

transformations: malabou on heidegger and change

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*... being is revealed to be
nothing—but its mutability.¹*

Catherine Malabou is unquestionably one of the most important French philosophers of this generation. Her work has opened new perspectives on the history of philosophy, the relation between philosophy and science and the meaning of philosophy itself. The novel concept which brought about these seminal shifts is her thought of “plasticity.” This concept was first articulated in her doctoral thesis *L’Avenir de Hegel* which was published in 1996 and translated into English in 2005 as *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*.² While the concept of plasticity [*Plastizität*] has a specific and delimited role in Hegel’s philosophy, the significance of Malabou’s reading is that she transforms this term into a concept which is able to reinterpret the whole of Hegel’s thought. Departing from the prosaic sense of plasticity as the moulding and retention of form, Malabou rethinks the meaning of plasticity as a transformative power immanent

within form itself. Beyond the metaphysical understanding of form as the mere contour of matter, Malabou envisions form itself as a site of self-dissolution and re-generation: “Between the emergence and the annihilation of form, plasticity carries, as its own possibility, self-engendering and self-destruction.”³ It is this sense of transformation that provides the basis for Malabou’s original re-reading of Hegel in which plasticity is uncovered as a metabolic alterity that structures the formation of time and futurity in Hegel’s philosophy. However, already in this first work, the regenerative thought of plasticity also announced the promise of a different future for the philosophy of Martin Heidegger.

In *The Future of Hegel*, Heidegger’s reading of Hegel in terms of prosaic temporality is presented as the traditional account which the articulation of a Hegelian temporal plasticity is able to pass beyond. However, plasticity not only provided a resource for challenging the Heideggerian reading, it already announced itself as a thought which overflowed this initial confrontation and could be deployed and discovered at the heart of Heidegger’s own thought of being: “Heidegger never [...] invested [the notion of plasticity] with ontological significance. Thus it is as if Hegel retrospectively has offered to him an instrument indispensable to the intelligibility of his ideas.”⁴ Although the concept of plasticity was first discovered in Hegel it does not remain simply a Hegelian notion, but rather, can be seen to operate both within the Hegelian system and also outside of it as a wider and autonomous hermeneutic instrument. Malabou is explicit that the applicability of plasticity beyond Hegel assumes a semantic and critical enlargement of the concept of plasticity. Just as the discovery of plasticity had opened an unthought alterity within the Hegelian dialectic, its wider application was able to articulate an unforeseen metabolic structure within the thought of ontological difference: “Plasticity inscribes the motive of metamorphosis right at the heart of the dialectic, and metamorphosis inscribes the motive of plasticity right at the heart of the thought of being. This intersection pointed the way for *Le Change Heidegger*.”⁵ The original French version *Le Change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie* was published in 2004 and was first translated into English in 2011 as *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*. Although the English language reception of this work is just beginning, it is clear that Malabou’s reading of Heidegger is original, compelling, and in terms of its implications for understanding Heidegger as a whole, perhaps, unprecedented.⁶

Malabou’s reading of change in Heidegger articulates a theme that is at once pervasive in Heidegger’s *oeuvre*, and yet, has no reception in the secondary literature. The reason for this curious absence is that the traditional ordering

of Heidegger's texts around the ontological difference has always marginalized the philosophical significance of Heidegger's numerous descriptions of change. However, her reading is not simply the exegetical recovery of an overlooked theme. In an account that is both meticulously documented and passing beyond the explicit level of Heidegger's text, Malabou reads Heidegger's thought of being itself as structured by an originary sense of mutation. Focusing on Heidegger's conception of the Platonic origin of metaphysics as a "change [*Wandel*] of the essence of truth" (HC 31) she articulates a general economy of this mutability which governs the emergence and history of metaphysics. From the perspective of this overlooked sense of change she then reinterprets the meaning of being, the human, the gods and the possibility of a second beginning. At stake in her reading is the prospect of a wholly new understanding of the composition and resources of Heidegger's thought.

My argument in this essay is structured in three sections. In the first section, I present Malabou's indeed seminal interpretation of ontological plasticity in Heidegger. In the second section, I then draw out the implications of an important limitation in Malabou's reading. While her interpretation of change brings to light new aspects of Heidegger's thought, when contextualized against the background of Heidegger's overtly genetic account of the anteriority of being to metaphysics, it can be seen to also obfuscate important aspects of this relation. Most importantly, by disallowing any anteriority to the inaugural event of change, Malabou's reading erases Heidegger's crucial distinction between the first beginning [*Anfang*] of the history of being and the start [*Beginn*] of metaphysics as such. In the final section, I make a suggestion for a further application of the concept of plasticity to Heidegger's thought. While Malabou's treatment ranges from *Being and Time* to Heidegger's later works, I argue that plasticity can also be seen to articulate Heidegger's understanding of phenomenology as a form of life in his early Freiburg period. This earlier instance of plasticity in Heidegger does not rely upon the concept of an inaugural change, but rather, locates the emergence and dissolution of form in the plasticity of life itself. From this perspective, Malabou's concept of plasticity can be seen as an even more apposite medium for the articulation of Heidegger's thought.

I.

Malabou's reading of ontological plasticity in Heidegger is based upon his consistent use of three related terms: *Wandel* (change), *Wandlung* (transformation) and *Verwandlung* (metamorphosis) which she abbreviates as "W, W, & V." These

terms are shown to structure Heidegger's account of the origin of metaphysics, its history and its possible transformation: "From the one change [*change*] and regime of exchange [*échange*] to the other, a metabolic circulation takes place between man and *Dasein*, God⁷ and god, being (*Sein*) and be-ing (*Seyn*)." (HC 24) Although Heidegger never explicitly accorded these figures of change any philosophical import, her reading reveals that these terms, which he first employed around 1929, consistently structure and support his thought: "W, W, & V could be the *secret agent* of Heidegger's philosophy, what *sustains and clandestinely guides* the destiny of the essential." (HC 7) While the concept of change might seem to be a generic construct externally imposed upon Heidegger's thought, it is in fact directly derived from Heidegger's own remarkably consistent deployment of these terms in the most crucial passages of his work. The triad of change which Malabou articulates is at once an interpretive decision but also a synthesis that directly emanates from and brings to light an overlooked dimension which is wholly specific to Heidegger's thought. Most significantly, by drawing together these three words for change Malabou articulates an originary metabolic instance which can be seen to structure the difference between the truth of being and metaphysics. However, this plastic coupling of being and metaphysical being is not to be understood as if being itself was simply given as a substrate behind the changing dispensation of epochs in the history of metaphysics. More radically, change is seen to be an event of schematization that concurrently gives form to both the withdrawal of being and the emergence of its visibility as the history of metaphysics: "a rupture and suture between metaphysics and its other." (HC 13) Malabou's reading begins by articulating this originary change which grants metaphysics its form and trajectory.

Through a close reading of Heidegger's 1940 essay "Plato's Doctrine of Truth" a text based on the 1930/31 lecture course "On the Essence of Truth" Malabou demonstrates how Heidegger consistently employs instances of change to describe the emergence of metaphysics: "It all starts with a change. The foundational event of metaphysics is, indeed, a *mutation*. A 'change of the essence of truth' comes to pass. Plato, that is, brings about 'a transformation in the essence of truth.'" (HC 31) In Plato, the original essence of truth as ἀλήθεια is transformed into truth understood as correctness. Simultaneously, a reciprocal ontological substitution takes place with the exchange of being as φύσις for the mere beingness [*Seiendheit*] of the Platonic ἰδέα. Traditionally, commentators have passed over Heidegger's depictions of change and framed this original interface as the obfuscation of a prior term. Moving beyond this conventional account, Malabou reads the sense of transformation opened by this original change as a constitutive alterity which

governs and defines the visibility of being as such. The emergence of metaphysics via a transformation defines metaphysics as both always already changed and changing. Heidegger further relies upon the triad of change to describe not only this capacity of transformation animating the history of metaphysics but also its resources for opening upon a different thinking of being. Malabou articulates this auto-schematizing character of metaphysics and its resources for another beginning by tracing Heidegger's employment of change along metamorphic and migratory axes that together constitute the metabolic regime of ontology.

For Heidegger, change is always the amalgamation of a change in form and a change in pathway. This constellation of change articulates the plasticity linking, and simultaneously differentiating, the various epochs within the history of metaphysics and the possibility of a transformed relation to being: "Heidegger characterizes metaphysics as a 'form [*Form*]' that changes form from epoch to epoch by being re-formed, even as he just as much promises 'the other thinking' to be a *transformation* in the literal sense—a *passage* or *transition* to another form." (HC 21) On Malabou's account, metaphysics and the change that would announce another thinking are wholly enclosed within an ontological mutability that is defined by both a change in form and a change in pathway. Metaphysics is plastic in that, although trans-forming, it remains the same, and charts a history that, while also changing directions, remains continuous. Accordingly, the proper sense of change in Heidegger is not located in any specific process or alteration, but rather, must be understood in terms of the emergence into visibility of being itself. Malabou's term for this new condition of phenomena when thought from out of the alterity of change is: the fantastic.

On Malabou's account, the fantastic designates the mode of appearance of beings after metaphysics. As instances of the schematization of being their phenomenality is divided and dissociated. Across this internal margin beings now bear within themselves the simultaneity of the uncanny and the familiar. This sense of the uncanny is not the incursion of the phantasm into the real or the irruption of a transcendent other from beyond the horizon of being. For Malabou, there is no outside of being and the fantastic describes the uncanny as located exactly within the essential, within the alterity of ontological determinations to themselves: "alterity is first of all the strangeness within, the most intimate unexplored mystery of essential self-identity."⁸ The fantastic is a strangeness that arises from within the immanence of the already there. This sense of fantastic is not a mere genre or category of discourse, but rather, articulates the pre-conceptual status of the image as the site for the original emergence of being:

The fantastic: the locus of originary (ex)change can only be invested with images. The concept falls forever short of it. Because on the one hand, the commencement of metaphysics—the setting into form and on its way of the first (ex)change—coincides with the vesting of the image as the inaugural event of being (exchanged): idea, essence, face, picture. (HC 71)

Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger articulates a sense of the fantastic that is not restricted to the Heideggerian text, but rather, comes to define a condition and limit of philosophy itself.

What Heidegger is the first to articulate is that the becoming visible of being is always the operation of a moment of schematization opened through the metabolism of change. Accordingly, the proper issue of change in Heidegger is located in the emergence of form understood as the original figuration of being itself: "As an imaginary production without referent and pure ontological creation, the fantastic characterizes the apprehension *and* the regime of existence of *what cannot be presented, of, that is, what can only ever change*. [...] *This point is the phantasm of our philosophical reality*." (HC 13) For Malabou, what comes to presence is not the representation or expression of a receded origin, but rather, an original imaging and schematization which takes form through the alterity of change. This metabolic exchange structuring the original substitution of being for itself defines all beings as split figurations. They are at once present, but forever bearing the trace of the abysmal operation of displacement at their origins. This condition of ubiquitous ontological-auto-schematization constitutes the proper locus of change in Heidegger and is the basis for the affinity with Malabou's own articulation of form as both plastic and the inexorable medium of thought:

The original site of the issue of change in Heidegger is not that of movement, becoming, (vulgar) time, or flux but rather the *image* understood as a *scheme*. Any entry into presence, birth, or growth is an originary imaging. This is the first *metabolè*. Anything *enters change* by showing, imaging, or schematizing itself. [...] Here we come upon the *fantastic intersection*. Everything that comes into presence arrives changed, substituting itself for itself. This is the original ontological phantasm.⁹

One of the most important implications of this originary sense of change is that it breaks with the traditional metaphysical understanding of change as the mere alteration of attributes upon an unchanging substrate.

Malabou's understanding of change displaces any reference to an origin or anteriority which would transcend the operation of change. Rather than a merely regional modification upon an underlying base, the sense of change that guides her reading of Heidegger is so originary that, strictly speaking, nothing precedes it: "Prior to exchange, nothing. Everything goes at the outset into the convertor. And so it begins: difference." (HC 76) The event of change determines its own anteriority so completely that: "The change invents what it changes [*Le changement invente ce qu'il change*]." (HC 63; CH, 85) Not even the apparent primordially of ἀλήθεια, being or ontological difference is seen to precede the operation of change:

In considering with me these consequences of the first (ex)change, you are at the same time beginning to understand that *neither being nor beings, neither man nor god and not even ἀλήθεια exist prior to their change. The enigma of change stems from its originarity, from the fact that nothing precedes it, above all not (ex)change.* (HC 63)

This alterity within the event of change can be seen to re-articulate not only the sense of origin in Heidegger's thought but also the dimension of futurity which would open upon a second beginning and a different relation to being.

In addition to interpreting the Platonic origin of metaphysics as an operation of change, Malabou reads Heidegger's account of the end of metaphysics in Nietzsche¹⁰ and Heidegger's own preparations for a second beginning as equally determined by the triad of change. Just as Heidegger consistently employed W,W, & V to depict the origin of metaphysics these same terms are given the role of forming the transition from metaphysics to an ultra-metaphysical possibility of thought. As Malabou notes, Heidegger's employment of W,W, & V in this capacity is particularly pronounced in his *Contributions to Philosophy* where: "the triad is constantly resorted to, since it characterizes, all at once, the change leading from metaphysics to the other thinking, the mobility specific to *Ereignis*, and the new exchangeability over which these preside." (HC 102) The transition to the other thinking, is not made possible by the transcendence of a term exterior to ontology. Rather, the alterity from out of which the ultra-metaphysical future of thought is opened remains within the metamorphic resources of the plastic coupling of being and metaphysical being. On this point, Malabou's reading of ontological plasticity in Heidegger can be seen to offer a new perspective on one of the most pervasive critiques of Heideggerian thought.

Since the mid 20th century, the charge has consistently been made that Heidegger is fundamentally a thinker of the identical and represents merely a supplementary version of metaphysics. Although Heidegger is explicitly concerned with ontological difference, this sense of difference has been seen as merely an interval within the more original identity and totality of being. Thus sealed under the absolute horizon of being, it would seem that Heidegger's philosophy is without radical alterity or otherness. In various ways this has been the verdict of Levinas, Derrida and Marion. On Malabou's reading, there is indeed nothing outside, nothing beyond, the mutability of being, however, this does not preclude the possibility of articulating a *different* alterity in Heidegger's thought. Rather than deducing the unity of Heidegger's thought from the perspective of what would be absolutely otherwise to being, Malabou articulates an *other* alterity operative *within* the horizon of being. This overlooked alterity in Heidegger is an alterity thought without the aid of transcendence, within being, and yet, irreducible to the totality of the same or an invariable element.

In contrast to the charges that Heidegger's thought supposedly lacks alterity and the other, Malabou shows that:

[...] a question concerning the other is very much in evidence in it—an other irreducible to the same but irreducible as well to absolute alterity, the Other so fecund in Levinas's thinking. If there is something other in Heidegger, it is something other than the Other. The phenomenon of this other alterity should be sought in the tight articulation uniting change and difference. (HC 27)

In much the same way that Malabou's discovery of plasticity in Hegel was able to retrieve him from the Heideggerian reading, her articulation of ontological mutability in Heidegger can be seen to retrieve his thought from those readings which would claim that it was sealed, without a future, in its own self-coincidence. One of the most significant implications of Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger is that it brings to light a constitutive alterity which allows Heidegger's thought to be reinterpreted from out of the inexhaustible mutability of ontological imagination. Malabou's reading has awoken a dormant resource within Heideggerian philosophy that convincingly transforms it into a thought of transformation. However, while the operation and radical implications of change in Heidegger are undeniable, this plastic reading can also be seen to erase some aspects of the explicitly genetic sense of origination in Heidegger's thought.

On Malabou's account, the site of the first change is temporally undecidable in that it is itself the condition for any chronology which would attempt to historically date the instant of change. Strictly speaking, the event of change is an immemorial instant which was never simply present within any of the historical thematizations of time which it opens and defines. However, this event is still located in Heidegger's text as the transformation of the essence of truth in the thought of Plato which articulates the subsequent history of metaphysics as plastic and defines all that is antecedent to Plato as "pure ontological creation [*création ontologique pure*]." (HC 13; CH, 24) For Malabou, there is no element prior to change which could antedate the constitutive dynamics of change. There is no anteriority to the operation of change which would constitute a given and unchanging substrate to the condition of change. Every projection of a time, dynamic or ground as prior to the moment of original change remains itself indissolubly constituted by this first change. While this absolute originality of change opens new futures for the interpretation of Heidegger's work, it must also be seen to generate a tension with Heidegger's own descriptions of a time before change.

II.

For Malabou, the event of change which transpires in the essence of truth is so original that it actually creates what, on a chronological account, would seem to antedate it. The fantastic intersection of change does not extend between an anterior and transformed element, but rather, is itself more original than both terms and any genetic construal of their relation. On this point Malabou is wholly consistent in thinking the implications of the radical originality of the event of change in that it is not a mere passage between a prior and resultant element. As she clearly states, the proper enigma of change is that *nothing* precedes it. Everything that comes to presence arrives changed. However, there is no pre-metamorphic completeness which would be lost in the event of change, nor does change supervene upon an identity which would maintain itself across "its" changes. Instead of the alteration of a more original presence, Malabou thinks change as the co-original arising of what changes with the instant of change. Strictly speaking, the first change which initiated the history of metaphysics with Plato was a creation preceded by nothing. However, the price to be paid for understanding this change as "pure" ontological creation and the most primordial instant of origination in Heidegger is that it draws down into itself aspects of Heidegger's genealogical account of the history of being that were understood to be given prior to the start of metaphysics.

Change is at once constitutive of the entire history of being, and yet, only arising after one inaugural change. Being itself first becomes plastic only through this initial event of change. One of the results of Malabou's reading of this first change is that it creates a structural duplicity in that change is both historical, in that it occurs as a specific instance in Plato, and simultaneously, is an event which reinscribes all chronologies as emerging from the event of change itself. In contrast to the role which plasticity played in Malabou's reading of Hegel as the figuration of temporality itself, plasticity in Heidegger is tied to one specific historical point of initiation. Rather than temporality itself being articulated as plastic, in Malabou's reading of Heidegger, plasticity is bound to an inaugural instant with the implication that prior to this privileged event there was no change. She is explicit on this point and claims that change does not articulate the time that was given before the initial change in Plato. In other words, change in Heidegger is not a ubiquitous condition in that it is not given prior to Plato and does not originally condition beings and truth on both "sides" of the inaugural metamorphic event.

The bifurcation that is created when Malabou reads plasticity in Heidegger as arising from a specific historical commencement is not present in her reading of Hegel where plasticity is seen as: "what is most essential and primal in life itself."¹¹ This wider sense of plasticity in Malabou's reading of Hegel is stressed by Derrida in his introduction to her book which he describes as: "devoted to the plasticity of the living in general."¹² As Derrida states, the question of the origin of plasticity in Hegel is not a mere historical instance but is understood as co-original with life itself: "this movement of plastic *subjectivation* would not or should not be considered simply as an anthropological or even theological stance. It would begin with life itself [...] with the very apparition of life."¹³ On this point Derrida can be seen to accord Malabou's thought of plasticity an aporetic sense of origination in life itself which, like Derrida's thought of *différance*, is more primordial than any historical thematization of temporal differentiation. In contrast, the way in which Malabou reads plasticity in Heidegger can be seen to introduce a doubling in her account of the originality of change as both an historical event, and simultaneously, an imaginary, indeed fantastic, origin. While the terms of Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger do not allow her to conceptualize a time before change, this anteriority to the origin of metaphysics is a crucial dimension of Heidegger's thought. As I will now argue, perhaps the most important element of Heidegger's thought that is structurally precluded in Malabou's reading is his distinction between the first beginning and the start of metaphysics.

Malabou's reading of change in Heidegger unquestionably relaunches his philosophy beyond many reductive assessments of its resources and scope. However, as Malabou also makes explicit, hers is an engagement that both follows and departs from Heidegger's texts. One aspect of Heidegger's thought which Malabou's reading inherently silences is the anteriority which Heidegger accorded the interpretation of being and truth prior to the Platonic origin of metaphysics. This anteriority explicitly figures Heidegger's account of the genetic relation between what he described as the beginning [*Anfang*] of the history of being and the start [*Beginn*] of metaphysics as such. This distinction is one of the most important elements of Heidegger's philosophy and one which he rigorously maintained: "The start is certainly not the beginning."¹⁴ On Malabou's reading, the location of the original event of change is the transformation in the essence of truth in Plato which at once opened the difference between metaphysical being and the truth of being. For Heidegger, this transformation constituted what he terminologically and consistently referred to as the start of the metaphysical tradition. This sense of starting was formulated as the contraction and obfuscation of the earlier more original sense of being as φύσις and truth as ἀλήθεια that he articulated as the first beginning.

In Malabou's account there is no mention of the difference between the first beginning and the start of metaphysics, instead the transformation of the essence of truth that stands as the origin of metaphysics is described as absolute and even conflated with the first beginning itself: "the commencement [*le commencement*] of the metaphysical tradition" (HC 29; CH, 43), "the inaugural exchange [*l'échange inaugural*] of being for beingness" (HC 44; CH, 62), "the inaugural event—the first beginning [*premier commencement*]." (HC 68; CH, 91) Nor is there any engagement with Heidegger's account of the pre-Platonic understanding of being as φύσις. In the whole of Malabou's text there are only two passing and insubstantial references to ἀλήθεια. One of the most important implications of Malabou's reading is that the change which occurs at the start of metaphysics in Plato would be more primordial than the earlier inceptual origin that Heidegger articulated as the first beginning. In other words, the first beginning is displaced into, and thought wholly from out of, the change which Heidegger identified as simply the start of metaphysics.

In Heidegger's being-historical texts of the mid 1930's and early 1940's he consistently articulated the start of metaphysics in Platonic thought as a contraction within the more original dynamics of φύσις and ἀλήθεια. This givenness of the first beginning with respect to the start of metaphysics is described in terms of

the difference between the original emergence [*Aufgang*] of the first beginning and the veiling of this origin in the mere advancement [*Fortgang*] which opened the history of metaphysics. For Heidegger, the start of metaphysics represented a covering over of the more original dynamic of truth granted in the first beginning: “The first beginning is emergence (unconcealment). [...] The emergence abandons itself to the advancement (start ‘of’ metaphysics). [...] Meanwhile, undisturbed by the mere advancement, the first beginning persists in itself as transition.”¹⁵ The originality of the first beginning remains intact behind the start of metaphysics. In other words, the start and end of metaphysics is wholly internal to the emergence of the first beginning. While Malabou’s account demands that the first beginning be thought only through the fantastic interface of change, Heidegger can be seen to grant this earlier beginning a fullness and priority which is necessarily erased in Malabou’s reading.

On Heidegger’s understanding of the first beginning the essence of truth as ἀλήθεια was a dynamic of concealment and unconcealment. This was the essence of truth which in Plato’s thought was transformed into a relation of mere correctness and which Malabou understands to be the imaginary site of the original change. However, Heidegger also described the essence of truth as unconcealment as a foreground and merely regional sense of truth. The earlier ground of ἀλήθεια as unconcealment was articulated at two levels. Firstly, the essence of truth as unconcealment was itself still an instance of a more original dynamic of sheltering [*Bergung*] and disconcealment [*Entbergung*]. And secondly, this earlier essence of truth as sheltering only received its proper articulation when grounded in the thought of *Sein* opened by the second beginning. For Heidegger, the mere start of metaphysics was more essentially an inceptual *ending*. However, this earlier dimension of inceptuality in which *Sein* itself is seen as the singular origin of both the first and second beginnings is a dimension of Heidegger’s thought which Malabou’s reading is unable to express. The first instant of change, as itself a fantastic image, does not admit of any anteriority to the absolute originarity of its own auto-inception.

Throughout the period of his being-historical texts, Heidegger is unequivocal that the essence of truth as unconcealment was merely a foreground instance of the more original essence of truth as sheltering: “Unconcealedness is then *one* mode of the disconcealment of sheltering [*Entbergung der Bergung*].”¹⁶ Rather than unconcealment, it was the dimension of sheltering that was the more primordial essence of truth and the earliest instance of the history of being: “Sheltering is the enshrouding (protection) that preserves the emergence: the most proper

essence of the beginning, its indestructible act of beginning [...] its pure self-donation.”¹⁷ From this perspective, the essence of truth as unconcealment which undergoes change is actually a foreground configuration of the more original sheltering of being in the first beginning. If the essence of truth as unconcealment, strictly speaking, is not given prior to its transformation, but only arrives co-stantaneously with this transformation, what is the status of the relation between the earlier essence of truth as sheltering and the essence of truth as unconcealment? Heidegger clearly understood the essence of truth as sheltering to be given prior to truth as unconcealment. Equally, Heidegger understood being as φύσις to be given prior to the construal of being as ἰδέα in Platonic thought. This genealogical ordering is displaced on Malabou’s reading and reconceived from out of the immemorial instant of change in Plato’s thought. However, while Malabou’s reading of Heidegger passes over the anteriority of the first beginning in favour of the metabolic inauguration of metaphysics, this in no way forfeits the importance of her discovery of change in Heidegger or the relevance of plasticity as an instrument for the intelligibility of his ideas.

Malabou has consistently stressed that the concept of plasticity as a heuristic tool is not fixed, but rather, is itself plastic and mutually articulated through the material it interprets. Just as the thought of plasticity was transformed in its exportation from Hegel to Heidegger, it can also be seen to overflow the borders of Malabou’s reading of change within Heidegger. This different instance of plasticity in Heidegger can be read in his seminal 1919-20 lecture course “Basic Problems of Phenomenology” where phenomenology is transposed beyond its original Husserlian version and rethought on the basis of what Heidegger described as: “The tendency of life to give shape to itself.”¹⁸ Although he would later retract this initial privileging of life and relegate it to a merely ontic region within the more original openness of Dasein, its central role in this early period has often been overlooked. Prior to Heidegger’s thought of ontological difference and his interpretation of the ultimate vocation of phenomenology as the questioning of being, he first conceived phenomenological philosophy as: “the absolute original science of life in and for itself.” (BP, 131) This understanding of phenomenology was not simply a redesignation of the appropriate subject matter for phenomenological investigation. More radically, phenomenology as such was rethought on the basis of the structural ability of life to maintain itself in meaning: “From out of factual life, we want to understand the form [*die Form*] of apprehending life itself: How does life experience itself?” (BP, 188; GP, 250) As the earliest interface and medium through which life becomes intelligible to itself, Heidegger employed a new sense of form which was not reducible to traditional

philosophical definitions of this term.

The sense of form which consistently guided Heidegger's initial reinterpretation of Husserlian phenomenology was neither a version of the transcendental meaning of the formal, nor a variant of *Lebensphilosophie* in which form was the expression of a merely ontic thematization of life. Heidegger's early deployment of form was explicitly conceived without reference to any point of origination, transcendence beyond life or absolute ground within life. This sense of form was the "dynamic structure" (BP, 134) of the original emergence, stabilization and dissolution of meaningfulness within life. The forms through which life articulated itself were not the expression of any transcendent or original form, but rather, always came into relief as a "deformation [*Deformation*] of life." (BP, 113; GP, 147) This sense of originary deformation was inextricably entwined with the emergence of the intelligibility of life to itself. The dynamic configuration of life as always already deformed and transforming was the condition from out of which Heidegger first rethought the meaning of phenomenological philosophy. As I will now argue, this self-engendering-transforming figuration of life as the inner dynamic of philosophy itself can be seen as another aspect of Heidegger's thought that can be articulated through the medium of plasticity.

III.

At the very opening of "Basic Problems of Phenomenology" Heidegger announces: "The most burning, most original, and ultimate basic problem of phenomenology, one which is never to be effaced, is *it itself* for itself." (BP, 2) The rest of the ensuing lecture course can be seen as an attempt to rethink the meaning and possibilities of phenomenological philosophy as articulated through this dynamic of self-differentiation. For Heidegger, the unquestioned postulates of Husserlian phenomenology had covered over the ability of phenomenology to turn the radicality of its questioning back upon its own presuppositions regarding methodology, transcendental subjectivity and its definition of philosophy: "The radicalism of phenomenology needs to operate in the most radical way *against phenomenology itself and against everything* that speaks out as phenomenological cognition." (BP, 5) This sense of radicality is not that of a subject reflecting upon itself or merely methodological reflexivity. For Heidegger, the proper radicality of phenomenological questioning overflowed Husserl's theoretical-epistemic thematization of subjectivity and displaced it upon the deeper constitutive dynamic of life itself: "subjectivity—only the formation [*Ausformung*] of *life*." (BP, 105; GP, 136) Rather than assuming a given structure of subjectivity and

employing a fixed methodology, phenomenology was to be rethought from out of the ability of life to vitally apprehend and renew itself: “A life led astray, in all of its forms of manifestation, even in philosophy and science, can only be renewed again through *genuine* life and its radical, stalwart actualization, not through programs and systems.” (BP, 17) This regeneration of philosophy beyond the will to systematization is based upon the inner capacity of philosophy as a form of life to transfigure itself.¹⁹

The sense of life which guided Heidegger’s inaugural rethinking of phenomenology is explicitly presented in terms of the emergence and shaping of life into forms: “Life is not a chaotic confusion of dark floodings, it is not a dull principle of power, it is not a terrible monster [*Unwesen*], unlimited and devouring everything. Rather, *it is what it is, only as concrete, meaningful form.*” (BP, 114) Accordingly, “Philosophical research is: a researching-understanding guiding into the forms of life itself.” (BP, 115) This sense of form is unequivocally differentiated from the transcendental category of the formal. Heidegger explicitly rejected this merely abstract formalism and the “danger of the conceptual pair ‘form-content’” (BP, 188) which he described as having dominated philosophy since Kant. Instead, he clearly states: “We dispense with formal and transcendental considerations and start out from factual life.” (BP, 188) However, this rejection of the transcendental sense of form is not at all a rejection of the concept of form as such, on the contrary, it is exactly a new sense of form that is employed in this appeal to return to the immediacy of life. To this end Heidegger can be seen to redefine the meaning of form and also create a new terminology based upon its dynamic sense of emergence: “*formation*” (BP, 93), “*relief-like formations of life*” (BP, 31), “*form-giving stabilization.*” (BP, 93) This sense of form as the dynamic medium for the emergence of meaning in life surpasses the traditionally aesthetic and idealistic definitions of form and is employed by Heidegger both explicitly and continually.²⁰

Heidegger’s early reappropriation of form can be seen as a strategy for articulating the sheer immanence of meaning within life itself: “What is decisive is that life [...] gives form to the lived life from out of itself.” (BP, 93) Rather than a site of expression for a meaning beyond the flow of life, Heidegger rethought form to instead designate the structural self-sufficiency of life to itself. This novel redeployment of form is conceived as an articulation which is wholly internal to life in the sense that life: “actualizes itself from *out of its own forms*, that life always addresses itself and answers itself in its own language, that structurally life does not need to untwist itself out of itself in order to maintain itself in its own meaning.” (BP, 34) While this sense of form is wholly removed from connection

to anything beyond life, it is also not simply enclosed within the totality of a pre-given definition of the living. For Heidegger, life is not reducible to objectivity nor grounded in subjectivity: “Life is *not an object*, but it is also not philosophically apprehended through anchoring in the *subject*.” (BP, 111) Nor is the emergence of form to be seen as the expression of a: “primal force [*Urkraft*] of life” (BP, 24; GP, 29) or Bergsonian *élan vital* which Heidegger chided as “mystically confused.” (BP, 17) Heidegger’s figuration of life in the medium of form is not structured as if life were something already present behind a foreground of forms. This traditional ordering of form is not simply reenacted within a vitalistic thematization of the living which is then posited as a substrate behind the manifestations of its expressive forms.

On Heidegger’s account, the manifestation of life as form is determined in every case by a constitutive distortion. Every articulation of life in the medium of form is also, as such, a deformation of life: “factual life gives itself in a particular *deformation*” (BP, 181), and further, “life in all its forms somehow [...] succumbs to a deformation.” (BP, 114) This sense of deformation is not the distortion of a previously pure state of life, but rather originally co-determines the living in its giving and taking form. This articulation of an originary and constitutive deformation at work in the manifestation of forms can be seen to redetermine the meanings of both subjectivity and objectivity. In contrast to Husserl’s definition of these terms as ultimately pre-given static structures, Heidegger explicitly recontextualized them as modes of life’s originary deformation: “an objectivizing or subjectivizing deformation of life.” (BP, 113) By displacing the meaning of these terms back upon the dynamic of life as an originary nexus of deformation and formation, Heidegger can be seen to rethink subjectivity and objectivity as figurations of a structural plasticity in life itself.

Heidegger’s novel sense of form was described as a dynamic of emergence which did not emanate from an ultimate foundation nor progress teleologically, but instead reposed upon the ability of life to both give and receive its own formations. It is perhaps here, in terms of this co-originality of life and form, that Malabou’s concept of plasticity can be seen to articulate Heidegger’s descriptions of the chiasmic figuration of life as form. At once enclosed within the complete immanence of life to itself, Heidegger’s sense of form still retained a capacity for radical transformation. Form is not simply a medium for the incarnation or expression of life. Although life appears nowhere else than in form, life is also never wholly saturated in any of its specific formations. Form is at once the site of life’s stabilization, yet simultaneously, it is also the site of life’s departure from

itself in its transition to different configurations of form. This trans-formation does not supervene upon any more original substrate of life, nor is this transition to be understood as if form were merely a contingent or extraneous medium. Rather, the immanent motility of phenomenological philosophy was structured upon a figuration of life as co-originally giving and receiving its own forms. This radical sense of transformation within life can be seen as an instance where the concept of plasticity can both articulate Heidegger's thought and perhaps grant it, yet another, possible future.

NOTES

1. Catherine Malabou, *The Heidegger Change: On the Fantastic in Philosophy*, trans. Peter Skafish (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011), 54. My references to this text will be given parenthetically with page number and indicated by: “HC”. My references to the original French version *Le Change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie* (Paris: Editions Léo Scheer, 2004) will be indicated by: “CH”.
2. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality and Dialectic*, trans. Lisabeth Durning (London: Routledge, 2005).
3. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 193.
4. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 192.
5. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing: Dialectic, Destruction, Deconstruction*, trans. Carolyn Shread (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 28.
6. For examples of this early reception see: Jean-Paul Martinon, *On Futurity: Malabou, Nancy and Derrida* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and Ian James, *The New French Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012), 83-109.
7. While Malabou is correct to include the relation between the god of metaphysics and the last god as a transformation determined by ontological plasticity, it must be pointed out that this particular instance of change in Heidegger is different than the others. The last god is not only predicated upon an ontological transformation but additionally determined by what Heidegger explicitly described as the essence of the last god itself which, although it manifests itself in being, remains wholly other to its ontological medium.
8. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 42.
9. Catherine Malabou, *Plasticity at the Dusk of Writing*, 30.
10. The degree to which Heidegger’s reading of Nietzsche is also structured by W,W, & V has been obscured by Heidegger’s later editing. Whereas Malabou quotes from the 1961 *Neske* version: “Self-assertion is original assertion of essence” (HC 88) the original lecture course manuscript has in complete concurrence with Malabou’s reading: “Self-assertion is original transformation of essence [Wesensverwandlung].” Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1985), 70 (my translation) In a further omitted passage Heidegger describes Nietzsche’s thought as enacting a “transformation of being [Wandlung des Seins]” *Ibid.*, 160 (my translation).
11. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 193.
12. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, xxiii.
13. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, xxvii.
14. Martin Heidegger, *Die Geschichte des Seyns* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2012), 156 (my translation).
15. Martin Heidegger, *The Event*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 2013), 263.
16. *Ibid.* p. 47 (translation altered).
17. *Ibid.* p. 47.
18. Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*, trans. Scott M. Campbell (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 33. References to this text will be given as: “BP”. References to the original German edition: *Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2010) will be given as: “GP”.
19. On this point, Heidegger explicitly announced a convergence between his understanding of phenomenology as a form of life and the way in which Nietzsche also thought philosophy from

out of the ultimate sympathy of life with itself. (BP, 17) See my: “Bringing Philosophy Back to Life: Nietzsche and Heidegger’s Early Phenomenology.” *Studia Phaenomenologica* 14 (2014): 349-369. If, as Malabou concedes in the final section of *The Heidegger Change*, Nietzsche was the first thinker of ontological mutability (HC 287) then the concept of plasticity can be seen as also a medium for uncovering an earlier and even more direct proximity of Heidegger to the metabolic resources of Nietzsche’s thought. Heidegger’s first articulation of destruction [*Destruction*] in this lecture course (BP, 107) is perhaps the index of this proximity.

20. Heidegger’s ubiquitous employment of form extends to the lecture course itself: “The preceding considerations would be completely misunderstood and would not at all have reached a philosophically understandable stance if they were to be taken as propositions of cognition, so-called truths, from which something would follow, or result with logical necessity. They are much more *a form, a shape* for the preparation of the situation of philosophical understanding.” (BP, 105) (Heidegger’s italics) Moreover, the self as such is presented as mediated by a relation to form: “I dawn upon myself [*ich dämmere mir selbst auf*] in a particular *form*.” (HC 122) (Heidegger’s italics).