Placing Understanding/Understanding Place

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ABSTRACT: This paper sets out an account of hermeneutics as essentially 'topological' in character (where 'topology' is understood as designating the philosophical inquiry into place) at the same time as it also argues that hermeneutics has a key role to play in making clear the nature of the topological. At the centre of the argument is the idea that place and understanding are intimately connected, that this is what determines the interconnection between topology and hermeneutics, and that this also implies an intimate belonging-together of place and thinking, of place and experience, of place and the very possibility of appearance, of presence, of being.

1. Although the early years of this century saw the loss of two of the most distinguished and influential figures in the history of hermeneutics, Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur (in 2003 and 2005 respectively), the years since have also seen an upsurge in critical engagement with hermeneutics (it might be argued that the one is, to some extent, a consequence of the other). There are thus an increasing number of volumes dedicated, not only to aspects of the history of hermeneutics and key figures in that history, but also to re-thinking the nature of hermeneutics and its relation to other areas of philosophy.[1] Most notably perhaps, Günter Figal's *Objectivity*[2] attempts a major critical engagement with the hermeneutical tradition in order to rethink what hermeneutics might be, while Rudolf Makkreel's more recent *Orientation and Judgment in Hermeneutics*[3] also takes up hermeneutics within a broad frame, arguing for a re-positioning of hermeneutics that gives a renewed emphasis to Kant.

A key feature of the work of both Makkreel and Figal is the way their approaches explicitly thematize a set of spatial or, as I would say, *topological* themes. Each explores aspects of the way hermeneutics stands in relation to space and to place. Figal's account is focussed around the necessity for understanding to be distinct from its objects – it is this that both requires but also enables understanding – and it is the idea of distance that leads Figal in the direction of the notion of *hermeneutical space*. Although couched in very different terms, Makkreel's account is also focussed on the need to rethinking the grounds for genuine critical engagement – an engagement that allows for understanding across difference. In this context Makkreel turns to notions of reflection and especially orientation, and at one point draws directly on a set of topological themes and concepts present in Kant (many of which also have key roles in Heidegger's thinking) – including *Schranke*, *Grenze*, *Aufenthalt*, *Gebiet*, and *Boden.*[4] Makkreel and Figal each develop their accounts in opposition to what they see as problematic elements in Gadamer's thinking, and one might argue, though neither Figal nor Makkreel take up this point, that Gadamer's own approach is much less focussed, or so it would seem, on the spatial and topological elements in understanding.[5] One might say, then, that what Figal and Makkreel attempt is essentially a re-orienting *of* hermeneutics that is also a turning of hermeneutics back to address the role of orientation *in* hermeneutics.[6]

In this brief essay, I want to take up this idea of a re-orienting of hermeneutics in order to set out the broad outlines of a conception of hermeneutics as itself essentially topological in character. While not wanting to diminish the extent to which Figal and Makkreel do indeed take up spatial and topological themes as central to hermeneutical thinking, my approach will be one that places the topological (and so *place* rather than *space* – a key point of difference in my approach from Figal's) at the very centre of hermeneutics, and that also argues that hermeneutics has a key role to play in making clear the nature of the topological. The approach that I will set out here is one that is already adumbrated in much of my previous work – and part of what this essay aims to do is to bring out more explicitly, and in somewhat synoptic fashion, the extent to which my own thinking has always involved an interweaving of topology with hermeneutics – except that the connection at issue is not simply contingent upon a particular personal path of thinking. At the centre of the argument that is sketched is the idea

that place and understanding are intimately connected, that this is what determines the interconnection of topology and hermeneutics, and that this also implies an intimate belonging-together of place and thinking, of place and experience, of place and the very possibility of appearance, of presence, of being.

2. Understanding and place – or as one might also say, understanding and *situation* –are bound together from the very start. Indeed, it is precisely the central role of situation in hermeneutic as well as existential thinking that is a clear indication of the topological character of such thinking.[7] Heidegger's explorations in *Being and Time* thus take the connection of understanding with place, even though not explicitly named in this way, as a key focus. Dasein,[8] is already 'in the world' in a way that depends on a prior understanding of world, and so of that being-in, and that understanding is itself given precisely in terms of a mode of oriented situatedness or 'placedness' (see Malpas 2006). To a large extent one can read the entirety of Part One of Division One of *Being and Time* as an analysis and laying-out of this 'placedness'. It is our being already in place – here, in *this* place – that *gives rise to* understanding (and to the need to understand) as it also *depends upon* understanding. It is only in virtue of where and how we find ourselves that anything is able to present itself to us as something that calls for understanding, and it is only on that basis that we are moved to understand – indeed, it is this that underpins Figal's emphasis on hermeneutical distance, and so also hermeneutical space[9]. Equally, however, our being in a place, our situated, is itself a matter of our having some prior grasp of that place and that situation, even if it is a grasp that often remains unarticulated.

The circularity that appears in the relation between place and understanding is the most basic form of the hermeneutic circularity that has so often been remarked upon as a feature of understanding in general. Here it appears as a mode of circularity that belongs essentially to the structure of being-in-place – as a mode of circularity that is essential to *orientation* (which depends upon the 'to and fro' relatedness that arises in the interdependence of and interaction between self and place[10]). It is a circularity that thereby reflects the relational character of orientation, but also the relational character of place itself. As soon as one shifts away from the simplistic notion of place as mere 'location' (the notion of

place that is at work in the use of a map or in the giving of an address[11]) and towards the notion of place as that wherein things appear or come to presence (something captured in the Archytan dictum, reepatyed by both Plato and Aristotle, that to be *is to be in some place*[12]), then one is also forced towards a recognition of place as given always and only relationally – not only inasmuch as any and every place is embedded within a network of other places, nor even inasmuch as any and every place embeds a myriad of other places within it, but also inasmuch as things are themselves shaped by the places in which they appear even as they also contribute of the shaping of those very places (this applying as much to our own mode of being as to any other[13]).

This hermeneutic circularity, which is also a topological circularity (one might argue that all circularity is such), is the same circularity that appears in the idea of the transcendental – at least as that notion refers, in the case of hermeneutics, to the inquiry into the pre-conditions of understanding, or, in the Kantian case, of knowledge. Transcendental circularity is often mistakenly identified as the circularity of the *petitio principia* – of circular *argument* – but the transcendental does not first name a mode of argument, so much as a mode of thinking, and specifically a form of orientational thinking that looks to find a ground by reference to that wherein what is to be grounded is always already situated.[14] Nowhere is this clearer than in Kant himself for whom the structure of the transcendental-critical project is articulated precisely in topological terms – as a laying out of the proper place that belongs to knowledge and to reason. It is thus that Kant presents himself as a kind of philosophical geographer, though one who maps, not any foreign shore, but rather the very country that is our home and from which we can never properly depart.[15] Understood in this topological fashion, the transcendental thus concerns not that which goes beyond, the metaphysically transcendent, but rather that which is already given – *and so given within the bounds proper to it* – and through which a form of transcendence, in Kant's case the opening up of the world or of knowledge, is made possible.[16] One might thus say that the transcendence at issue here is made possible precisely in and though what is immanent – which here means that which is already given in the boundedness of place. The structure of relations that are at issue in any topologically understood transcendental project – the relations, for instance, that make

possible understanding – are thus relations that already lie before us. They are the relations that make up our already being-placed in the place in which we are – that therefore make up our being already in the world.[17] Although Makkreel does not directly take up this connection between the topological, the hermeneutical, and the Kantian conception of the transcendental, the manner in which he re-positions hermeneutics within a Kantian frame, and with explicit attention to a set of topological notions including the idea of orientation, itself suggests a similar topological reading of the Kantian transcendental-critical project, and so implicitly of the idea of the transcendental as such.[18]

Inasmuch as it undertakes to map out the place of understanding – or of knowledge or reason – the transcendental already presupposes the relational character of the domain into which it inquires. What the transcendental inquiry brings to the fore is the always already given structure of relations in which what is inquired into is embedded. The exhibiting of this structure of relations is itself a *placing* – a laying out of a particular being *in place*. The emphasis on relationality is central, not only to the transcendental, but also to the thinking of place itself, and it is also central, as the idea of hermeneutic circularity itself suggests, to the thinking of understanding that takes place under the banner of hermeneutics. It does not appear only in the idea of circularity, however, but in ideas of dialogue, conversation, and play. It is significant that these ideas themselves bring a set of topological connotations with them – the dialogue is always that which occurs between two interlocutors, and as it occurs between, so dialogue is impossible without the co-relative placing of those who participate in it. Yet if dialogue is sometimes more abstractly conceived, perhaps in a way that could be taken to remove it from the concreteness of its situation, then this is less so in the case of conversation – can there be any genuine conversation that did not implicate its situation in some way, that did not in some fashion depend upon that situation? The notion of play, which can be used to capture the dynamic movement of dialogue or conversation also brings with it an emphasis on the domain within which any such play unfolds – the play-space or *Spielraum* - which is not only spatial but also temporal.

Each of these notions – dialogue, conversation, play – can be seen to draw attention to the character of the hermeneutical as itself existing always in the between and at the edge, as

always pointing towards what is other at the same time as it draws on what is the same. Hermeneutics is thus always, in an important sense, *liminal*. When Heidegger talks of hermeneutics as "not just the interpretation [*das Auslegen*] but, even before it, the bearing of message and tidings [*das Bringen von Botschaft und Kunde*],"[19] then this liminality is brought to the fore in a way that also indicates its character as adventual. Of course, every advent – every 'arrival' – always occurs *at the threshold*, and so the adventual and the liminal cannot properly be thought apart from one another: "the bearing of message and tidings" is a bearing from afar to the nearness of the threshold. It is the sense of hermeneutics at issue here – the sense that encompasses the liminal and the adventual – that Heidegger identifies as lying behind his own original appeal to hermeneutics in *Being and Time*. "What mattered then", he writes, "and still does, is to bring out the Being of beings – though no longer in the manner of metaphysics, but such that Being itself will shine out, Being itself – that is to say: the presence of present beings, the two-fold of the two in virtue of their simple oneness".[20] The liminality and adventuality at issue here is, of course, exactly in keeping with the role of Hermes, the god with whom hermeneutics is so often associated, the god who moves between gods and mortals, who is indeed the god of the road *and* the threshold (and as such is paired with Hestia), the god of journey and arrival, and so also the god of appearance and of revelation.

3. Place is inadequately understood if it is treated as identical merely with what I briefly referred to above as 'simple location'. Indeed, the latter notion barely exists beyond the limited conventionalities of the map, the directory, or the address book. No place exists as a mere point, and though places are essentially bounded, their bounds do not take the form of dividing lines in space. To suppose otherwise would be to suppose that place somehow came *after* space, as a modification of it, whereas the reality is that it is place that comes first, and it is space that is the dependent phenomenon. Moreover, as the emphasis on the idea of the adventual might suggest, neither can place be taken as secondary to time. If time has its origin in the event, then the event itself belongs already with place – there is no event that is not already placed, that is not a happening of and in place. Place has the character of both openness *and* opening – the latter being, respectively, the most fundamental modes of the

spatial and the temporal. This also means that the essential relationality of place is therefore dynamic as much as it is extensive, and, indeed, there can be no relationality that is not worked out in time as much as it is in space. Yet although space and time are both intimately related to place, what lies at the heart of the idea of place itself is an idea that does not belong either to space or time alone, namely, the notion of *bound* or of *limit*. It is the notion of place as bound that was already at work in the discussion of the transcendental – the laying out of the place of understanding is also an uncovering of its bounds which is identical with the exhibiting of that in which it is properly grounded (namely, in its prior being-placed) – hence the Kantian project as a laying out of "the bounds of sense and reason".[21] The notion of bound is also the key idea that is operative in the Aristotelian explication of the Greek *topos* – which although not etymologically linked to the English 'place', has nevertheless entered into English as a near-synonym for it– as essentially a bounding surface.[22]

The linking of bound with surface is significant – especially when considered in the context of the relation between place and hermeneutics – since it indicates the asymmetrical character of bound, something that is notably evident in the understanding of bound as *horizon*. It is this asymmetrical character that underlies the difference between, for instance, inner and outer, and that also marks off bound proper from any mere division or demarcation (in which there is no essential difference between what lies on each side of the dividing line). In Aristotle, this is captured in the character of *topos* as the *innermost* boundary – the *topos* is the surface of what bounds as it faces inward to what is bounded (in much the same way as the horizon only appears from within the field that it bounds).[23] The notion of horizon is often treated as if it were an abstract notion, or as if it were primarily derived from the structure of perception, specifically, from the structure of visual perception. It can certainly be treated abstractly, and it does capture a feature of perception, although not only the visual.[24] Yet as an abstraction, the horizon is derived from its more basic appearance in the form of the boundedness that belongs to place, from whence also comes its functioning as a perceptual structure: perception is always placed, and so is itself determined by place and the manner of the perceiver's being in place.

The notion of bound or limit is typically taken as a purely restrictive notion, and the notion of surface is often treated similarly. But just as the idea of the horizon makes explicit the character of bound or limit as productive, so too does it draw attention to the character of the surface as precisely that which enables appearance rather than as blocking it off. Indeed, one might even say that appearance belongs essentially to surface – what appears is always surface and its appearance is always by means of surface. The way surface functions here is, at least initially, in two ways. First, as an inner boundary, exemplified in the horizon, the surface enables appearance by *giving room* – and this is not only evident in the horizon, but also, architecturally, in the enclosure or 'room'. In the latter, things are housed and given shelter through the opening up of an interior space afforded by the enclosing walls. Second, as an outer boundary, perhaps exemplified most notably by the *face* itself (but also by the body, the surface enables appearance through being precisely that by means of which what appears is apparent. In this second sense, the surface is precisely that which stands across from that which it also meets, and with respect to which it marks that which is 'close to' even as it is 'separate from', and so surface is here associated with the idea of the 'between', as well as with the notions of nearness and distance (the two belonging essentially together).

The surface is thus *both* the outermost boundary of what appears *and* the innermost boundary of that wherein there is appearance. Both of these forms of surface are productive, rather than merely restrictive, but within hermeneutics there has sometimes been an oscillation between these two – between a focus on surface *as horizon* and on surface *as face*. Heidegger, interestingly, can be seen to deploy both of these senses of surface – surface as horizon is at work in the idea of the 'clearing of being' (*Lichtung*) whilst surface as face, and so as associated with the between, is at work in the inter-relation of the elements of the fourfold as well as in the authentic relation to the other described in *Being and Time*. For a thinker such as Martin Buber, on the other hand (who surely remains a hermeneutic thinker even though he did not himself make any claim to the term), the emphasis seems entirely on surface *as face* – on the immediate appearing of that which stands across from us – and so on surface as it functions in the between of the I and the Thou. Something similar could also be said of the way in which the face-to-face figures in the thinking of Emmanuel Levinas, although in Levinas' case

there are some additional complexities that in part reflect the equivocal attitude toward the topological that Levinas' work exhibits.[25] The distinction between horizon and face, between what surrounds as opposed to what stands before, appears to be a fundamental one, and yet as both are depend upon modes of bounding surface, so they are less far away from one another than may first appear – especially if one looks to the difference at stake here as one that is given in terms of a boundedness that belongs to an inner or outer surface. Every inner bound is at once also an outer bound and vice versa – which means that every face can appear as a horizon and every horizon as a face.

The emphasis on surface has another aspect also – one that is indicated by Heidegger's implicit reference to hermeneutics as a mode of thinking that does not operate "in the manner of metaphysics" – and that connects directly back to the topological conception of the transcendental that was discussed above. Inasmuch as hermeneutics directs its attention to what is given in and through surface, in and through the horizon and the face, so it refuses the attempt constantly to look behind, beneath or beyond what is given – to that which is transcendent apart from what is immanent – and to concentrate on that alone. As the message or greeting arrives at the threshold, and is received at the threshold, where Hermes is also present, so hermeneutics looks first to what appears, and to the place of its appearance, rather than seeking to found that appearance in something other than itself. This is expressed in mundane interpretive terms in the focus of hermeneutic engagement, first and foremost, on that which is to be understood – on the text, utterance, or thing (what appears in Figal's reading as the concern with objectivity) – rather than on anything outside of it. If hermeneutics brings with it an element of suspicion, it is a not a suspicion of the adequacy of the engagement with what is given as the basis for the understanding of it, but rather a suspicion of our own and others' tendencies to look to understand precisely on the basis of that which is apart from what is given.

Hermeneutics thus stands radically opposed to what has been a key element evident in much of Western philosophical thinking: a constant turning away from the placed appearing of things towards the abstract, the formal, the super-sensible, the placeless. It is this that underlies the 'metaphysics' from which Heidegger is so eager to distance himself. Hermeneutics

concerns the challenge of understanding that arises always and only in the places in which we already find ourselves. Hermeneutics begins with the insight that it is our being in place, and so our being within the bounds of place – our finitude– that is enabling of understanding, and so also of knowledge and thought. It is this, over and above the images and ideas of place on which it draws, that constitutes hermeneutics as essentially topological in orientation. It is also this that marks off hermeneutics from epistemology. Traditional epistemology has always been predicated on the disabling character of finitude, and so of boundedness and limit. It is thus that epistemology typically defines itself in terms of the response to scepticism – seeing scepticism, which is itself an extrapolation from the fact of bound or limit, as a challenge to the very possibility of knowledge – and so concerns itself with finding a secure foundation to knowledge or establishing its reliability. Hermeneutics, on the other hand, can only view such epistemological scepticism, and the epistemological project to which it gives rise, as problematic, since epistemological scepticism fails to recognise the way in which the questionability of knowledge arises on the basis of the prior understanding that is given in and through our being in place. Moreover, in its insistence on the close relation between understanding, and so also knowledge, and place, so hermeneutics can itself be seen as standing in a close relation to more ancient forms of scepticism, including, for instance, Pyrrhonism, that refuse any notion of knowledge as standing outside of particular communities and locales. Ancient scepticism can thus be viewed as already adopting a stance on the question of knowledge that is hermeneutic as it is also topological.[26] Perhaps not only ancient scepticism is at issue here, however, since the role of scepticism in the work of Stanley Cavell, for instance, is not in drawing us away from the place in which we find both ourselves and the world, but in returning us to that place, and so bringing us back to the essential finitude of that place, a finitude also evident in tragedy and in loss.[27]

4. Understanding belongs essentially to place. Only in place does there arise anything that requires understanding, and only in place are there the means by which understanding can be arrived at. Moreover, in an important sense, to understand just is to be oriented - to have become familiar with a place or to have grasped something in the place in which it stands –

something suggested by the very etymology of the English 'understand' as well as the German *verstehen*, but also by the proliferation of ideas associated with understanding and lack of understanding that draw upon notions of finding or losing one's way, of moving forward or having one's way impeded (as in the the Greek *aporia* – literally a 'lack of passage', a 'no way'), even of freedom or imprisonment, that all involve different spatial and topological connotations. The suggestion might be made, however, that these sorts of associations, and even the very use of the term 'place' as it appears in this discussion, remains at best loose and metaphorical and at worst simply vague and obscure. There are, it might be thought, just too many different senses of place that are being used here without any distinction between them.

Such a response depends, however, on the assumption that the character of place is already known and understood, and this is precisely what is here in question – indeed, it remains in question even from within the perspective of a topology that is also hermeneutical. More particularly, such a response typically depends on assuming that place is first and foremost to be identified with what I would argue is indeed, at best, a secondary and derivative sense of place: place as simple location - which usually means as a point in or region of space. What place is cannot be assumed in this way, nor can it be assumed that the use of 'place' in relation to the discussion of the hermeneutical and topological is primarily a 'metaphorical' useage. Indeed, neither the notion of the 'metaphorical' nor the 'literal' are sufficiently clear or well-defined to be able to be employed to demarcate the uses of place that are at issue here. Moreover, the topology that emerges in the hermeneutical approach to understanding is one that cannot be treated as subordinate to any prior theory of metaphor, meaning, or language, since the subject matter of any such theory is itself encompassed by the topology, and the hermeneutical approach, that is at issue. This is especially clear in Heidegger's work, in which the shift towards a more explicitly topological mode of thinking in the post-war period (a shift that begins in the 1930s) is also a shift towards a more direct engagement with language that proposes a radically transformed view of language which is directly related to that topological shift. In this regard, I would argue that the topology in Heidegger's later thinking represents an intensification of a hermeneutic mode of thinking that was already present in the early 1920s, even in spite of the seeming absence of any explicitly hermeneutical terminology in the later

work.[28] Heidegger's hermeneutics is instead to be found in Heidegger's topology – as would be expected if hermeneutics and topology are as closely tied together as I have argued.

The way the question of language emerges here is, however, of special importance. It is so both because of the centrality of language to hermeneutics and because of the centrality of language to topology. Although there is a common tendency to think of language as somehow removing us from place into the abstract and the general, the reality is that the very essence and ground of language is to be found in its placed appearance – in the singularity of a saying that shows itself on the page, in the gesture, through the voice. Moreover, it is only through the participation in language that we are witness to the calling forth of things into the open space of appearance that is place itself. That language has this centrality does not, however, imply any form of 'linguistic idealism'. Language does not 'make' or 'construct' place, and it cannot do so, since language is already dependent on place – already arises as a response to it and as shaped by it. The very idea of linguistic idealism – or connected to it, of linguistic constructionism or relativism – stands apart from any genuinely topological or hermeneutic approach. Yet if one begins with place, then one must also begin with language – and with language as belonging in and to place. It is thus that neither in Heidegger nor in Gadamer does one ever find language presented as somehow standing over and against the world, and this is not because the world is somehow determined by language (which is, in any case, a notion that cannot be given any genuinely meaningful articulation[29]), but rather because language and world emerge together, as I would argue, within the common matrix that is place.

Inasmuch as it takes language and place to stand in a close relation to one another, so the topological-hermeneutic approach that has been outlined here stands in contrast to those many other approaches that insist on treating language as somehow a secondary phenomenon. Thus, although hermeneutics is closely connected with phenomenology, and phenomenology also exhibits important topological elements,[30] there is a widespread tendency for phenomenology to emphasise what is variously referred to in terms of the 'pre-linguistic' or 'pre-conceptual', the 'non-linguistic' or 'non-conceptual' (a tendency perhaps most closely associated with the work of Hubert Dreyfus,[31] but certainly not restricted to that work alone). Often the emphasis is on a mode of engagement in the world that does not depend upon either

language or concept.[32] Sometimes this is presented in terms of a primary mode of sensuous, bodily engagement, sometimes in terms of certain forms of behavioural 'coping', sometimes in terms of the horizonal 'background' to understanding, sometimes in terms of the idea of the 'life-world'.[33] To some extent such approaches within phenomenology tend, even when arguing otherwise, to reinstate forms of subjectivism and also of objectivism. The world thus comes to be that which is determined by certain structures or activities of the subject (or of the subject as 'objectively' construed) – by bodily or behavioural systems, by networks of practices, by forms of 'tacit' understanding or unconscious dispositions. Such approaches within phenomenology and elsewhere can overlap with the sort of topological-hermeneutic approach outlined here (and they often draw directly on topological elements), but not only do they differ in that they give a secondary role to language (which is itself tied to a tendency to treat language as already an abstracted and displaced phenomenon), but they also tend to leave *place* itself almost entirely out of account, effectively focussing only on *being placed*, on situation, as if this were a notion that could function independently, and often treating that concept as if it could be reduced to a notion of mere spatio-temporal location. Yet being in place presupposes the wherein of place as such (which is neither merely spatial nor temporal), and although accounts of place may well encompass an account of being in place, any account of being in place that ignores place remains inadequate – as do all of those accounts that look to notions of worldly engagement without an explication of that in which such engagement has its origin: namely, the very place in which sense and concept, behaviour and language, even life and world first appear.

5. The topological character of hermeneutics is not always explicit, and neither is the hermeneutic character of topology. One reason for this is simply the tendency for place, and also the relation between place and understanding, to be forgotten, overlooked, or ignored – itself a function of the longstanding antipathy toward place in much (especially European) philosophical thinking that stems both from the universalist ambitions of reason as well as from the indeterminate and complex character of place itself. The 'forgetfulness of being' that Heidegger claims is the hallmark of Western metaphysical thinking is itself a forgetfulness of

place – *Seinsvergessenheit* is thus also *Ortsvergessenheit*. The remembering of place involves more than just attending to the placed character of understanding, and yet the inquiry into understanding, if one follows it far enough, nevertheless leads inevitably back to place itself. It is thus that hermeneutics and topology are bound together: the thinking of place requires that we attend to the character of understanding, and the thinking of understanding requires that we attend to the thinking of place.

The turn to place is not a turn back to some new 'foundation' for understanding as if everything can then be 'reduced' to place. Place resists such reduction, both of itself but also of that which appears within it. Place thus 'gives place', as it 'gives room', and yet in doing so it also withdraws, remaining apart from even as it is also intimately close to that which appears within it.[34] Place is neither spatial nor temporal – it encompasses both while refusing identification with either. Place is the adventual and the liminal, it is both open and opening, it is the bounded and the boundless. Place is the ordinary happening in which the world itself opens to us. When we think hermeneutics from place, as we must if we are properly to think what understating itself is, then hermeneutics is seen, not in terms of 'interpretation' or the 'theory' of interpretation, but as the turning towards the original opening and openness of place – the announcing, one might say, of the beginning of understanding, as with the advent of the world, in place and of our own belonging to that place. If there is a renewed concern with hermeneutics, then perhaps this should be understood as itself part of the turn towards place that is evident, even if inconsistently so, in many areas of contemporary thought and across a wide range of disciplines. Perhaps the future of hermeneutics lies in this turn back to place, all the more so inasmuch as this turning back to place is a turn back to a topological orientation that lies at the very heart of hermeneutics.

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[1] Two extensive reference works on Hermeneutics by major publishers have also appeared within the last year (see Keane and Lawn, 2016, and also Malpas and Gander, 2015).

[2] Figal. 2010

[3] Makkreel, 2015.

[4] Makkreel 2015, see esp. pp.63-80. See also Malpas 2016b.

[5] Although see Malpas 2016a (an essay that partially overlaps with the discussion here) for an account that does try to bring the topological elements in Gadamer to the fore; also Malpas 2015a.

[6] The spatial and topological turn that appears in Figal and Makkreel is also evident in Janz 2017. Janz's volume aims explicitly to address the spatial and topological character of hermeneutics across a range of topics and areas.

[7] See Malpas 2015a.

[8] In spite of the tendency among some readers to disown or disregard its connection to any notion of place, Heidegger's use of *Dasein* as the central term in his thinking in *Being and Time* is perhaps the clearest indication of the essentially topological character of that thinking. Dasein names that mode of being whose own being is in question for it, and that questionability is tied to the singularity of Dasein's being – a singularity that is itself tied to Dasein's being as essentially placed, hence its being named as *Da-sein* (literally 'there/here-being'). It is the idea of singularity that underpins Heidegger's use of the notion of 'own-ness' (*Eigentlichkeit* – problematically translated into English as 'authenticity'), since what is most properly Dasein's 'own' (*eigene*) – what is 'ownmost' to Dasein – is precisely that which belongs to it in its singularity. Such singularity, which is neither a matter of particularity nor individuality, is precisely what pertains most properly to place and that which is placed (see Malpas, 2015b).

[9] See Figal, 2010.

[10] That orientation is always a matter of the active involvement of an agent in its environment is a point that one might take from the work of J. J. Gibson (see eg Gibson, 1979), but it is already an idea present in Kant (see eg. Kant 1992; see also Malpas and Zöller, 2011).

[11] Which is what is actually at issue in those passages in which Heidegger insists that Dasein cannot be understood in terms of any simple notion of being in this location or that location – eg Heidegger and Fink, 1993, p.126; see also Malpas, 2006.

[12] Plato, 1960, 52b; Aristotle, 1983, 208a30.

[13] See Malpas 1999. The reciprocity that obtains between place and human being is a key point in the topological account sketched here. The basic idea of reciprocity or mutuality of constitution is fundamental to hermeneutic thinking, and is evident, for instance, in the very idea of hermeneutic circularity (which is an ontological rather than merely methodological or epistemic structure) as well as in the hermeneutic emphasis on the inter-relatedness of self and other.

[14] See Malpas, 1997

[15] See Malpas and Zöller, 2011

[16] Heidegger (1971, p.41) talks of the human being as the one who "walks the boundary of the boundless" (echoing Georg Simmel's characterisation of the human being as "the bordering creature who has no border" – Simmel, 1997, p.170), and in doing so captures just this idea of the connection between boundedness and a non-metaphysical form of transcendence. Heidegger's attitude towards the notion of the transcendental, however, changes over the course of his thinking, and the notion is one that he comes to view as problematic (see Malpas 2007, pp.119-134; also Malpas, 2012, pp.90-95).

[17] These relations include, but are not restricted to, the relations that make up the 'pre-judgmental', and they also include relations that remain unarticulated linguistically or conceptually, but this does not mean that they therefore stand apart from judgment, or apart from language or concept.

[18] Significantly, Gadamer himself argues for the importance of the Kantian critical turn to the hermeneutical turn – particularly in relation to Heidegger, although he also notes the disappearance of Kant in Heidegger's thinking as tied to Heidegger's abandonment of the

transcendental (see Gadamer, 1994). My approach here adopts a rather different reading of the transcendental form that assumed by both Gadamer and Heidegger, and so also a closer relation between the critical, the transcendental, and also the topological.

[19] Heidegger, 1971, p.29. The emphasis on hermeneutics as not merely interpretation is especially important here (even though it is a point very often overlooked) – see my discussion in Malpas, 2016b.

[20] 'Heidegger, 1971, pp.29-30.

[21] Kant's Letter 'To Marcus Herz, 21 February, 1772' in Kant, 1967, p.71.

[22] Aristotle, 1983, Bk IV, 4.

[23] See Aristotle, 1983, 212a20

[24] The precedence given to the visual here reflects a precedence given to the visual in the thinking of place also – for instance, in the way places are commonly identified with their visual representations as exemplified both by the postcard and the landscape painting.

[25] Levinas often appears to reject the topological (most obviously in essays such as 'Heidegger, Gagarin and Us' – Levinas, 1990: pp.231-234), but also to embrace it (in the very idea, for instance, of the face-to-face), and could thus be seen to demonstrate the inevitability of place in thinking even when the attempt is made to think apart from place. In fact, much of what goes on in Levinas is actually the mobilization of one form of topology – one mode of the thinking of place – against another.

[26] On this basis, the Kantian transcendental-critical project has to be understood as directed against the scepticism of Descartes more so than Pyhrro – even though this is not entirely clear in Kant himself

[27] See for instance Cavell, 1988. Cavell also demonstrates the way in which a certain topological-hermeneutic sensibility can be uncovered in Wittgenstein's work, as well as in certain strains of romanticism and in American idealist-pragmatist tradition (on the latter, see also Malpas 2016c). Notice that the way we are brought back to place here is not such that we are brought back to some certain and secure shelter – the bringing back to place that is at issue is a bringing back to the uncertainty and questionability that also belongs to

place, though it is an uncertainty and questionability that can only arise within it and on the basis of it.

[28] See Malpas, 2016d.

[29] As Donald Davidson shows in several key essays– see eg Davidson 2001, pp.183-98. Davidson is perhaps the best example of a thinker who arrives at what is essentially a topological-hermeneutical position, one that is close in many respects to that of Heidegger and Gadamer, from within a largely analytic framework (though one that is also strongly influenced by Kantian and Hegelian elements – in the former via Whitehead and in the latter via Mead).

[30] On the relation between phenomenology and topology, see eg. Malpas 2012, pp.44-56.

[31] See Dreyfus, 2014.

[32] Place, and so too any mode of being in place, always extends beyond anything that might be said of it or in terms by which it may be conceptualized, and place is not constituted by language nor by conceptuality. Being in place also encompasses modes of engagement other than the purely linguistic or conceptual – being in place does indeed include, for instance, the bodily and the sensual. None of this, however, warrants the conclusion that, in regard to place and being in place, language or conceptuality are therefore secondary phenomena.

[33] The 'life-world' is an important if also problematic concept. In some ways the life-world can be construed as a way of taking up aspects of what is at issue in the idea of place (it essentially a development of the topological notion of horizonality). Yet, because it is defined specifically in relation to the 'lived', so it also tends to remain within the frame of an essentially subjectivist orientation. Moreover, within this sort of approach, the topological elements that are at work often remain undeveloped or appear only as single elements alongside others within a larger structure – as is so often the case, place itself is effectively overtaken by the idea of situation or lived environment (where the latter are treated as if they were the prior notions). The idea of the life-world is deployed as a key concept in Claude Romano's account of both hermeneutics and phenomenology (see Romano 2016), and although I would see Romano as one of those who has contributed significantly to the contemporary resurgence of critical engagement with hermeneutics (and elsewhere I find

important points of convergence between his work and my own), his deployment of this idea, among others, seems to me to present significant problems. The topic deserves much closer attention than I can give it here, however, and I look forward to a closer and more direct engagement with Romano in the future.

[34] See especially Derrida's discussion of the Platonic *chora* in Derrida 1993, pp.89-130.