the same. In the other, self-consciousness recognises themselves and that they, too, are other to the other. The self-consciousness must resolve this contradiction, and can only do so by reconfiguring its conception of itself, i.e. the 'ambiguous return *into itself*'. Odenstedt structures Hegel's description of this process as three stages:

- i. unreflected unity with one's natural state, and a corresponding neglect of otherness;
- ii. alienation from one's natural state induced by otherness;
- iii. reflective reconciliation between self and other (Odenstedt, 2008, p. 562).

In Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the process continues until the last stage, Absolute Knowing. Here, the Spirit's absolute recognition of itself and its relation to God is posited as the goal:

The goal, Absolute Knowing, or Spirit that knows itself as Spirit, has for its path the recollection of the Spirits as they are in themselves and as they accomplish the organization of their realm. Their preservation, regarded from the side of their free existence appearing in the form of contingency, is History; but regarded from the side of their [philosophically] comprehended organization, it is the phenomenology: the two together, comprehended History, form alike the inwardizing and the Calvary of absolute Spirit, the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne, without which he would be lifeless and alone. Only *from the chalice of this realm of spirits/foams forth for Him his own infinitude*. (Hegel, 1977, p. 493)

By positing the Spirit's insight into 'the actuality, truth, and certainty of his throne' as the end point for the development of Spirit, Hegel's Bildung seems both in letter and in temporal structure faithful to the messianic temporality I have outlined above.¹

If we understand Absolute Knowing as the redemptive moment of the development of the phenomenology of spirit, then (comprehended) History appears as the way to salvation. Kojève (1969, pp. 105, 109) suggests that the dialectic can be illustrated by the shape of a closed circle – the Spirit's search for Absolute Knowing closing the circle by dissolving the future into eternity:

This absolute Knowledge, being the *last* moment of Time—that is, a moment without a *Future*—is no longer a temporal moment. If absolute Knowledge *comes into being* in Time or, better yet, as Time or History, Knowledge that *has come into being* is no longer temporal or historical: it is *eternal*, or, if you will, it is *Eternity* revealed to itself. (Kojève, 1969, pp. 148–149)

Kojève's Hegel, it appears, sees no possibility for a future after Absolute Knowing, as time transforms from temporal moments into eternity. History describes the line between the beginning and the end, which is eternity, revealed to itself, ending time by transforming it (see also Malabou, 2005, pp. 4–7).

The difference between History and comprehended History appears simply as a difference of vantage points: History as the retrospective view on what has happened, and comprehended History as seen from beyond the end of time, from the point of view of the eternal. Hegel has since been criticised for this exact point, that his 'explication of the genuine concept

of being (...) is nothing less than leaving time behind on the road to spirit, which is eternal' (Heidegger, 1994, p. 147). By positing a beginning and an end, Hegel's concept of *Bildung* appears to have an implicit messianic structure in that it follows a necessary path and can only really be understood from the viewpoint of eternity (Kojève, 1969, p. 108).

A Hegel contemporary, Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1834) distanced himself from a strictly religious concept of *Bildung* and entered into a more humanistically oriented religious mode of thinking. He saw *Bildung* as 'the true purpose of human existence' (Hermeling, 2003, p. 174). Humboldt's concept of *Bildung* considered the freedom to pursue one's interests the 'ultimate task of our existence':

It is the ultimate task of our existence to achieve as much substance as possible for the concept of humanity in our person, both during the span of our life and beyond it, through the traces we leave by means of our vital activity. This can be fulfilled only by the linking of the self to the world to achieve the most general, most animated, and most unrestrained interplay. (Humboldt, 2000, p. 58)

For Humboldt, *Bildung* was not about engaging with society, learning a profession, or being reunited with God, but *Selbstbildung* – the development of the self. As Humboldt's concept of *Bildung* relied on having the choice to follow one's interests freely, without the intervention from the state or professional life, the working class was effectively excluded. *Bildung* was in his elaboration a non-egalitarian, individualistic concept, tied strongly to a form of higher education which could provide the freedom necessary for such self-developmental pursuits (Horlacher, 2016, p. 61). Moreover, Humboldt's *Bildung* coincided with a post-enlightenment transition from the idea of 'nobility of birth' to 'nobility of merit', strengthening the notion that *Bildung* had to do with the individual's self-development and not only the relation to God, learning, or society (Hermeling, 2003, p. 174). Humboldt's concept of *Bildung* has thus played an important ideological role for education, particularly for higher education, and continues to do so today (Horlacher, 2016, p. 125).

After Humboldt, *Bildung*'s reliance on individual freedom and subsequent attachment to higher education remained. The emphasis on self-development, however, seemed to strengthen the relation between *Bildung* and aestheticism at the cost of social responsibility and moralism. In the period leading up to the Great War, *Bildung* appeared more and more as a nationalist and exclusionary concept. Powerful voices saw German culture – validated, upheld and refined by *Bildung* – as superior to and unappreciated by other cultures (Tröhler, 2012, p. 156). In the wake of the Second World War, it became evident that even well-educated (*gebildete*) people were implicated in atrocities on behalf of Nazism (Adorno, 2003; Fosslund, 2012; Hermeling, 2003). The distance between the ideals concocted in the ivory towers and the rest of society was therefore an important theme in the May 1968 protests (Hermeling, 2003, p. 177). Effectively, the time had

come for the concept *Bildung* to recover from a nationalist and supremacist concept into something else.

In the following decades, the philosophical educational discourse in Germany took a two-pronged shape. The 'empirical-analyticals' were those who had a more practical view on education. To them, *Bildung* in the traditional sense was not useful in the technological race, and as it could not resist fascism it should simply be left aside. On the other hand, those who proffered a 'critical-emancipatory science of education' shared the critique of the ideology of the concept and particularly that *Bildung* both in theory and practice did little to improve social conditions. But they were unwilling to objectivise the individual like the empirical-analytical approach demanded and therefore set out to reform the concept, especially its societally redemptive element (Hermeling, 2003, pp. 177–178).

In 'the context of postmodern discourse' of the 1980s, the essence of the human and thus the entire foundation for humanist thinking was put under scrutiny (Hermeling, 2003, p. 180). Lyotard's (1984) *The Postmodern Condition* contested central elements of *Bildung*, such as 'the abandonment of a teleological, normative approach and unity ...; the abandonment of a general, unified subject ...; the recognition of the thought that human reason is unstable and that therefore a complete understanding of reality is impossible' (Hermeling, 2003, p. 180). All of these critical elements seemed to produce their opposites: a radical plurality of norms, the supremely singular individual and a plural approach to ontology and epistemology.

However, these critiques were pursued only by a minority of theorists. Hermeling mentions Niklas Luhmann, who elaborated an anti-humanist, system theory based *Bildung* where the *telos* is the process of learning itself instead of the realisation of the properly human. As a consequence, he replaces the word 'human' itself with the word 'autopoietic systems', meaning systems that have self-sustainment as their only purpose (Hermeling, 2003, p. 180).

Luhmann's *Bildung* was criticised for being a 'subjectivism without subject' (Merz, 1997, in Hermeling, 2003, p. 180). Luhmann's system theory posits a synchronic principle for his concept of time: 'everything that happens happens simultaneously', and by extension, 'everything that happens does so for the first and last time'. According to Luhmann, the basic unit in system theory is not the subject, but the system,² which continually and simultaneously interacts with other systems (Luhmann, 1993, p. 34). An implication of this view is that everything that exists will change simultaneously, and none of the elements will be eternal, external or relative to the process of change (Luhmann, 1993, p. 35). Another implication is, following Merz above, that subjective agency seems to disappear in a mess of ever-changing systems. This would constitute a radical move away from former theorists' focus on self-development and creation.

Bildung, the Divine, and Metaphors of Time

Insofar as the Vorbild–*Bildung*–Nachbild structure has inherited its structure from the motive of reunification with the divine in the eternal, we could

perhaps also assume that it relies on a type of constancy that functions as the condition of possibility of change, i.e. the eternal. Considering the eternal as something ‘beyond time’ means extending the spatial metaphor to at least two spaces: The space that time provides, the ‘inside’ of time, and the space which surrounds time, the ‘outside’ of time, i.e. the eternal. The inside of time is where everything happens, and the outside of time is what allows us to examine any temporal aspect but the very present. In order to observe the past and the future, we are bound to remove ourselves from the present, insofar as we are construing the present as part of the unified distinction between past and future.³ Construing time in this way implies seeing the past, the present and the future as aspects of the same, as one ‘thing’ graspable by our mind.

We are bound to think of time as something that we can grasp with our understanding. To continue the spatial metaphor, time as a concept is ‘smaller’ than us because it is part of us; of how we think and act. While we conceptualise time to extend beyond our being, this conceptualisation inevitably takes place ‘within’ our understanding (cf. Gabriel, 2015). Heidegger contends that all philosophical thought is concerned with this conundrum: ‘[p]hilosophy is the theoretical conceptual interpretation of being, of being’s structure and its possibilities. Philosophy is ontological’ (Heidegger, 1988, p. 11). Whatever is beyond our grasp, is ‘nothing’ – the anxiety-inducing and productive realisation that we can only interpret what we know to exist. We know the ‘nothing’ as what exceeds our understanding, and this constantly comes back to haunt us (Heidegger, 2011). Thinking is driven by our recognition that outside our knowledge, the ‘nothing’ remains to be explored.

Ignoring this, we risk leaving education, *Bildung* and perhaps time itself as something smaller than us; unexplored. This might conceivably amount to a closing down of the active, creative and open aspect that is so often desired in *Bildung* and education in general, because it presupposes a beginning, a process and an end. Assuming that *Bildung* is a motor scheme, its temporal aspect should not be considered above or outside scrutiny. That said, I am not certain that a *radical* alternative is possible – how, after all, would a concept of *Bildung* that was somehow ‘bigger’ than thinking, look or function? Where would it reside outside of thinking itself? Can we posit an alternative by challenging the implicit temporal linearity of *Bildung*?

Bildung’s *ideal* (*Bild*) is formulated in the past but is supposed to (not) come to fruition the future. The *process* (*Bildung*) depends on a starting point and direction which was decided in the past, executed in the present and has its goal in the future. The *result* (*Nachbild*) must be formulated in the present, referred to during the process, but can only be experienced once it has occurred, i.e. passed. The relation between past, present and future can only be inferred from an assumed third position, i.e. a position that can oversee all three times simultaneously – the eternal. This logic remains religious, local and restricting. If we consider *Vorbild*–*Bildung*–*Nachbild* an *aporia*, and its resistance as the heritage of Christian temporality, investigating this might open up for new questions and problems in the thinking of education and *Bildung*.

Two problems. Going back to the initial problematic, I first assume that Bildung can be thought of as a 'motor scheme'. This implies that Bildung can be investigated in such a fashion that the concept's underlying structures can be brought forth and scrutinised. I suggest that Bildung's structure Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild is one such structure, which implies that our thinking of Bildung seems to be stuck in a Christian messianic model of time. Second, I suggest that if Bildung is to be meaningful outside of a Western context, either as an educational ideal or an educational concept that can be drawn upon for theoretical purposes outside of Bildung thinking, the temporal thinking implicit to Bildung should be exposed. In doing so, inherent contradictions and incoherencies are allowed to come to light, a move which in itself is a philosophical intervention (Malabou, 2007). But I wish to go one step further and bring together contradictions and incoherencies with an alternative way of thinking. The alternative is a 'plastic' view on time and will be elaborated in the following section.

Malabou's Plasticity

Plasticity appears primarily as an ontological model of change (Malabou, 2005, 2007, 2011b, 2012a, 2012c, 2016b). In order to clarify what Malabou's model of change looks like and how it might affect the underlying assumptions of the idea of Bildung, I will in what follows give a short overview over Malabou's inspirations and how plasticity has developed over the course of her oeuvre. We will see that Malabou developed the concept from her engagement with Hegel and his multiple uses of the term in his *Aesthetics* (Hegel, 1998; Malabou, 2005). Her book is titled *The Future of Hegel*, in the explicitly affirmative, seeking to reread Hegel in a way to argue that his philosophy and status as a thinker are not things of the past (Malabou, 2005, p. 1).

As we have seen, Heidegger considered Hegel a teleological thinker who left 'time behind on the road to spirit, which is eternal' (Heidegger, 1994, p. 147). Heidegger argues that Hegel prioritises the past at the cost of being, on the grounds that 'a genuine *being* is what *has returned to itself*'. It can 'return to itself' because Hegel argues that its essence (*Wesen*) is to arrive at its (eternal) substance. Because of this, Hegel's focus on the past is also a focus on the eternal: 'For *Hegel*, being (infinity) is also the essence of time' (Heidegger, 1994, p. 146). Malabou's ambition is to allow Hegel to speak against the criticisms launched at his teleological view on history and the seemingly determinist ('Absolute') quality of his temporality. She does so by negotiating the relation between the concepts *plasticity*, *temporality* and *dialectics*. In short, plasticity takes place *as* temporality's self-differentiating capacity, and dialectics is what provokes change. Allow me to explain.

Plasticity as a concept takes on different meanings for Hegel, according to Malabou. One is the notion that 'plastic arts' are valuable and that they also essentialise. Once marble has been shaped into a sculpture, it cannot go back to the starting point. The work of the artist is to extract this essence. Second is the process that individuals go through when they extract their

own essence from their figurative slab of marble and become what Hegel calls ‘plastic individuals’: free, substantial, independent, self-made. Such plastic individuals should be seen as a combined result of their preconditions and efforts, leading to the recognition that plasticity is a combination of reception and creation of form. And the relation between plasticity and temporality seems clear: insofar as change happens in time, the capacity for change must have a temporal element. Additionally, temporality itself is plastic because it self-differentiates. Future becomes present, then past. Time becomes its own other (Malabou, 2005, p. 9 ff.).

Plasticity gathers three core dynamics: the reception of form, the giving of form and the loss of form. Put together, these three dynamics allow Malabou to read Hegel as if he anticipated Heidegger’s critique that Hegel’s concept of history, and therefore time, was locked in an Aristotelian teleology. If, as she writes, the task of Spirit ‘is to comprehend itself, to anticipate itself in everything that is now and is to come’, then it ‘can never come face to face ... with the *event*’ (Malabou, 2005, p. 4, emphasis in original). If the task of Spirit is simply to discover what is already there, it can have no room for the alterity that the unexpected would represent. Construing instead plasticity as the organising principle would emphasise formation instead of negation. Subjectivity would then develop as the result of the active, creative, accidental and destructive meeting of forms, and the incorporation and incarnation of these meetings (James, 2012, pp. 83–109; Malabou, 2005).

In the book that marks what has been called Malabou’s ‘neurological turn’ (Hogstad, 2020), *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (2008), she picks up a thread which was only briefly touched upon in *The Future of Hegel*, namely neural plasticity. There, she elaborates plasticity as an organic contrast to the obsolete metaphors of the brain as a machine. Whereas French philosophy continues to rely on substance dualism (Malabou, 2008; Malabou, 2015a, 2016b), construing the brain as the static and material opposition to immateriality and free symbolism, Malabou argues that neurological plasticity allows us to see them as aspects of the same. According to neurological plasticity, the brain is constantly changing throughout life, and in accordance with the choices we make in life. A philosophical repercussion of this new knowledge of the brain, according to Malabou, is that a new paradigm for thinking the material and the symbolic has started to show itself (Malabou, 2008).

Discussing Heidegger’s conception of change, Malabou introduces the concept *the fantastic*, the invisibility of the form in the present and the becoming-visible once it has become past (Malabou, 2012c). She examines a triadic structure in Heidegger’s writings that to her surprise has been consistently overlooked: *Wandel* (change), *Wandlung* (transformation) and *Verwandlung* (metamorphosis). In the interest of seeing how these concepts might influence metaphysics, Malabou outlines the idea of form itself as *fantastic*. In her terminology, the fantastic denotes the process of attaining essence only after change has happened. In other words, no form can be thought until it has taken form, i.e. changed, and no form can change except from its essentialised state. What this gives, in Malabou’s thinking, is the

fundamental notion that form is plastic: Form's capacity to change is fundamental, but simultaneously fundamentally indebted to its attained essence. Form changes freely, but not without bounds (Malabou, 2012c, p. 270).

Malabou's thinking elaborates a new way of construing the human as a biological, changing and changeable entity (Malabou, 2007, 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2016b). According to plasticity, the age-old dichotomy of symbolism and biology should rather be seen as reciprocal and co-dependent aspects of the same (Malabou, 2015b). But plasticity also designates the way the world appears for the human because '[f]orm is the metamorphizable but immovable barrier of thought' (Malabou, 2010, p. 49). Forms change, both how they appear to us and what constitutes them, but we cannot do without them. In this perspective, plasticity becomes an ontological principle with a materialist slant (Malabou, 2010). Plasticity's explanation of how neural pathways change according to experience, i.e. how culture incarnates itself by turning thought into (brain) matter, represents a powerful critique of the nature/nurture dichotomy as it dismisses that either is sovereign or primary to the other (Malabou, 2008, 2015b, 2016a).

Approaching this field of problematics, I will turn to the argument developed in the article 'Plasticity and the Future of Philosophy and Theology' by Clayton Crockett and Catherine Malabou (2010). The authors argue that Christian temporality can be traced back to Aristotle, and that in order to criticise messianic thinking we have to engage with Aristotle and his linear, teleological model of time. Christian temporality, structured as the line between Creation, through Salvation, to Eternity, remains in Western thinking, they argue, even in conceptions that apparently challenge it. By contrasting Christian messianism with Malabou's concept plasticity, Crockett and Malabou suggest a different model of temporality. Their model does not depend on the Creation-Salvation-Eternity structure, but construes time as an 'epigenetic' process in which temporality is a materialised and materialising, subjectivised and subjectivising process that finds its energy in its 'synaptic spacing' (2010).

Deconstructing the Linear Conception of Time

Malabou's self-appointed task is to reflect on whether 'a genuine philosophical vision [would] be possible in the wake of deconstruction' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 16). To begin this reflection, Crockett and Malabou read Jean-Luc Nancy and Jacques Derrida who might both be understood as implying that the end of deconstruction and the deconstruction of Christianity are one and the same. After the deconstruction of metaphysics and onto-theology, Christianity remains the 'most pervasive, profound and problematic spirit of what we call the West' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 16). What constitutes 'the West' is often described in historical terms, as a trajectory from 'ancient Greece and/or ancient Israel', a trajectory that has been described 'in its vulgar form as progressive, in a more modern way as dialectical, or ... in its postmodern version ..., as messianic' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 17). As we have seen, *Bildung* represents one such trajectory.

Derrida is one of those who have thought the West in messianic terms. He construes messianicity as ‘an urgency, imminence but, irreducible paradox, a waiting without horizon of expectation’ (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 17; Derrida, 2006). For Derrida, messianicity should be thought of as without a messiah. It represents the waiting for something that is impossible to predict; something good which will not happen, and if it does, it will be by pure coincidence. Messianicity without a messiah retains the structure of the proposed messianic event, but attempts to do away with its deterministic element (Derrida, 2006). Derrida has thus not challenged the concept of time as the unified difference between the past and the future, and as such it seems that the problematic structure *Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild* remains in the logic of ‘messianicity without a messiah’.

Crockett and Malabou suggest that ‘messianicity without a messiah’ has become popular recently because it coincides with what seems to be ‘a strategy to defend Eurocentrism’. ‘Messianicity without a messiah’ presents the historical European cultural development as an isolated event, unaffected by other cultures, even when such a development is demonstrably false. This strategy appears as a ‘desperate effort to ‘save’ the West by delinking a spirit of Christianity from western metaphysics’ to allow Christianity to play the role of *Ereignis*, of ‘opening or inauguration as such’ (2010, pp. 17–19). Christianity is unfit to play this role (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 20).

Derrida’s ‘messianism without a messiah’ occupies the same logical space as Christian temporality. The connection between deconstruction and Christianity is according to Crockett and Malabou not coincidental, but ‘essential’. Deconstruction is embedded in a Christian heritage, and Christianity is built around a self-deconstructive structure. Heidegger’s concept *Destruktion* was a part of his attempt to rid philosophy of preconceptions that concealed the true nature of the world. *Destruktion* is

a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are deconstructed down to the sources from which they were drawn. Only by means of this destruction can ontology fully assure itself in a phenomenological way of the genuine character of its concepts. (Heidegger, 1988, p. 23)

Destruktion connotes the Lutheran concept *destructio*, which meant ‘destroy[ing] the outer shell in order to liberate the living kernel within’ (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 18). Furthermore, as the authors find in Derrida’s *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, only Christianity can fulfil Christianity, i.e. move beyond itself by way of producing its own salvation and thus subvert its own determinism. In this sense, Christianity is its own *pharmakon* – its own poison and cure. Poison because it represents a closing down; cure because its opening up can only be provided by its self-deconstruction. If we accept Nancy’s claim that Christianity and the West are ‘co-extensive’ in the sense that any Western metaphysical thinking remains embedded in a Christian cultural heritage, we accept that both are ‘in and through [themselves] in a state of overcoming’, i.e. engaged with

overcoming Christianity (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 17). There seems to be no plausible way of delinking Christianity from metaphysics as Christianity does not appear as other to metaphysics nor deconstruction (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 19). The fundamental opening that Christianity would have to provide is already delivered by presence, *parousia*, Being (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 20). In order to deconstruct Western temporality, apparently Christianity must be deconstructed; in order to arrive at the fundamental opening, Christian temporality must be deconstructed – which has yet to happen (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 21).

'Aristotle's definition of time in *Physics* IV remains the only framework within which any further western concept of time can be developed', the authors claim (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 21). While messianic time is 'conceived as non-temporal, or eternal' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 21), its assumption of eternalness reveals a structure of time as infinite and therefore Aristotelian. Messianic time is structured around the promise of salvation: 'The God to come is thought as a being or a phenomenon who can only occur in an indefinite future' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 21), and of course only an endless future can provide indefinite possibilities for God to arrive (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, pp. 21–23). Perhaps Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild operates within this same logic, as it too depends on an ideal that is not guaranteed or expected to arrive, or is guaranteed not to arrive.

Crockett and Malabou suggest that considering *Destruktion* and deconstruction from the angle of plasticity would establish both concepts as evolving, one derived from the other. The possibility for this evolution – their deconstruction – is granted by their originary plasticity 'and not the other way around' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27). What this brings is a temporal difference between *Destruktion*, deconstruction and plasticity: *Destruktion* is tied to a linear conception of time and the Hegelian heritage. Deconstruction, on the other hand, considers time as spacing, or 'the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time' (Derrida, 1998, p. 68). The incorporation of space into time is what paved the way for plasticity. From the perspective of plasticity, Being's originary feature appears to be change, which incorporates and keeps both *Destruktion* and deconstruction in motion. Plasticity thus sublates *Destruktion* and deconstruction. In Malabou's plasticity, subjectivation seems parallel to this movement because the brain, too, can be said to be originally open and capable of incarnating time. The brain exhibits continual, material change as time passes (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27).

The plastic outlook on time brings a new perspective to subjectivity and the openness of the future. According to plasticity, time also has a form and should be considered as such. Crockett and Malabou argue that there are (at least) three recognisable forms of time: Circular, linear and plastic time. Circles are always relative to a centre, the (metaphorical) 'God as that around which everything turns' (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27). Characteristic of this form of time is the eternal return and the implication that time itself is passive compared with its centre. Linear time, on the other hand, is active in the sense that it grasps itself in consciousness as it

passes, but *only* as it passes. Hegel gave us the modern expression of linear time, which originated in Christianity. Time as ‘plasticity itself’ opens up these constricted geometrical forms and reconfigures time as a fragmented and ‘fractalized’ form which ‘bifurcates’ and exceeds what the subject is able to grasp, provoking and stimulating the brain’s plastic capability, i.e. ‘the ability to set up parallel networks, loosely connected inference systems that do not run through a central processor or programmer’ (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27).

Plasticity understood in this way contradicts the idea that the brain is a vessel or tool for the mind. From the view point of plasticity, a radical integration takes place in which the self is constituted by the interplay between choice, habit, the will of others, social structures and other environmental factors, the forgetting and letting go of past experiences, and accident (Johnston and Malabou, 2013; Malabou, 2005, 2008, 2012a). Subjectivation, or the ‘originary fashioning of Being’, should then be understood as a material process by which the material constitution of the body is given form. Form and its ‘originary ontological plasticity’ also represent the limit of Being itself: ‘there is no Being outside an originary fashioning of Being. We have to think of the priority of the fashioning of form upon Being’ (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27). If the limit of Being has been identified, then presumably it can be challenged.

By construing time as plasticity, the possibility opens up to deconstruct and move beyond messianic thinking and thus Christianity as such. The plastic form is an active, receptive and destructive branching, which provides time itself with creative power. Messianic time, in Crockett and Malabou’s view, is understood in terms of the metaphor of death: Its potential is only realised when it has reached its definite end. It collects its drive from that which is not yet here. Plastic time is understood as the active, material and materialising process happening continually, ‘bring[ing] nothing to an end’ (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27). Plastic time generates its own drive by opening up the ‘synaptic’ gap (*écart*), the spacing which allows form its shape; a traversable threshold and not an absolute break; a gap where thinking can be born (Crockett and Malabou, 2010, p. 27).

BILDUNG, EDUCATION AND PLASTIC TIME

The aim for this article has been to focus on Bildung’s apparent reliance on Christian messianic time and present an alternative, represented by Crockett and Malabou’s plastic time. This approach was chosen to open up for the possibility for new questions and new educational thinking, based on different conceptions and with different implications. Construed as an alternative to Christian messianic time, plastic time can problematise our concept of Bildung as it supposes that plasticity is the driver of time instead of the pull towards eternity. This might challenge messianic time’s implicit fatalism in that it attempts not to presume a future. In what follows, I will outline some types of educational thinking that might have to be rethought in light of plastic time, and some new questions for further research.

I suggest – with some audacity, I suppose – that plastic time might flip our conception of education altogether on its head. It seems likely that the most fundamental notion inherent in the thinking of education is the belief that we can, to some extent or other, know the future. We observe that children become adults and understand that living in the way that we do, there are some things that adults need to have learned. In this sense, educational time integrates this realisation with the notion that we can form a curriculum that will meet both society's and the student's future needs, thereby presuming some knowledge of the future. Plastic time does not presume knowledge of the future in the same way, but focuses on the opening that allows for the unexpected, the new, the created, instead.

Educational time knows something about the future, but the ontology of education goes further and presumes more. Education can in some ways be said to have grown into a capillary type of power that integrates questions on the personal and societal level concurrently. Examples are personal hygiene and health, which both are taken to affect the public health; and technical and theoretical learning which is taken to affect economical and political stability and growth (Peim, 2020). In the Norwegian context, mental health auto-regulation technique is a recent addition to education, with the ambition that the students learn 'mastering [their] own life' (MER, 2019). This appears as a dramatic development of control following the Foucauldian 'biopolitical' line that education has changed from being primarily concerned with controlling the body to controlling the mind (Foucault, 1977; Peim and Flint, 2009).

Some theorists argue that a 'biopolitical' development is also valid for the concept of *Bildung*. Over the last few centuries, (German) educational thinking has established *Bildung* as an ontological necessity for society, they argue. *Bildung* appears necessary because society as we know it depends on it existing. It seems, then, that *Bildung* cannot guarantee that education can be the redemptive or critical institution that it is usually thought to be (Masschelein and Ricken, 2003). This position has already been challenged on the basis of Malabou's plastic ontology which undermines the idea that education can be totalitarian in this way (Hogstad, 2020).

Bildung's inherent ontological ties to Western thinking is a challenge to its usability as a global concept. *Bildung* has already been argued to be 'a global and postcolonial concept' (Gustavsson, 2014). The question remains whether this is actually possible as long as the concept remains reliant on Western metaphysics. One might also fear that *Bildung's* ties to Western metaphysics causes *Bildung* to disqualify itself from participating in what Torill Strand has called '[t]he cosmopolitan turn' in education (Strand, 2010). I suggest that it is this point that is currently the biggest hurdle for *Bildung* to remain relevant and productive.

CONCLUSION

In this article, the temporal structure *Vorbild*–*Bildung*–*Nachbild*, inherent in the thinking of *Bildung*, has been identified and contrasted with the metaphor 'plastic time'. The article has suggested that *Bildung* and

education follow a sort of Christian messianic logic, supposing itself to mediate between past and future that is (not) to come. Plastic time, on the other hand, focusses on the plastic process of the coming together of strands and fragments of time. Contrasting the Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild structure with plastic time might allow us to think education as where the present is created. In this view, education's role in preparing the student and society in general for a future could be construed wholly differently than in traditional Christian thinking.

One consequence could be that the *Bild* (ideal) of education had a completely different status. Plastic education and plastic Bildung would have to concentrate on the coming together of time instead; an openness to the unexpected and the creation of the never before thought, of that which takes and creates time. Time understood as a materialising process would retain the idea of Bildung because it too represents a generative threshold between the particular and the general. It would, however, position Bildung outside of the Vorbild–Bildung–Nachbild structure, representing a new way of thinking Bildung in general. A plastic Bildung would have less to do with the ideals and expectations of parents, politicians and teachers, and more with what is actually happening – and what it might create.

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NOTES

1. Žižek argues playfully that 'Hegel really is the ultimate Christian philosopher' (2013, p. 112).
2. I understand Luhmann's concept *systems* as, among other things, human beings. The concept appears as a variety of the Aristotelian *form*. See *Metaphysics*, book VII (Aristotle, 1984, p. 1623 ff.).
3. In what Luhmann calls 'the European tradition', time is the unified conception of the distinction between *before* and *after*. This spatial metaphor explains time as a linear shape – a shape that necessitates a past, a future and a distinction between them. It also implies a metaphor of movement, according to which something (i.e. consciousness) moves along the line. This set of metaphors – space, distinction between before and after, and a movement in space – gave rise to a distinction between 'this set' and 'its opposites': between change and non-change; between transitoriness and eternity, the former being the realm of human experience, residing within the latter (Luhmann, 1993, p. 34).

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