

The Beckoning of Language: Heidegger's Hermeneutic Transformation of Thinking

Jeff Malpas

J: I believe that now I see more clearly the full import of the fact that hermeneutics and language belong together. / I: The full import in what direction? / J: Toward a transformation of thinking... / I: The transformation occurs as a passage... / J: ...In which one side is left behind in favor of another... / I: ... and that requires that the sites be placed in discussion. / J: One site is metaphysics. / I: And the other? We leave it without a name – Heidegger, 'Dialogue on Language'.

I. A summary history of modern philosophical hermeneutics has it developing through at least three stages: first, as a methodology of textual interpretation; second, as an methodology for the *Geisteswissenschaften* in general; and third, as a mode of fundamental ontological inquiry (the last of these also leading to a transformation in the first two). These three stages can be said to be organised around three pairs of thinkers (although others stand

in the background, perhaps most notably, Luther): Ast and Schleiermacher, Dilthey and Yorck, and Heidegger and Gadamer. In the work of the last of these, Heidegger and Gadamer, it is precisely the relation between hermeneutics and ontology, a relation that might otherwise be thought to be central to their own appropriation and reconceptualisation of the hermeneutical, that nevertheless also comes into question.

While there is a sense in which Heidegger never abandons ontology, at least, not if ontology is understood as a 'saying of being', the focus on hermeneutics largely disappears from his later thinking in spite of Heidegger's increasing concern with language. Hermeneutics is, of course, central to Gadamer's work, but he makes few explicit references to ontology. One might say that if in Heidegger, hermeneutics disappears in the face of the persistent inquiry into being, in Gadamer it is the thematization of ontology that seems to disappear in the face of the pursuit of the hermeneutical. The tensions evident here are developed further elsewhere. In the work of such as Jacques Derrida, Heidegger's own thinking is taken as itself showing the impossibility of any 'understanding' of being of the sort envisaged in a hermeneutical ontology – deconstruction thus takes precedence over both ontology and hermeneutics. For Gianni Vattimo, the path from Heidegger and Gadamer onwards, when followed in company with Nietzsche, leads to what might be understood as a hermeneutical abandonment of the ontological – what Vattimo has called 'weak thought' (*il pensiero debole*).¹

Yet the original conjunction of ontology with hermeneutics that appears in Heidegger's work, perhaps most notably in the title, as well as the text, of his 1923 lectures, *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity* (a conjunction Gadamer refers to as like talk of “wooden iron”²), and that is also continued in *Being and Time* in 1927, is one that deserves closer scrutiny.³ Certainly the conjoining of ontology with hermeneutics in the early Heidegger raises questions as to the nature of that which is conjoined. What is ontology as it stands in relation to hermeneutics? What is hermeneutics as it stands in relation to ontology? Why might they be thought to come apart and why might they be thought properly to belong together? Perhaps the most compelling reason for raising the question concerning the relation between ontology and hermeneutics is that what is surely at issue in this question is the relation between being and language – a relation that has been of perennial concern throughout much of the history of philosophy, and in which, one might say, the very nature and possibility of philosophy comes into view. It is this relation that is already thematized in Heidegger's treatment of ontology as inseparable from logic (and which meant that the title of the 1923 lectures could equally have been either *Logic* or *Ontology*).⁴

In this latter respect, the question of the relation between ontology and hermeneutics concerns the question of the hermeneutical character of philosophy, and this, I would argue, is actually what is already at stake in the late Heidegger's concern with language as the 'house' of being (something to

which I shall return briefly below).⁵ Indeed, the connection between ontology and hermeneutics is itself thematized, if sometimes indirectly, in 'A Dialogue on Language' from 1950 – a work that makes reference directly back to the thinking of the 1920s. Moreover, understanding the intimate relation between ontology and hermeneutics as developed by Heidegger (a relation that, although I will not have space to address the matter here, is actually implicit in Gadamer also⁶) entails a transformation in thinking that affects both ontology *and* hermeneutics (as it also affects logic), and that also forces us to attend more carefully to *language*, to *world*, and to *place*.⁷ In short, understanding the relation between ontology and hermeneutics moves us in the direction of what later Heidegger calls *topology*, but in doing so it also indicates the manner in which topology itself calls upon the notion of *logos* as well as *topos*. Place thus stands in an essential relation to language. The way place emerges here, however, is particularly instructive, since although it appears for the most part by way of what I will refer to later as "hints and beckonings" (*Winken*), and it does so, in both the early lectures on facticity and the later dialogue on language, in direct relation to the hermeneutical. Since it is these two works, from 1923 and 1950, that provide Heidegger's two most sustained discussions of hermeneutics, especially as it arises in relation to the question of being, that is, to ontology, so it is on these works that my discussion will focus.

II. Let me begin with the early Heidegger – with the Heidegger of 1923. The lectures that make up *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity* open with a series of comments on the character of both ontology and hermeneutics. In a manner that echoes my passing characterisation of ontology above as a ‘saying of being’, Heidegger comments that:

Ontology means doctrine of being. If we hear in this term only the indefinite and vague directive that, in the following, being should in some thematic way come to be investigated and come to language, then the word has performed its possible service as a title for this course. However, if ontology is regarded as designating a discipline, for instance, within the field of inquiry of Neo-Scholasticism or within that of phenomenological Scholasticism and the directions of academic philosophy influenced by it, then the word ‘ontology’ is not a course title fitting for what our theme and manner of treating it will be in the following... The terms ‘ontology’ and ‘ontological’ will be used only in the above-mentioned empty sense of nonbinding indications. They refer to a questioning and defining which is directed to being as such. Which sort of being [*Sein*] is to be questioned after and defined and how this is to be done remain utterly indefinite.⁸

To assume an identification of ontology with any of the various modes of contemporary ontological analysis would already be to predetermine the direction of inquiry when that has still to be established. The idea of ontology as simply the inquiry into the question of being, whatever that might be, remains undetermined as to the exact form ontological analysis might take –

the term 'ontology' itself is used as a mode of 'formal indication' that does not predetermine its subject matter in any problematic fashion. One might well argue that this is just as it should be, since the inquiry into being, if it genuinely aims to take up the question of being as a question, can no more assume a prior determination as to the nature of ontology and the ontological than it can assume a prior determination of that into which ontology inquires, namely, being. The questioning of *being* can only take place if pursued in a genuine fashion – which means in a way that is also accompanied by a questioning of *ontology*.

Although it represents a simple and very basic place of departure for Heidegger's analysis, as well as my own, and is not something that Heidegger develops further, the point that appears here is nonetheless a crucial one. So long as we remain focussed on being as that which is in question, then ontology must remain in question too. Any decision as to a more determinate conception of ontology necessarily involves a more determinate conception of being; similarly, the complete abandonment of ontology can only come with the complete abandonment of the question of being. Moreover, if the question of being has been forgotten or covered-over, as Heidegger claims, then so too must we say that ontology too has been forgotten or covered-over at the same time. We can thus no more make direct appeal to the traditional characterizations of ontology to elucidate what is at issue in ontological

inquiry than we can simply refer to the traditional characterizations of being in answer to the question of being.

Just as the question of ontology is raised at the very start of Heidegger's discussion, indeed as preliminary to it, so too is the question of hermeneutics. Heidegger's 1923 lectures provide us, in fact, with one of the longest and most direct disquisitions on hermeneutics that Heidegger offers anywhere in his writings, including even the 1950 'Dialogue on Language'. Heidegger emphasises that his use of 'hermeneutics' in this early work is not to be construed in the 'modern sense' of a methodology of interpretation that he associates particularly with Dilthey (of whose position on hermeneutics, Heidegger says that it is "already quite limited, showing little clarity in regard to fundamental issues, and moving only to a small extent in their direction")⁹. Hermeneutics is rather to be understood as itself a fundamental mode of 'interpretation' as such.

As is so often the case, Heidegger's account of hermeneutics draws heavily on the Greek origins of the term – on the meaning of the Greek *hermeneuien* and its cognates. An *hermeneus* is an interpreter, "one who communicates, announces and makes known, to someone what another 'means', or someone who in turn conveys, reactivates, this communication, this announcement and making known."¹⁰ Referring to Aristotle, Heidegger writes that *hermeneuien* is a form of conversation or discussion, and as such is "the factual mode of the actualizing of λόγος", and what it accomplishes is

“making something accessible as being there out in the open, as public.”¹¹

Hermeneutics is not to be construed as a form of theoretical comprehension or as a theory *about* interpretation. It is itself an interpreting, an announcing, a making known, and, as such, it is an interpreting that is also self-interpreting – hermeneutics is “the announcement and making known of the being of a being in its being in relation to...(me).”¹² The interpreting that is at issue in hermeneutics is thus not an interpreting, if there could be such, that somehow stands outside of itself, neutral, disengaged, unconcerned.

What is at issue in hermeneutics is always our own understanding, and so an understanding embedded in our already given interpretive situation. The idea of a “hermeneutics of facticity” is thus not the idea of a special mode of interpretation that merely happens to take facticity as its object, but rather the interpreting that that already belongs to facticity as such. Similarly, the facticity to which hermeneutics is directed is not a facticity that stands apart from hermeneutics: what is at issue is the very facticity of the hermeneutical – the factual basis of interpreting.¹³ As Heidegger summarizes matters, using terms that prefigures the language of *Being and Time*, “in hermeneutics what is developed for Dasein is a possibility of its becoming and being for itself in the manner of an understanding of itself”.¹⁴ The understanding at issue here must, however, already be given, if only implicitly, in Dasein’s own mode of being – otherwise it could never be developed as a possibility *at all*.

Hermeneutical understanding thus names both that which is constitutive of Dasein's factual being, *and* what develops out of the inquiry into that being.

The theme of facticity is what Heidegger identifies at the very start of his lectures as initially described using the term "ontology" (but which can also be referred to as 'logic').¹⁵ In its 'empty' and 'nonbinding' sense, ontology does indeed name "any questioning and defining which is directed to being as such", but in Heidegger's hands it is also clear that any entry into the questioning of being can only begin with that original questioning that is already bound up with the being of Dasein – the latter being that "from out of which and for the sake of which philosophy 'is'".¹⁶ The Heideggerian understanding of the question of being as arising only in relation to the being of Dasein is so familiar that it may seem unnecessary to remark on it further. Yet it is easy to overlook what is actually at issue here, and in so doing, to miss the full implications, as well as the proper basis for, Heidegger's manner of proceeding. This is especially so given the character of the inquiry into being that is underway here as indeed a *hermeneutics of facticity*.

The two concepts at work in this phrase are closely inter-related – so much that they appear almost as two aspects of the same unitary phenomenon. The being of Dasein is factual, that is, Dasein is always already given over to its 'there' – to its being 'already-in' the world. Such facticity can be understood as a basic form of situatedness that is also *committed* or *engaged* – it is a situatedness that calls upon Dasein, that opens up in terms of a set of

possibilities, and hence 'questions', for Dasein's being (one might say that this is precisely what it is to be genuinely situated or placed and so distinguishes 'situation' from mere 'position').¹⁷ Yet understood in this way, facticity is essentially hermeneutical: factual being is being that already interprets itself (that announces itself, makes itself known). Yet this also means that ontology itself, the questioning of being, can only be undertaken from the perspective of facticity, and as hermeneutical.

Inasmuch as the question of being, which is the concern of ontology, is seen as beginning with the inquiry into facticity, and so as taking the form of a hermeneutics of facticity (which is also, it should be noted, a hermeneutics of that mode of being that is itself hermeneutical), so the inquiry into being is already transformed into a very different kind of inquiry from that which has traditionally gone under the heading of ontology. The inquiry into being is an inquiry into that which is given in our own facticity. Thus Heidegger says of philosophy in general that it "is a mode of knowing which is in factual life itself and in which factual Dasein is ruthlessly dragged back to itself and relentlessly thrown back upon itself."¹⁸ This aspect of the relation between facticity and philosophical, or ontological, inquiry itself reflects the hermeneutical character of the inquiry at issue. Philosophical inquiry always arises out of the hermeneutical, that is, self-interpreting character of the being of Dasein in which the being of philosophy is itself founded. Moreover, as hermeneutical, philosophy must itself be understood as a mode of self-

interpretation and self-articulation. For this reason it must always move in the space opened up by the 'there' of Dasein's being. There can be no other space, no other situation, in which philosophy can emerge or to which it can make appeal.¹⁹

Moreover, as the hermeneutical is also discursive, and so stands in an essential relation to language ("the factual mode of the actualizing of λόγος"), so the hermeneutical understanding of ontology shifts ontology into the same discursive realm. Whereas Carnap famously announced, in 1931, the "elimination of metaphysics through the logical analysis of language", Heidegger's thinking, even in 1923, presages the transformation of ontology, and with it a more fundamental appropriation of metaphysics, through the hermeneutical understanding of facticity. The course of Heidegger's thinking beyond 1923 – and beyond 1927 – takes this transformation still further. To see the direction in which this transformation occurs, however, it is necessary to explore more closely the idea of the hermeneutical, and especially the hermeneutical understanding of language that is also at issue, and for this we need to turn from Heidegger's early to his later thinking.

III. Although, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger is explicit in characterising his project as aiming at an 'Interpretation' (*Auslegung*) of the meaning of being, the only explicit discussion of hermeneutics in that work occurs in a single paragraph in §7 in which Heidegger is at pains to make clear the sense in

which the inquiry into the meaning of being can be said to take the form of a 'hermeneutics' (his comments summarise some of the points discussed above).²⁰ It is not until 23 years later, in 'A Dialogue on Language' from 1950, that hermeneutics reappears as a significant point of focus for Heidegger's thinking, and when it does, it is in a way that, although in some ways less detailed (in other ways more so), nevertheless echoes elements of the discussion of the matter in the 1923 lectures on facticity. There is thus significant continuity between the two works, and Heidegger makes explicit reference in the 1950's work back to his thinking in the 1920s.

In this later discussion, Heidegger once again refers the meaning of hermeneutics back to its Greek origins, and to the Greek term *hermeneuein*, emphasising, however, that hermeneutics does not mean merely the interpretation of some message already given: "hermeneutics means not just the interpretation [*das Auslegen*] but, even before it, the bearing of message and tidings [*das Bringen von Botschaft und Kunde*]." ²¹ The idea of hermeneutics as the bearing of the message as well as its interpretation is not entirely absent from the 1923 discussion, even if it is not at all highlighted (and may even appear obscured by some comments). However, not only does Heidegger make the same connection to the god Hermes in the later as well as the earlier discussion, as well as referring to the same passage from Plato's *Ion*,²² but the references Heidegger draws from Aristotle in the earlier discussion seem to allow for just such a reading as appears in the later: hermeneutics is

connected to *discourse*, and so to the making manifest of things, to their being unconcealed. Significantly, this aspect of the hermeneutical, as explicated through Aristotle, seems very much to depend on the explication of *hermeneuein* in connection with *logos*, and it is this connection that, as I indicated above, comes to the fore in the later discussion.

In answer to the question as to why he places such emphasis on this original sense of *hermeneuein*, Heidegger refers immediately to the way in which it connects to his approach to the question of being:

It was this original sense which prompted me to use it in defining the phenomenological thinking that opened the way to *Being and Time* for me. What mattered then, and still does, is to bring out [*zum Vorschein zu bringen*] the Being of beings – though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out [*dass das Sein selbst zum scheinen kommt*], Being itself – that is to say: the presence of present beings [*Anwesen des Anwesenden*], the two-fold of the two in virtue of their simple oneness [*die Zwiefalt beider aus ihrer Einfalt*]. This is what makes its claim [*den Anspruch*] on man, calling him to its essential being.²³

If the original sense at work in the term ‘hermeneutics’ is not just the *interpreting*, but also the “bearing of message and tidings”, and if this original sense is what opens up the possibility of bringing out the being of beings, “not in the manner of metaphysics, but such that being itself will shine out”, then hermeneutics is not merely an ‘interpretation’ of being in any usual sense, but rather concerns the bringing forth of the very being of beings – a

bringing forth that mirrors the character of being as itself the presencing of what is present (what Heidegger frequently refers to in this discussion as just “the twofold”). Hermeneutics’ own character as self-interpretation can now be read differently: not as the interpretation of some hidden aspect of the hermeneutical, but rather as the uncovering of the self-showing character of the hermeneutical, and of being, as such (thus also drawing the hermeneutical into the domain of the Heideggerian understanding of truth as *aletheia*). Indeed, one might argue that this is already what is at issue in Heidegger’s original use of hermeneutics in *The Hermeneutics of Facticity*.

The reading of the character of the hermeneutical in Heidegger’s thinking is reinforced when one reflects of the role of facticity in the earlier work. If, as I have argued elsewhere, facticity is understood in terms of Dasein’s own essential situatedness (something suggested by Heidegger’s own emphasis on the ‘there’),²⁴ and of hermeneutics as a kind of ‘wakefulness’ to Dasein’s factual situation, then the language of ‘interpretation’, as usually understood, seems ill-adapted to what is at issue. Rather than interpretation, perhaps one should understand the hermeneutical as itself essentially concerned with a fundamental mode of *awareness* and *orientation* – as essentially a matter of finding oneself *in one’s situatedness*, of finding oneself *in place*. Certainly, it is only *in place* that any form of appearing, of presencing, or of showing, can occur, while such presencing can itself be understood as itself a placing and a ‘taking place’. It is thus that late Heidegger talks of his

thinking of being as a *topology* – as ‘a saying’ of the place of being (*Ortschaft des Seyns*). One might argue, in fact, that the unity of the twofold – of presence and presencing – is itself encompassed only in and through the unity of place, even as the unity of place is itself worked out only in terms of the twofold of presence and presencing.

The character of the hermeneutical as connected to a fundamental mode of appearing or showing, and the way this might also be tied to the bearing of a message or tidings, clearly brings to the fore the relation between hermeneutics and language, and with it the question of the understanding of language that might be at work here. This is already suggested by the way the character of Heidegger’s treatment of the matters at issue, both in *The Hermeneutics of Facticity* and in other works from around the same time, as one that implicates logic no less than ontology: *hermeneuein* cannot be addressed independently of *logos* any more than it can be dealt with apart from *to on*. Moreover, language itself appears as a mode of bringing to appearance, showing, or making present. This is evident throughout much of Heidegger’s earlier thinking, but the originary character of language in this regard is an even stronger theme in the later works, including ‘A Dialogue on Language’. One of the exchanges in the 1950 dialogue runs as follows:

I: For long now, I have been loathe to use the word “language” when thinking on its nature...

J: Which word do you use? I: The word “Saying”. It means saying and what is said in it and

what is meant to be said. J: What does “say” mean? I: Probably the same as “show” in the sense of: let appear and let shine, but in the manner of hinting [*in der Weise des Winkens*].²⁵

Clearly, part of what is at issue here is the intimate connection of language, or ‘Saying’, and being – as indicated through the reference to ‘show’ in the sense of “letting appear and let shine”. Moreover, given that this exchange appears in the midst of a discussion in which the being of hermeneutics is itself at issue, and in which hermeneutics is seen as a the bringing of message or tidings, then so we can see the understanding of language as a “Saying” that is also a “showing” to itself reflect back on the character of hermeneutics as such.

The term *hermeneuein* refers us, not to some secondary act of interpretation, but instead to an original event of showing or letting appear – though an event that also draws us toward it, an event that hints or *beckons*,²⁶ as connoted by the German *Winken* (although *Winken* can also carry a sense of greeting – something which cannot be entirely absent here either). This latter term takes on a special significance in Heidegger’s discussion. Of *Winken*, *beckonings*, Heidegger says that “They are enigmatic. They beckon to us [*Sie winken uns zu*] . They beckon away [*Sie winken ab*]. They beckon us toward that from which they unexpectedly bear towards us.”²⁷ The showing that is at issue here, and that belongs to language, and so also to the hermeneutical, is not some simple presentation of what is already determined, but, like the

appearances of the gods themselves, both hides and reveals, concealing in its very shining.

The character of hermeneutics as a “bearing of message and tidings” thus cannot be construed in terms of the delivery of something complete and transparent in content. Indeed, the message that is borne, Heidegger tells us, is the message “which the twofold’s unconcealment” speaks to us,²⁸ and the message that is so spoken can be nothing other than unconcealment itself, including our own prior belonging to such unconcealment. If this is a message that can only take the form of *Winken*, of beckonings, then this is because there is nothing revealed here that does not also carry an essential concealment with it. Hermeneutics is itself concealing as well as disclosive – it is a “bearing of message or tidings”, and so also a “saying”, but one that indeed beckons, and so directs us to what shows, as it is itself a kind of showing, rather than simply declares. All of the terms that operate in Heidegger’s thinking, and especially in his late thinking, should be understood, in this ‘hermeneutic’ fashion, as *Winken*, as beckonings. As such, they constantly play out within a space in which different senses overlap, and in which the same term can carry multiple connotations.²⁹ The reader who looks for a single univocal interpretation of Heidegger’s text will thus always be disappointed, but such a reader is also likely to be one who has assumed exactly the reading of the hermeneutical that Heidegger warns us against – who has assumed a mode of interpretation that remains *merely* interpretive

("in the manner of metaphysics"), and so fails to attend to the more fundamental disclosure, the shining appearance, that is at issue here.

Heidegger's talk of *Winken* also serves, once again, to beckon us back towards the character of showing, whether the unconcealment of the twofold, or the showing of the hermeneutical itself, as always 'taking place' in the place opened up by the 'there' to which human being is already given over. *Winken*, as Heidegger characterises them, always involve a situatedness and directedness, a movement towards or away. Not only Heidegger's use of terms, but his very thinking takes the form of such a beckoning – a drawing-into a certain place of thinking, a calling-back towards the place in which thinking is already situated. Such beckoning or hinting is topological in its own character, as is the idea of the "bearing of message or tidings" that Heidegger sees at work in the idea of the hermeneutical. The bearing of a message is always a matter of a certain "journey" – a carrying from one 'place' to another (even if those two places are actually but two aspects of the same) – while its speaking or 'saying' also invokes a circumstance and an occasion. The topological connotations that are evident here run throughout 'A Dialogue on Language', in which there is constant reference to modes of movement and stillness, distance and nearness, trail and direction. They are evident in the very presentation of the piece as a "dialogue" – as a placed conversation *between* speakers (even if the exact place of that conversation

remains largely unspoken) that allows for an openness in which something can emerge into unconcealment .

The character of dialogue as indeed occurring within an open space 'between' is itself significant. Such a between arises only in the space opened up in place, since it is only within place that there appears the necessary boundedness on which such a between-space depends. Space can itself be understood to emerge out of just such a between – it is thus that space is sometimes said to have its origin, in one sense, in the idea of the interval, *diastema* – such that space cannot be understood (contrary to the manner in which the history of the concept has so often played out) independently of place, just as the unbounded cannot be understood independently of the bounded; the open cannot be understood apart from the closed; the unconcealed always presupposes the hidden. In attending to the showing or letting shine that is at the heart of the hermeneutical, what is also attended to is this very between — a between that is evident in the idea of the twofold as well as in the figure of the dialogue; that appears in the hermeneutical 'relation' itself,³⁰ as well as in very character of language.

IV. Given the topological character of so much of the discussion within it, Heidegger's 'Dialogue on Language' can be seen as carrying out something like a sustained elaboration of the claim, from the 'Letter of Humanism' of the late 1940s, that "language is the house of being". This sentence is as succinct a

statement of Heideggerian topology as one can find anywhere in his works. It is a summary that itself draws together both ontology and hermeneutics within the same topological frame: language is that within which the presencing presence that is being properly comes to place, and the inquiry into being is thus always an inquiry into the placedness that is opened up only in and through language.

Yet although rich in topological hints and indications, for the most part, the 'Dialogue on Language' only indirectly thematizes the place that it nevertheless invokes – and this is as true of language (understood topologically as the house of being) as it is true of place itself. Towards the end of the Dialogue, however, in which the two participants attempt to characterise the common neighbourhood in which their thinking seems to move, that neighbourhood is itself brought into view in a way that also seems to illuminate the place of dialogue itself as the place of speaking or saying and of presencing – and to do so in an explicitly topological fashion:

I: The question of the site [*Ort*] in which the kinship that you sense comes into play. / J: Your question reaches far. / I How so? / J: The distance is the boundlessness which is shown to us in *Ku*, the sky's emptiness. / I: Then, man, as the message-bearer of the message of the two-fold's unconcealment, would also be he who walks the boundary of the boundless. / J: And on this path he seeks the boundary's mystery... / I: which cannot be hidden in anything other than the voice [*Stimme*] that determines and tunes his nature [*die sein Wesen be-stimmt*].³¹

This is a dense passage and one that is rich in implications. Not only is the question of place (*Ort*) brought directly into view, but it appears in a way that connects it with one of the elements in Heidegger's own Fourfold, *Sky* [*Himmel*], but here characterised in terms of distance, emptiness, and boundlessness. Yet immediately the connection is made to 'man', to the human, as "he who walks the boundary of the boundless".

Place is precisely that bounded opening into the boundlessness of world that is exemplified in the emptiness of sky as it is 'shown to us', as it opens above us, as it appears within the horizon of our own being there. Moreover, this place, and the mystery that belongs to it as the boundary itself belongs, is hidden and therefore also revealed in the voice, the saying, which is surely nothing other than the voice (*Stimme*) that sounds in language, and that determines and tunes (*bestimmen*) the nature of the human. The human is the one who is attuned to, as well as being tuned by, that voice, as it is also attuned to and by the place that sounds in the voice and in which the voice sounds. Here the cleared place that belongs to being appears as 'cleared' in a way that invokes the spatiality of sound no less than of light. As Heidegger comments elsewhere:

Hellen [to clear], along with *hell* [clear], mean the same as *Hallen* [to resound] in the sense of "resounding." In the sense of the [primordial] event of the self-manifestation of being, *Hellen*

[to clear] occurs originally as *Hallen* [sounding], as tone. All other beings fall short of this fundamental tone [*Grundton*].³²

The intimate connection between sound and place (and between sound and space) is sometimes overlooked,³³ yet in Heidegger the essential connection between the two means that the idea of place as clearing always carries more than just a visual connotation: the clearing is a saying, as it is a beckoning, as it is an opening. The clearing is a place, and a place that sounds in language as language itself sounds in place.

The sounding that Heidegger takes to occur within the clearing is the same sounding that occurs in the voice, and so in the Saying that is language. In his essay on the poet Hebel, Heidegger writes of both the sounding of voice and the shining of script:

A word of language sounds and resounds in the voice, is clear and bright in the typeface. Voice and script are indeed sensuous, yet always within them a meaning (*Sinn*) is told and appears. As sensuous meaning, the word traverses the expanse of the leeway between earth and sky. Language holds open the realm in which man, upon the earth and beneath the sky, inhabits the house of the world.³⁴

The clearing is a between – a bounded and yet open space – and it is just such a between that is here said to be held open by language. Earth and sky are the two poles of this between, and so one might say that they also constitute its

bounds, and yet in another sense, it is earth that stands as the bound here, that which the human walks, whereas sky is the open, and so also, in the terms of the 'Dialogue on Language', the boundless. It is in this between that world itself opens up.

How is it that language can hold open this between? How is it that language can make for the possibility of world? In the passage just quoted, Heidegger seems to imply that it is the character of the word as the making present of meaning in the sensuous that enables the opening and holding open of the between-space of world. There is much in this idea that deserves further exploration, but what seems most worthy of consideration here is the way this idea itself depends upon a between that already belongs to language as such. If language unifies the sensuous with the meaningful, then this is only because it also differentiates them, and it is this very interplay of unity and difference as it occurs in and through language that is surely the more fundamental structure. If the between is itself understood in terms of such an interplay of unity and difference, then so language and the between must be inextricably linked – and more than this, as the between lies at the heart of the topological (for *topos* is the emergence of the open within what is bounded), so place and language must also be intimately connected. Hence the significance of the place as it sounds in the voice, and of the voice as that which resounds in the clearing.

In language – in Saying – there resides the possibility of a sameness that is also a difference. In mundane terms, this appears in the way in which what is said both belongs with what it speaks about even while it is also distinct from it; as well as in the very rhythm of language, which may become song, in which repetition enables articulation, and in which differentiation of sound and script makes possible a unity of sense. It is this possibility of identity in difference and of difference in identity, given in the idea of the between, that is the very essence of language, of Saying, and so also of showing or of letting–appear.³⁵ It is this unifying-differentiation that is operative on Heidegger’s original deployment of the so-called ‘ontological difference’, but which, perhaps more importantly, is also evident in the concealing-revealing that is *aletheia*, in the twofold of presencing and presence, and in the bounded boundlessness of *topos*, of place. The between that holds language and place apart is thus also what unites them, and it is this between to which the hermeneutical also belongs, and to which it draws us.

V. For all that Heidegger makes only occasional appeal to the language of the hermeneutical, and is often seen to have abandoned it altogether in his late thought, it is nevertheless hermeneutics that opens up the Heideggerian transformation in thinking. It is hermeneutics that allows phenomenology to become a way into the question of being understood as focussed specifically

on the 'there' of being as it opens into world. It is hermeneutics that enables the understanding of language as that which holds open the differentiated unity of world.

The very idea of a such a hermeneutics as applied to ontology, and especially of ontology as itself taking the form of a 'hermeneutics of facticity', must indeed appear as an impossibility, "wooden iron" in Gadamer's phrase, if it is understood in *conventional* terms – that is, if it is understood apart from the transformation that this mode of thinking also brings about, if it is understood merely as an *interpretation*, in the usual sense, of factual existence. Facticity will always be resistant to such an 'interpretation', just as the presencing of what is present will always resist the attempt to think such presencing in the terms of 'metaphysics'. Yet the Heideggerian transformation of thinking, while it may be said to be brought about through Heidegger's appropriation of the hermeneutical, is also a transformation in the hermeneutical as such. That transformation occurs partly through the very turning of hermeneutics in the direction of ontology, but also, and more importantly, through the topological re-orientation that becomes an increasingly central element in Heidegger's thinking, and that is already present even in the 1920s. The place of thinking that is opened up through this transformation and re-orientation is, I would argue, the place that thinking never leaves: it is the *topos* of being, the *topos* of the *hermeneuiein*, the *topos* that also belongs to *logos*.³⁶

The place of thinking that appears here is one in which both language and the hermeneutical are shown as belonging together, and as standing in an essential relation to being, and so to the unconcealment of the twofold, to the presencing of presence. This place of thinking, which opens in the between-space made possible by language, is not a place that allows for any movement behind or beyond. It is a place that can only be explored in and through language, although the manner of that exploration is one that demands that we remain with both the place that appears, and the language that allows that appearance. The transformation that opens up through the way languages comes to the fore here is thus not one that leads in the direction of more formalized analysis (Carnap's 'logical analysis' of language has no place here), but rather requires that we address language itself, and that we therefore attend to language in its own Saying/Showing – that we return to the 'essential simplicity' that language already possesses.³⁷ Similarly, the hermeneutical engagement in and with place is not an engagement directed at making transparent what is otherwise obscure, of eliminating all traces of what is hidden in favour of some unsullied disclosure, but is rather a matter of letting stand forth the emergence into openness that is the presencing of presence.

It is this topological-hermeneutical engagement that appears as opening a place of thinking that, if we are to employ such terms, stands apart from the place that belongs to metaphysics (although even metaphysics

stands apart here only inasmuch as it already misapprehends its own place). If this engagement is given the name of ontology (as Heidegger refrains from doing, but surely remains a possibility), this is not because it fulfils some prior designation of the nature of the ontological, but because ontology, if genuinely understood as a saying, and so also, presumably, a showing – a disclosing – of being, must always remain an ‘empty’ name. It refers to nothing more than that between-space in which being, always enigmatically, is brought to appearance. It is a between-space opened up by language, and towards which language itself beckons.

¹ See Vattimo, *The End of Modernity. Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991).

² See Gadamer, ‘Kant and the Hermeneutical Turn’, in *Heidegger’s Ways*, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p.55. Gadamer does not endorse this characterisation, but instead uses it as a way of capturing the apparent impossibility of the Heideggerian project on a conventional understanding.

³ Käte Bröcker-Oltmanns that the use of the term ‘ontology’ in the title of these lectures is “vague and accidental”, since Heidegger would have used the term ‘logic’, except that another course had already been scheduled under

that title – see her comments in the ‘Editor’s Epilogue’, in Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans John van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p.88. Accidental though the circumstances surrounding the use of the term may be, Heidegger’s own comments in the lectures, as well as the course of his thinking elsewhere (see note 3 immediately below), make clear that his use of the term is far from vague, and in regard to the matters at issue, not at all accidental.

⁴ As van Buren points out, Heidegger takes logic and ontology to be interconnected – see *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.91.

⁵ See ‘Letter on Humanism’, in *Pathmarks* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p.239.

⁶ Although something of this is indicated in my ‘The Beginning of Understanding: Event, Place, Truth’, in Jeff Malpas and Santiago Zabala (eds), *Consequences of Hermeneutics* (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2010), pp.261-280.

⁷ Chrsitina Lafont has argued at length for the problematic character of the hermeneutical transformation that occurs in Heidegger’s thinking – see Lafont, *Heidegger, Language, and World-Disclosure* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). Although I will not discuss Lafont’s approach in any detail here, I would argue that her approach is limited by its failure to understand the topological character of the hermeneutical transformation

that Heidegger achieves, as well as its insistence of reading Heidegger's work from the perspective of a form of analytic philosophy of language that is alien to it (a perspective that remains, in Heidegger's terms, *metaphysical*).

⁸ Heidegger, *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.1.

⁹ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.11.

¹⁰ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.6.

¹¹ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.8.

¹² *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.7.

¹³ See van Buren's comments in *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, n.1, p.102.

¹⁴ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.11

¹⁵ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.1.

¹⁶ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.2

¹⁷ I would note that the tendency on the part of some commentators to insist that the 'Da' in Dasein cannot and should not be construed spatially or topologically seems to overlook the impossibility of avoiding spatial or topographical concepts in any explication of what is at issue here (see my discussion in *Heidegger's Topology*, p.47-51) – the refusal to treat the 'Da' as in any sense a 'there' is perhaps most vehemently insisted upon by

Thomas Sheehan (“there is no there there” he tells us) in ‘A Paradigm Shift in Heidegger Research’, *Continental Philosophy Review*, 34 (2001), p.193.

¹⁸ *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.14

¹⁹ Which is why philosophy is always ‘of its time’ — a point to which Heidegger gives special emphasis (see *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.14).

²⁰ See *Being and Time*, H37-38. The terms ‘hermeneutic’, ‘hermeneutics’, and ‘hermeneutical’ do appear at other places in the work, but not in such a way that hermeneutics is made an explicit focus of discussion.

²¹ ‘A Dialogue on Language’, in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p.29 [122] — the bracketed numbers refer to the corresponding pages in the 11th German edition of *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Stuttgart: Verlag Günther Neske, 1997).

²² Plato, *Ion*, 534e, “the poets are but the heralds/interpreters of the gods” – see *Ontology – The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, p.6; ‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.29 [122].

²³ ‘A Dialogue on Language’, in *On the Way to Language*, trans. Peter D. Hertz (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), pp.29-30 [121-122].

²⁴ See Malpas, *Heidegger’s Topology: Being, Place, World* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2006), pp.39ff.

²⁵ ‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.47 [145].

²⁶ Although the English ‘beckon’ is certainly not an exact counterpart to the German *Winken*, the etymology of the English terms suggests it may be more appropriate than may first appear. ‘Beckon’, in its modern and older forms, is closely related to ‘beacon’, a term that comes through Middle and Old English, as well as various Germanic forms, from the proto Indo-European root **bha-* meaning ‘to shine’ – see Eric Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1959), p.42. Such a derivation has obvious resonances in the Heideggerian context.

²⁷ ‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.26 [117].

²⁸ ‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.40 [135].

²⁹ There is thus an essential indeterminacy that is present throughout Heidegger’s thinking (where indeterminacy implies just such a multiplicity of meaning), as well as an inevitable self-referentiality in Heidegger’s use of terms (as the use of *Winken* itself beckons or hints). The indeterminacy and multiplicity at issue here is what I refer to elsewhere as ‘iridescence’ (see *Heidegger’s Topology*, pp.36-7).

³⁰ Although the sense of ‘relation’ at work here is one that must be approached with some care – as Heidegger warns: “We think of [relation] in the sense of relationship [Wir denken an Beziehung im Sinne der Relation]. What we know in that way we can identify in an empty, formal,

sense, and employ like a mathematical notation. Think of the procedure of logistics. But in the phrase, “man stands in a hermeneutical relation to the twofold”, we may hear the word ‘relation’ [Bezug] also in a wholly different way. In fact, we must, if we give thought to what was said” (‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.32 [125].)

³¹ ‘A Dialogue on Language’, p.41 [136-7].

³² Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars: Protocols, Conversations, Letters*, ed. Medard Boss, trans. Franz May and Richard Askey (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 2001), p.181.

³³ Perhaps most notably in P. F. Strawson’s discussion in Chapter Two of *Individuals* (London: Methuen, 1959) – see my discussion in *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.114-24.

³⁴ Heidegger, ‘Hebel – Friend of the House’, trans. Bruce V. Foltz and Michael Heim, in Contemporary German Philosophy 3 (1983), p.100-1.

³⁵ See Heinrich Ott’s excellent discussion of the idea of the between and its relation to language in ‘Hermeneutic and Personal Structure of Language’, in Joseph J. Kockelmans (ed.), *On Heidegger and Language* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972). Ott’s work is notable not only for the way in which it implicitly draws out the topology at work in Heidegger’s account of language, but also because Ott is so strongly attuned to the hermeneutical as it appears in Heidegger’s thought – see

also some Ott's comments in his 'What is Systematic Theology?', in James M. Robinson and John B. Cobb Jr (eds.), *New Frontiers in Theology, Vol 1, The Later Heidegger and Theology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963), pp.77-114. Ott's work seems to me unjustly neglected by contemporary readers of Heidegger. It is especially significant in this context, however, not least because of Ott's own hermeneutical orientation, as well as Heidegger's own apparent support for Ott's approach.

³⁶ See my *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* (Cambridge., Mas.: MIT Press, 2012), for more on this place of thinking.

³⁷ Heidegger comments in the Le Thor seminar that it was through Hölderlin that he learned the uselessness of the attempt to coin new words (seemingly confirming Gadamer's claim that it was Hölderlin who first set loose Heidegger's tongue) – only after *Being and Time* was the necessity of a return to the simplicity of language clear to him" (see *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew Mitchell and François Raffoul, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2003, p.51). One might argue that Heidegger's well-known claims regarding a 'neediness' of language (*Sprachnot* – something partially addressed in this same passage from *Four Seminars*) is mistaken if it is taken to imply a limitation in the capacity of language adequately to speak since this would seem to contradict the character of language as always essentially disclosive. Gadamer may, on such an

account, be said to be more in accord with the hermeneutical mode of thinking that appears here precisely through the trust he retains in the capacity of language adequately, even now, to speak and to say.