

**Trauma and Literature**  
**Prof. Avishek Parui**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology - Madras**

**Lecture – 17**  
**Malabou's The New Wounded – Part 2**

**(Refer Slide Time: 00:16)**

THE AUTO-AFFECTION OF THE BRAIN

A question immediately arises: If we define the unconscious as nonconscious activity, don't we land once again in the trap that Freud famously denounced of confusing the unconscious (*Unbewusst*) and the nonconscious (*Bewusstlos*)? Don't we thereby entirely fail to grasp the signification of the *psychic* unconscious? Accordingly, as we move from psychoanalysis to neurology, are we dealing with the same concept of "representation"?

There is no doubt that, if we simply characterize the cerebral unconscious as the nonconscious place from which homeostatic processes are managed, we do indeed risk falling in this trap and adhering to a very insufficient, precritical, definition of the unconscious. However, this is not the case if we determine the "cerebral unconscious" as the "cerebration" of affects<sup>29</sup> (to borrow Marcel Gauchet's term)—that is, as an active and sui generis process of regulation. All the information that the brain offers (itself) about the internal state of the organism and about the relation between the organism and objects are accompanied by the production of affects. It is impossible to separate "information" and "sensorial modality": strictly speaking, *the brain feels itself informed*. The autorepresentative activity of the brain, ceaselessly mapped out within psychosomatic states, thus scrutinizes its own inside, translates it into images and affects itself with this activity, of which, we see, it is both sender and receiver. The "cerebral unconscious," then, designates less the entirety of nonconscious processes than *the auto-affection of the brain itself in its entirety*.

Homeostatic processes, the birth of the self, and the birth of object rela-

This is an NPTEL course entitled "Trauma and Literature". We have begun to look at Catherine Malabou's book "The New Wounded". Malabou is situated here as a very important philosopher because she is someone who happens to bridge the connection between trauma studies and deconstruction.

The entire idea of literature as a textual activity is something which relates to the idea of psychic experiences because if one is looking at the psyche as a textual space, then literature becomes a very fertile field to represent that space. The whole idea of representation becomes important and Malabou spends a lot of time in talking about representation.

It is to discuss how the brain ought to represent itself in certain ways. Malabou gives a lot of importance to emotion and she considers emotions to be more important than drive because the whole idea of drive is a big thing and psychoanalysis the entire drive.

It was the libido drive; appetite drive those things become very important in Freudian psychoanalysis, but Malabou seems to make a departure from that and she talks about the primacy of emotion and how emotions help the system, the subject to achieve homeostasis or rather the stability of the self. It is to determine how the self can become a seamless movement, a seamless continuous movement which is homeostasis through a process of emotion.

Emotions become a way with which the self keeps cleansing itself in a certain sense and we discussed how there seems to be an interesting parallel in a certain sense with the Aristotelian idea of catharsis where the whole idea of theatre becomes a spectacle in which by consuming which the subject can cleanse themselves of excessive emotions and achieve homeostasis.

Malabou uses the metaphor of theater. The metaphor is a very important in Malabou and she borrows a lot from the Derridan vocabulary. There is a lot of deconstruction in her work in a way she is looking at the psyche; the way she is looking at memory, in the way she is looking at trauma. She is one of the very key philosophers today in terms of understanding literature's relationship with trauma.

It is how literature as an activity of representation, literature as an activity of textuality, different kinds of textual processes are mixed together in literature. If literature is considered to be a production of textuality and how that becomes a very interesting form perhaps a privileged form of representation when it comes to trauma. But before that we need to understand the idea of trauma, the experience of trauma, the ontology of trauma as such in a way the Malabou redefines it.

New wounded, the word new as mentioned is a redefinition and reontologization of trauma. She is re-ontologizing it. She is taking the traditional classical understanding of trauma and she is offering a more distributed, more post-structuralist model of understanding trauma. She perhaps should be considered as a philosopher who bridges poststructuralism and trauma studies in a very interesting way.

It is very important in terms of understanding literature's location in trauma studies because we come into this book of philosophy after "Mrs. Dalloway". Remember the sequence we have in this course and if one maps this on to "Mrs. Dalloway" in terms of how the idea, the experience of Septimus as a feelingless subject someone who cannot feel anymore, someone who cannot emote anymore.

The emotionlessness of Septimus and how that becomes index of how his idea of self, how his sense of self has become compromised, and how instead of a continuous seamless performance of the self, Septimus experiences constant discontinuities. This constant discontinuity is something which keeps interrupting his idea of self. We had talked about how Septimus may be understood medically as well as existentially as an interrupted self.

The whole idea of interruption in Septimus is a combination of medical and existential conditions but the core thing is the emotionlessness of Septimus. He cannot emote anymore; he cannot connect emotionally to what is around him anymore and that becomes a key figure that becomes a key index of his disintegration as a subject. We see that and we come to someone like Malabou.

We see how wonderfully uh the theory of Malabou can be mapped onto trauma text, trauma fiction like "Mrs. Dalloway". We just move on from we left off last time the idea of "Cerebral Auto-Affection". How does the brain keep recognizing itself; auto-affection is an act of self-recognition. So, what is the mechanism in the brain to which brain keeps recognizing itself as a working subject as a system.

This auto-recognition, the auto-affection, the auto-love, the love for the brain of itself; so it is something narcissistic about it but what Malabou says that the brain must be able to recognize itself in a certain sense in order to keep functioning as a brain, in order to keep functioning as a system. We can see how this can be interestingly compared to the idea of metafiction in literature.

The fiction about fiction, the fiction which recognizes itself as fiction, a work of literature, a work of artificial narrative which recognizes itself as a directive. In that sense, fiction is

always about artificial intelligence in a certain sense because the whole idea of an artificial universe that one is creating and the whole idea of producing an intelligent system to which we can recognize the universe is in itself an act of artificial intelligence.

We find that how the auto-affection in the way the Malabou is defining it, is interestingly comparable to the idea of metafiction in literature. Malabou is such an important philosopher to bridge literature and trauma studies through psychoanalysis and post-structuralism that is a dense network of research over there.

She talks about the auto-affection of the brain. A question immediately arises. If we define the unconscious as non-conscious activity, we do not and once again in the trap that Freud famously denounce of confusing the unconscious and the non-conscious. Hence, what she is saying over here the unconscious is not an absence of consciousness; unconscious and non-conscious are not the same thing at all and this is important.

The unconscious is that center to which the brain recognizes itself without recognizing itself. We can see that how it is very Derridan vocabulary because if we look at the way it is deconstruction even there Derrida says the center is not at the center. There is no real center but there is a center at the same time. It is ambivalence between absence and presence is exactly where the idea of play comes into being.

We can see how in a sense what Malabou saying is brain is a playful activity in a certain sense. The unconscious is a playful activity which keeps recognizing itself without being able to understand itself as one thing. There is that ambivalence between recognition and lack of understanding. The brain must be aware of itself without knowing what it is in some sense.

It is not the same as non-conscious, non-conscious is absolute absence and that is not the same thing as unconscious. Unconscious contains consciousness in a certain sense without the entire awareness of it. It is a recognition of consciousness without the awareness of it, the entire awareness of it. I mean it sounds complex but actually it is a quite simple thing as we will see.

The very first thing that she talks about is how the unconscious and non-conscious are dissimilar things, they are not comparable at all. We should not try to examine the unconscious as a non-conscious activity that would not work. There is no doubt that; this is the second paragraph, there is no doubt that if we simply characterize the cerebral unconscious as a non-conscious place from which homeostatic processes are managed.

We do indeed risk falling in this trap and adhering to a very insufficient, precritical definition of the unconscious. The unconscious must be examined critically as an ambivalent activity which is a play between awareness and recognition. It is not an absolute absence of consciousness. We can see how she is offering a restructuring, a re-ontologizing on the Freudian understanding of the unconscious.

She is drawing on Freud; but at the same time she is sort of significantly departing from Freud as well and offering a more poststructuralist model of the unconscious. However, this is not the case if we determine the cerebral unconscious as the cerebation of affects that is as an active and sui generis process of regulation. This is a key thing sui generis process of regulation, so a unique process of regulation.

The unconscious must be seen as an activity through which homeostasis is achieved. Homeostasis being the stability of the self; the self as a seamless activity, the self as something which keeps connecting to the different things around itself and this is something which we see as interrupted in Septimus Smith in "Mrs. Dalloway". A map is offered through which we can read "Mrs. Dalloway" through someone like Malabou.

There is a paper waiting for you if we want to write it. The whole idea of the cerebation of affects becomes important. Cerebation of affects, the whole production of affects the brain as a cerebral activity of affects and how that activity is something which keeps regulating and keeps sort of conditioning the homeostasis in certain sense.

All the information that the brain offers itself about the internal state of the organism and about the relation between the organism and objects are accompanied by the production of affect. We can see how affect becomes a very key thing in Malabou's discourse and that is

why Malabou is such an interesting figure also an affect studies because again if one takes that model and map it into literature if one look at literature as a production of affect.

We are moved by a good piece of literature it because literature too is a cerebation of affect in a certain sense. That connection is interesting in some sense. It is impossible to separate information and sensorial modality, strictly speaking the brain feels itself informed.

Information and sensorial modality; the word sensorial modality is replaced with emotion and it will make perfect sense. Information and emotion are deeply and cognitively connected categories. These are not disconnected or contrasting categories. We can see how this is a very anti-cartesian thing in a certain sense because if we look at the traditional enlightened philosophy of Beccaria which talks about how emotion and rationality are very different categories.

If one is rational, one is non-emotional. Emotion is seen as more appetitive, more beastly and more womanly and black, all these binaries keep flowing in subsequently but the whole idea of rationality is celebrated as something almost divine. Rationality is what makes man closest to god. Now what we know through neuroscience today.

Malabou talk about a series of neuroscientists from Joseph LeDoux to Antonio Damasio is that emotion and rationality are deeply connected categories and this connection between emotion and rationality is very interesting because the whole idea of sensorial modality, sensorial modality is emotional activity in a certain sense. Information and emotional activity are deeply connected.

In other words, the way we process information is through our emotional activities. Emotions are always there in any in an engagement with information strictly speaking. The brain feels itself informed. This whole idea of auto information, the brain keeps informing itself in a certain sense that becomes a very interesting idea of the auto-affection the brain. She talks about auto-affection, the whole idea of affect.

The brain keeps producing and keeps consuming affect, keeps producing and keeps consuming emotions and this production consumption of emotions exactly what makes the brain, what enables the brain to regulate itself as a mechanism or a system per se. The autorepresentative activity of the brain; ceaselessly mapped out within psychosomatic states, thus scrutinizes its own inside, translates it into images and affects itself with this activity of which we see it is both sender and receiver.

In other words, the brain becomes the producer as well as a consumer of affect and its constant production and consumption, simultaneous activities production and consumption of affect is exactly what enables the brain to achieve homeostasis. In other words to put in very simple terms, the brain must be able to keep producing and keep consuming emotions, keep producing and keep consuming affects in a very complex cognitive way.

Emotion and rationality, emotion and information are pretty contrasting activities, production and consumption not pretty contrasting activities; they are connected activities and this constant connect between production and consumption and information and emotion is exactly what makes the brain helps the brain to achieve homeostasis strictly speaking.

The whole idea of brain being the sender and the receiver. The cerebral unconscious then designates less the entirety of non-conscious processes than the auto-affection of the brain itself in its entirety. The brain can emerge as an entire mechanism, as an entire process only to the process of auto-affection. The auto-affection becomes a very key activity for the brain for the whole idea of the stable brain in other words.

The brain is an emotional machine in a certain sense. Joseph LeDoux very famous neuroscientist whom Malabou will quote, in a moment we will see that, he talks a lot about emotions, got a book called “Emotional Brain” which is wonderful. We have someone like Antonio Damasio who makes a very interesting and strong scientific claim that emotion and cognition are connected activities.

In other words if our emotional ability is compromised in a certain sense our cognitive ability will also be compromised because we would not recognize anything around us, we would not

be able to connect to anything around us. We see how that happens in a very spectacular and tragic way in “Mrs. Dalloway” where Septimus's emotional ability begins to disappear and with that his ability to connect to his environment also begins to disappear and these become sort of connected in their disintegration.

**(Refer Slide Time: 15:19)**

case if we determine the “cerebral unconscious” as *the “cerebration” of affects*<sup>29</sup> (to borrow Marcel Gauchet’s term)—that is, as an active and *sui generis* process of regulation. All the information that the brain offers (itself) about the internal state of the organism and about the relation between the organism and objects are accompanied by the production of affects. It is impossible to separate “information” and “sensorial modality”: strictly speaking, *the brain feels itself informed*. The autorepresentative activity of the brain, ceaselessly mapped out within psychosomatic states, thus scrutinizes its own inside, translates it into images and affects itself with this activity, of which, we see, it is both sender and receiver. The “cerebral unconscious,” then, designates less the entirety of nonconscious processes than *the auto-affection of the brain itself in its entirety*.

Homeostatic processes, the birth of the self, and the birth of object relations are bound together from the very beginning as one and the same phenomenon within the brain. The logic of cerebral auto-affection does not suppose the intervention of a supplementary energy that would have the status of the libido. The division between the self and the object is given before any narcissism and any sexual investment. Cerebral auto-affection is a logical sensuality that makes possible the attachment of life to itself which becomes the basis of all ulterior erotic investments. ©

Within the cerebral unconscious, homeostatic regulation puts in place, from the outset, the differentiated synthesis of self and object, survival and eroticism—without according the latter extraneuronal status. The psyche

We can see how the homeostatic processes of the birth of the self and the birth of the object relations are bound together from the very beginning as one and the same phenomenon within the brain. This self comes to mind, it is a book by Antonio Damasio but then this is exactly what Malabou is talking about. The self emerges as a knowledge in the brain to the process of consumption and production of emotion.

This is the process to which homeostasis is achieved, the homeostatic process. It is the same phenomenon within the brain. The logic of cerebral auto-affection does not suppose the intervention of a supplementary energy that would have the status of the libido. The division between the self and the object is given before any narcissism and any sexual investment.

Malabou talks about how emotions they come before drive, if emotions are more important than drive and the drive is not necessarily an intervention and emotional drivers are part of the emotional process. Emotions are the pre-date drive. In other words let us say if we take a biological example for a baby which is born and then begins to grow.



The emotions the baby begins to form that forms the foundation to which a baby can begin to recognize themselves as a subject as a stable subject and only after that we will have drives; narcissistic drives, libido drives, appetite drives but those are not necessarily interventions in the emotional process of homeostasis. Emotional stability, emotional equilibrium is a much more complex thing compared to drives.

Cerebral auto-affection is a logical sensuality that makes possible the attachment of life to itself which becomes the basis of all ulterior erotic investments. This is the whole idea of cerebral auto-affection and we can see how there is almost an oxymoronic quality that Malabou is deliberately foregrounding that is a logical sense reality. Sensuality seems to be very different from logic the way we normally understand it.

But this is exactly what we talked about earlier that any information, any logic, any idea of rationality must be mediated by and through a prism of emotions. Logical sensuality a prism of affect, so any information must be received and consumed through affect. Affect becomes very foundational principle, very foundational activity of production and consumption in the system of the brain.

It makes possible all other investments erotic and whatever that is okay. So within the cerebral unconscious, homeostatic regulation puts in place from the outset, the differentiated synthesis of self and objects. The whole idea of the self as an interiorized thing and the object is an external thing that connection can only be achieved through homeostasis.

If we map this into “Mrs. Dalloway” we find the fact that Septimus is not able to recognize anything around him or not able to connect to any objects around him it is because his sense of self is also compromised because of an inability to emote. The emotion ability disappears in Septimus; it suffers a depletion in Septimus and that depletion becomes a problem because that compromises his connect to the objects around him.

We can see how the object and self are connected categories and that connection can only be possible through homeostatic regulation of emotions and that emotions is very important. The synthesis of self and object, survival and eroticism without according the latter extraneuronal

status. There is nothing extra-neuronal. There is nothing extra outside this regulatory system so that is the system within which all other systems, all other drives come into play.

In other words, libido is not something extraneuronal, outside the neural makeup. It is very much part of the neural mechanism which is founded which is the primary base of which is the emotional activity of the brain, the brain as an emotional machine.

**(Refer Slide Time: 19:16)**

42 *The Neurological Subordination of Sexuality*

thus becomes the core that gathers, within the same energetic economy, the constant exigency of survival, the self's bond to itself, and the desire of the other.

How, precisely, do we understand the concept of the "auto-affection" of the brain? In philosophy, the notion of "auto-affection" traditionally designates the originary and paradoxical manner in which the subject experiences himself as self-identical by addressing himself as an other within the strange space of its "inner self" (*for intérieur*). It constitutes a kind of primordial self-touching: the subject smells itself, speaks to itself, hears itself speaking, experiences the succession of its states of consciousness. It is this "contact" that produces the difference of the self from itself, without which, paradoxically, there would be no identity and no permanence. Auto-affection is the subject's originary ability to interpellate itself, to solicit itself, and to constitute itself as a subject within the double movement of identity and otherness to itself.

To speak of cerebral auto-affection, therefore, is to admit that the brain is capable of looking at itself, touching itself as it constitutes its own image. Homeostatic regulation has a specular structure; it operates as a kind of mirror within which the brain sees itself live.<sup>30</sup> Cerebral auto-affection, which designates the set of homeostatic processes, thus characterizes *the brain's capacity to experience the altering character of contact with itself*. Emotion

The psyche thus becomes the core that gathers within the same energetic economy, the constant exigency of survival, the self's bond to itself and the desire of the other. See if we consider the other as an object outside the self that is connected to the self's understanding of itself. The self as inside and object is outside. The self is inside something which is regulated by its own recognition.

And the other someone which is loved outside the system and again those become connected categories. Desire and survival or self's bond to itself become connected only through this energetic economy of emotions. The emotions become this economy of energy through which the self can regulate itself through a process of homeostasis. She talks about how the idea of auto-affection is understood in philosophy.

In philosophy, the notion of auto-affection traditionally designates the originary and paradoxical manner in which the subject experiences himself as self-identical by addressing

himself as an other within the strange space of his inner self. In philosophy the self; itself as well as the other. So the subject the self is addressing themselves as an inner self, at the same time the self is something which is addressed to.

The object subject thing is there in philosophy. It constitutes a kind of primordial self-touching. The subject smells ourselves, speaks to itself, hears ourselves speaking, and experiences the succession of its states of consciousness. It is this contact that produces the difference of the self from itself without which paradoxically there could be no identity and no permanence.

Auto-affection is the subject's originary ability to interpellate itself, to solicit itself and to constitute itself as a subject within the double environment of identity and otherness to itself. It is actually quite simple. What is said over here is in philosophy; so again we see how Malabou is connecting very hardcore philosophy with neuroscience, psychoanalysis with the idea of the psychic subject.

In philosophy the self is something which is interiorized, at the same time it must be able to address itself as the other. The self is a dialogic mechanism in other words something which is inside the system as well as something which is able to connect to itself outside the system. It speaks to itself and that becomes the sort of form of self-touching.

The self must be able to touch itself, in a way it must be able to smell itself, speak to itself hear itself. In other words, the technical term for it is metacognition, the awareness of awareness, metacognition, the cognition of cognition. Metacognition becomes; again we can see how it is interestingly comparable to metafiction. Metacognition becomes the activity to which it understands itself as someone as well as the other.

This is a contact; this epistemic contact, the contact of knowledge, the contact of senses. This contact is a combination of information and emotion. The self must have information about itself and that information must be achieved or must be arrived at to an emotional process. It is an emotional acquiring of the information. This idea of the self as an awareness of itself as well as a difference from itself that produces identity and permanence.

We see how this is so deliberately Derridan in a certain sense. The idea of self as a process of identification is also a process of difference, a process of difference in a Derridan sense. Self must defer away from itself, at the same time the self must have awareness of itself. The point of contact that Malabou is talking about is an awareness of the self that it is brain.

It is working, it has its own system but at the same time that awareness must not be entirely mappable onto the self. Self must also be an other to itself. Self is the self as itself knows that the awareness is there, at the same time involves must also have a distance from itself for the mechanism to function. Auto-affection or the production of emotion, the consumption of emotion in certain sense that becomes the ability of the self to interpellate itself.

Interpellation is a system, is a mock system used by Louis Althusser. We can see how Malabou is using all kinds of vocabulary from everywhere. Interpellation is a process to which the self internalizes the belief system around themselves. In auto-affection the process through which again information is processed by the self, belief systems, values, moral principles are processed by the self-true and emotional activity.

Auto-affection becomes an ability to interpellate in a certain sense. To solicit itself and to constitute itself as a subject within the double movement of identity and otherness. This is an important thing that auto-affection is the process of identification. The self identifies itself as a stable functioning self, at the same time there is also a degree of otherness.

In very plain terms where philosophers ask do we know who we are, it is a very simple question that is exactly what has been talked about over here. We know who we are, we are a functioning biological organism. We have a system, we have a brain, we have emotions, etc. But then we do not quite know how to predict ourselves, we do not quite know how we will function, we do not quite know how we will process information in the future.

There is that dialectic; there is that ambivalence between knowledge and unknowability and that is exactly what Malabou talks about that movement between identity and otherness it is

actually quite simple. She is taking a very basic foundational philosophical question who am I. The answer to that is yes I am a functioning brain.

I have a name, I have an identity, etc. I have emotions. I know I have emotions, I know I am capable of being happy, I know I am capable of being sad, I know I have a functioning brain, I can count numbers, etc. There is an awareness of my brain but at the same time I also do not quite know how I will function. I cannot exactly predict myself in a certain sense, so I do not quite know myself entirely.

The entire thing that Malabou talks about can be translated in a very basic philosophical question is do know yourself. It is a question that Malabou is asking and what she is doing is; and this is a fantastic philosophical work that she is doing. She is giving a neurobiological response to that question in a certain sense.

We can see how this is such a rich philosophy because it brings in many different directions and many vectors. There is that philosophy vector, there is neuroscience vector, there is the affects that is vector and of course there is an entire cognitive understanding vector which looks like an offer.

**(Refer Slide Time: 26:33)**

otherness to itself.

To speak of cerebral auto-affection, therefore, is to admit that the brain is capable of looking at itself, touching itself as it constitutes its own image. Homeostatic regulation has a specular structure; it operates as a kind of mirror within which the brain sees itself live.<sup>39</sup> Cerebral auto-affection, which designates the set of homeostatic processes, thus characterizes *the brain's capacity to experience the altering character of contact with itself*. Emotion plays a fundamental role within the constitution of this cerebral psyche: the brain affects itself—that is, modifies itself—within the constant flow of vital regulation. The stakes of neurobiological research consist in highlighting, on the basis of this elementary relation of the brain to itself and to the other, the idea of a cerebral identity that is not identical with subjective identity to the precise extent that it constitutes its unconscious.

What does this mean? The nature of cerebral auto-affection is different than the auto-affection of the subject as the philosophers have defined it. The elementary reflection that constitutes the cerebral psyche as such *does not reflect upon itself*. It does not redouble its specularity to the point of endowing it with the form of consciousness. *No one can feel his or her own brain; nor can he or she speak of it, bear it speak, nor hear himself or herself speak within it*. Cerebral auto-affection is necessarily and paradoxically accompanied by a blindness, *an inability of the subject to feel anything as far as it is concerned*. If the subject can “touch” itself, it is indeed thanks to the brain: the first contact with oneself constituted by homeostasis renders such

“To speak of cerebral auto-affection therefore is to admit that a brain is capable of looking at itself, touching itself as it constitutes its own image.” There is that idea of the brain touching.

There is a tactile quality. I know I am a brain, so this knowledge that I am a brain, this knowledge that I am a mind is a knowledge of touching. I am touching myself in the brain.

This knowledge itself is an act of, there is tactile quality about it in a certain sense. Homeostatic regulation has a specular structure; it operates as a kind of mirror within which the brain sees itself live. The homeostasis is a mirror to which one can see oneself live. It is going back to the foundational question who am I. I know myself because I am living, because I am existing, because I am biologically functional that becomes the basis for which I know myself as a subject.

Cerebral auto-affection which designates the set of homeostatic processes thus characterizes the brain's capacity to experience the altering character of contact with itself. The altering character of contact with itself. This idea of contact with itself keeps altering all the time, keeps changing, keeps shifting all the time. Emotion plays a fundamental role within the constitution of this cerebral psyche.

The brain affects itself that is modifies itself within a constant flow of vital regulation, very important sentence. The whole idea of emotion becomes; the whole idea of the concentration of psyche is an activity of emotion, is an emotional activity through which the psyche is constantly constituted. The brain affects itself, modifies itself through a constant flow of vital regulation.

Joseph LeDoux whom Malabou quotes quite consistently in this book and also elsewhere he has got a wonderful theory of the Synaptic Self and what he says Joseph LeDoux in that book Synaptic Self and also elsewhere is that what we are as a self is a synaptic activity. Synaptic activity is the activity between neurons.

The space between neurons which have got millions of synapses which connects two different neurons to other neurons that nodal structure to which information passes through an electrochemical process, now that is a very plastic activity, synaptic plasticity. The more plastic our brain is, the more plastic or synaptic structure is, the more competent are we in

terms of understanding and navigating emotions and information and that is something which Malabou refers to here as well.

The whole idea of the brain as an ability to alter itself, auto-regulation, auto alteration that is something the brain must be able to do and the better it does it the more competent the brain is. The whole idea the competent brain interestingly is related to the idea of the emotional brains. The more emotional the brain is the more the brain has the ability to control the emotions, to produce emotions, to consume emotions, to process emotion.

The more synaptic, the more plastic it will be in a certain sense and that plasticity would also enable the brain to alter itself all the time in a way that is very self-regulatory. The stakes of neurobiological research consist in highlighting on the basis of the elementary relation of the brain to itself and to the other. The idea of a cerebral identity that is not identical with subjective identity to the precise extent that it constitutes its unconscious.

Malabou defines it that this idea of the unconscious is important because the unconscious is that point in the self which regulates all this emotional activity. It is a conscious process we are aware of it, but the reason why it is unconscious the reason why it is called unconscious is because we do not quite know how that regulation takes place, but we are aware of the regulation.

The idea of who am I, who am I is the unconscious and Malabou responds to that question to a very interesting and rich and flavored neuroscientific range of illusions. The idea of the unconscious as an activity which is produces self-awareness but at the same time it also produces a deferred understanding of the self. It is very Derridan as the self as the center is not really at the center.

The unconscious as in Derrida; the center is not at the center that is Derrida says. It constantly defers away, it constantly slips away and a production of slippage is a production of meaning in a certain sense. The unconscious too is a Derridan framework according to Malabou and that is the theory that she is offering and drawing a range of neuroscientific research.

She is saying that the unconscious that constitutes unconscious the whole idea of the brain has an activity of self-awareness as well as an activity of self-distance that becomes the whole understanding the ontology of the unconscious which is different from non-conscious.

But at the very outset Malabou talks about how the unconscious and non-conscious are ontologically, cognitively and functionally different states entirely. One should not mix up the two because that is not how things work scientifically speaking as well as philosophically is understood. The nature of cerebral auto-affection is different than the auto-affection of the subject as the philosophers have defined it.

The elementary reflection that constitutes a cerebral psyche as such does not reflect upon itself. It does not redouble its specularity to the point of endowing it with a new form of consciousness. No one can feel his or her own brain nor can he or she speak of it, hear it speak, not hear himself or herself speak within it. This is a bit that is the distancing bit. We know we have a brain, we aware of our brain, we aware of emotions.

But we do not know how the brain is working, we do not quite understand, we do not quite see the functioning of the brain, we cannot control that apparatus that there is a mysterious bit about the brain that we do not know, but the same time we are aware of functioning brain that is the ambivalence. Cerebral auto-affection is necessarily and paradoxically accompanied by a blindness, very important.

She talks about auto-touch. She talks about the self-touching itself to the brain but at the same time there is also she was in aporia, a blindness something which we cannot cross, something which is impassable in a way. An inability of the subject to feel anything as far as it is concerned, the whole idea of how the brain functions, the howness is something which we do not quite know about the brain and that is the blindness that Malabou talks about.

The epistemic cognitive existential blindness. If the subject can touch itself, it is indeed thanks to the brain; the first contact with oneself constituted by homeostasis renders such auto-interpellation possible.

**(Refer Slide Time: 33:36)**



auto-interpellation possible. At the same time, however, this originary solicitation hides itself within the very thing that makes it possible. Within my inner self, my brain never appears. *The brain absents itself at the very site of its presence to self.* It is only accessible by means of cerebral imaging technology. And there is no possible subjectification of this type of objectification.

As I write these lines, I see myself write them, but this vision is only the distantly derived and thoroughly elaborated form of a primary auto-affection—cerebral auto-affection, constant but invisible, which forever keeps me from experiencing the wealth of energy that it contains and that makes it possible for me to write in the first place. *Cerebral auto-affection is the unconscious of subjectivity.*

Neurobiologists sometimes seem to recognize a certain proximity between the “proto-self” and the “ego” from Freud’s second topic.<sup>31</sup> The ego, much like core consciousness, appears as a perceptive surface where internal excitations and external stimuli, coming from opposite directions, intersect. The eminent neurologist Jaak Panksepp goes so far as to define the “self” of the “proto-self” as a “Simple Ego-like Life Form.” “This primal self,” Mark Solms writes, “forms the foundational ego upon which all our more complex representations of our selves are built.”<sup>32</sup> Freud’s “ego” and the neurobiologist’s “self” are both concepts of the border that mediates

At the same time, however, the originary solicitation hides itself within a very thing that makes it possible. Within my inner self, my brain never appears. We cannot see the brain in a way we can see our limbs, we can see our self in a reflection for example in a very physical mundane example. We can stand in front of a mirror and see ourselves as a body, as an anatomy we can see our eyes, nose, whatever.

But we know we have a brain, we have experience of the brain, we experience the brain when we have a headache, when we are having a memory whatever but we cannot see it and we do not quite know how the brain is functioning and this play between knowledge and mystery is exactly what makes the brain a magnificent machine according to Malabou and this double dialectic of the brain in a sense it is something which is offering a contact.

But at the same time, it is also opaque and a blind thing. It is also producing blindness, as such we are blind to our brain. We cannot see our brain in the proper sense of the term. That becomes an interesting way to look at auto-affection. In our inner self, the brain never appears. We do not see the brain inner self. The brain absents itself at the very site of its presence to self.

This is very elegant line and it sums up everything done till now. The brain absents itself at the very site of its presence to self. If the brain is an emotional activity, if the brain is a production and consumption of emotion, it also ensures that the production consumption is

the subject is aware of it but it is also an absence because we cannot see the production and consumption in a real sense.

We cannot see the brain producing and consuming emotion. There is a knowledge of the brain producing and consuming emotion, we are aware of ourselves as producers and consumers of emotion but at the same time the brain also absents itself and it is interesting play between presence and absence is exactly what constitutes the unconscious that Malabou talks about. It is different from the non-conscious.

The brain absents itself at the very site of its presence to self. It is only accessible by means of a cerebral imaging technology. It is only through fMRI or other scanning technology can we see the brain. As a self-experience in the brain we cannot see the brain and this blindness of the brain, the blindness to the brain is very significant and that is exactly what Malabou says the brain has a play, the brain has a play between presence and absence.

The brain has a play between production and consumption and this play is dialectic, this dialectical condition the brain is exactly what makes it a magnificent machine which is something which they are addressing with all kinds of philosophies, the philosophy of neuroscience, neuropsychology, and neurobiology, affects studies all kinds of things can be invested into an understanding of the brain.

The brain absents itself at the very site of its presence to itself. It is only accessible by means of cerebral imaging technology and there is no possible subjectification of this type of objectification. Like for instance if we see an fMRI image of our brain, there is no possible way that we can subjectify it, it is purely an object that becomes the medical objectification of the brain. We as a subject cannot subjectivize ourselves to that image, the fMRI image.

It is outside of me entirely. In other words, the brain as a mechanism produces awareness, it produces auto awareness, produces auto-affect, at the same time it also ensures that the subject does not see the mechanism of the brain, the subject the brain is not visible as such and that becomes interesting and then she gives a humorous example of how this auto-affection works. And we will conclude with this.

“As I write these lines, I see myself write them.” For instance imagine yourself writing something, we can see ourselves writing it, we can see our hand, we can see our fingers typing on the computer, whatever machine are using and we can see of course the words which are coming out of that process. We see ourselves write them, but this vision is only the distantly derived and thoroughly elaborated form of a primary auto-affection.

Cerebral auto-affection, constant but invisible which forever keeps me from experiencing the wealth of energy that it contains and that makes it possible for me to write in the first place. Cerebral auto-affection is the unconscious of subjectivity. Malabou’s saying is funny and profound, profound in a very a wonderful sense that suppose we are writing something, a piece of poem or anything or a story.

We can see ourselves writing like we can see our hand moving, we can see the words coming out of that process. We cannot see the brain producing it. We cannot sort of experience, experience it in the sense that that our brain is working and is thinking and imagining things with which we are writing but we cannot see the brain.

We cannot, we have no access to that wealth of energy that the brain contains and paradoxically that inaccessibility to the wealth of energy, the inaccessibility to the brain is exactly what makes it possible for us to write. This absence of access is also a productive absence in a sense because that absence of access also produces the whole idea of emotions, the whole idea of the self, the whole idea of the brain, the brain as an emotional brain.

We are aware of the brain as a functioning mechanism, but at the same time we have no access to it in terms of how it works. We cannot see it work and interestingly and paradoxically because we do not have access to that because of this absence to access the brain is able to function. It is possible for me to write in the first place because we do not know how the brain is making us write that that paradox is a productive paradox in a certain sense.

Cerebral auto-affection is the unconscious of subjectivity. The unconscious is unconscious of cerebral auto-affection and that produces subjectivity. The subject is only a subject because of unconscious cerebral auto-affection. The whole idea of automatic production and consumption of emotions and effects and the regulation the same that is the process in which the self achieves homeostasis.

The self becomes a subject that is a process which subjectivity is produced, but that process is an unconscious process in a certain sense. We are conscious of it, but at the same time we are not complete, we do not have the knowledge, we do not have the visible knowledge of how it functions and hence it is unconscious and not non-conscious. It is to look at the Derridan play with words non-conscious is a perfect absence.

We have no idea, we have no knowledge, no visibility, no access, nothing but unconscious is a play between absence and presence. We are aware of the functioning of the brain, but at the same time we do not see how the brain functions. We are aware of what we are writing. We are aware that the brain is making me write that, that we are thinking, we are imagining. We are experiencing ourselves as a writing subject as an imagining subject.

But at the same time, we are not able to see the functioning of the brain or in the brain. There is no inner vision of the brain and that blindness is exactly what makes it possible for me to write in the first place. It is a very productive blindness in a certain sense, a productive absence and hence the word unconscious is important over here and that is chosen and preferred over non-conscious.

Malabou is a radical and abogar philosopher who connects so many different kinds of theories. There is a lot of research ideas that hopefully will generate. And map that with the Malabou understanding of brain as a plastic activity, as a synaptic activity, as auto productive activity, auto-affective activity which includes destruction as well as production as a plastic process and that understand that post-structuralist understanding of psyche especially when it comes to trauma is relevant in terms of how one can map that.

There are many different takes one can have a renewed understanding of text like “Mrs. Dalloway”.