Place and Hermeneutics:

Towards a Topology of Understanding

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The language of understanding is deeply imbued with ideas and images of place and space. To speak of 'understanding' is itself to draw upon a sense of 'standing in the midst of' or 'between' (from the Old English, *understandan*)[1] – one might even say, then, that to understand is 'to draw near' or 'to be close to'.[2] Heidegger points to the character of the German *Verständnis* as having "the original sense of 'standing before' [*Vorstehen*]: residing before, holding oneself at an equal height with what one finds before oneself, and being strong enough to hold out"[3] – and here too there is surely also a sense of standing 'near to'. The French, *comprendre*, on the other hand, a term which also enters into English as 'comprehend', does not draw upon any idea of standing 'before' or 'near', but the idea on which it draws is no less spatial or topological, namely, of grasping or seizing – even of taking in or bringing together.[4]

The way understanding appears to bring with it such spatial and 'topological' associations may be seen as an example of the primacy of *bodily* metaphor, not only in the manner in which we speak and think about understanding, but in all our speaking and thinking, especially in our speaking and thinking about the 'inner space' of the mind and its activities.[5] In *Metaphors We Live By*, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson argue that such 'metaphors' do indeed underpin our thinking,[6] and in *The Body in the Mind*, Johnson develops this idea specifically in relation to the understanding of the mind and the mental.[7] Part of Lakoff and Johnson's argument concerns the need to pay attention to the metaphors that they claim are at work here

(and in other domains) and to their character *as metaphors.* In this respect, one can see Lakoff and Johnson as drawing attention to aspects of our ways of speaking and thinking that might otherwise be said to pass largely unnoticed – and it certainly does seem to be the case that, for the most part, we barely attend to the bodily, the spatial, or the topological character of the language we use and the concepts we employ, especially in our speaking and thinking about the mind and the activities we associate with it.

Yet in Lakoff and Johnson's work what is primarily brought to our attention, and what they claim has otherwise been overlooked, is the supposedly *metaphorical* character of that speaking and thinking. The staring assumption of their work is thus that we can indeed identify certain language and ideas as metaphorical, and, as a consequence, the content of the metaphor, and so, in this case, its spatial, topological, its bodily character, seems actually to be secondary. Even Johnson's *The Body in the Mind*, although it shifts to explore the role of image schemata in providing the basic structure that underpins thought and experience in general, still seems largely to focus on the role of the assumed *metaphor* or *image* rather than of its spatial, topological, or even bodily *content*. The question as to whether there is a fundamentally spatial and topological character *to understanding* that is indicated by the prevalence of spatial and topological imagery and idea in the structure of our speaking and thinking *about understanding* never really emerges as even an issue. Indeed, the very assumption that what is at issue is metaphor or image (where image is itself understood as continuous with metaphor) already predisposes Lakoff and Johnson's inquiries in a particular way – space and place do not appear in their work other than as metaphors or as expressed in terms of metaphor or image.

Accepting, as do Lakoff and Johnson, that space and place, as well as the body (although I take the latter as a secondary notion here, since it already depends upon some notion of both space and place), but refusing the assumption that the way space and place appear is metaphorically or merely imagistically, the question then arises as to what is the role of space and place in thinking and experience, and so

also in *understanding*. Might understanding itself be spatially or 'topologically' structured? Moreover, given the way language also intrudes here, one might ask what the role of space and place might be tin relation to language or to metaphor and image? From the standpoint of contemporary hermeneutics, concerned as it is with both understanding and language, these ought to be viewed as significant questions, even though they are also questions upon which hermeneutics has, with some notable exceptions, tended not to reflect. In what follows, my aim is to explore some of the spatial, and especially the topological character of understanding, and so also to explore the connection between hermeneutics and what I have elsewhere referred to as philosophical topology or topography.[8] My argument will be directed at showing that not only is understanding imbued with the spatial and the topological, but that hermeneutics is itself essentially topological in character.

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Hans-Georg Gadamer is undoubtedly the central figure in twentieth-century hermeneutics. It is Gadamer who draws out and develops, in explicit fashion, the hermeneutical implications of Heidegger's thought, at the same time establishing hermeneutics as a distinctive mode of philosophy and demonstrating (even if it also remains contested) the essentially hermeneutical character of philosophy itself. On the face of it, Gadamer might be thought to have little to say about the topological character of understanding or of the hermeneutical – he nowhere draws attention to hermeneutics as determined by place, and place is not a central term or theme in his writing – moreover, if anything, it might be thought that it is the temporality of understanding that preoccupies him, and not its topology. Part of what I am to do in the discussion below, however, is to demonstrate the ways in which place and topology are indeed present in Gadamer's work – the topological character of understanding is thus something that emerges in Gadamer no less than in Heidegger, and indeed, is present even in the very temporality of understanding.

Certainly if understanding is topological, then one would expect to find topological modes and figures at work in Gadamer just as they must also be at work in all thinking and all understanding – one of the tasks of a philosophical topological ought, in fact, to be one of retrieving the topology that is inevitably present within the history of philosophy in general and so to make explicit the topological underpinnings that are present even in the work of the most seemingly atopic thinkers. In Gadamer, however, the topological character of his thinking is not merely present as part of the general topology that governs all thinking, but instead appears, if sometimes implicitly, in the very articulation of the hermeneutical as such. One only needs to reflect on the topological character of notions such as horizon and situation to see how this is so. Yet if hermeneutics is itself essentially topological, then not only will the topological character of hermeneutics be evident in key hermeneutical notions, but the very thematization *of the hermeneutical* will itself bring a topological orientation with it even if the topological orientation is not itself thematized. This seems to be very much the case with Gadamer.

It is significant, from a topological perspective, that, when talking about the formative influences on his thinking, especially in regard to Heidegger, Gadamer turns to Heidegger's lectures on 'The Origin of the Work of Art'.[9] Gadamer comments:

In these lectures, it was the concept of the 'earth' with which Heidegger dramatically transgressed the limits of German philosophical vocabulary once again... These three lectures so closely addressed my own questions and my own experience of the proximity of art and philosophy that they awakened an immediate response in me. My philosophical hermeneutics seeks precisely to adhere to the line of questioning in this essay and the later Heidegger, and to make it accessible in a new way.[10]

What appears in the lectures from 1935-36 is a dramatic new orientation in Heidegger's thinking, although an orientation that has strong continuities with his earlier thought, that is not merely focussed on the artwork, but on the artwork as it stands in relation to truth and to 'site' (*Stätte*). It is in the explication of the 'sitedness' of the artwork – what I would term its 'placing' or 'being placed' (the sense of 'site' at issue here is not the abstract notion associated with the mere projection of a plan, but the 'site' as that which 'gives room to' through the 'clearing of ground for') – that the idea of earth emerges in direct juxtaposition with 'world'. Often identified with the Dionysian and the Apollonian,[11] these two terms are perhaps best understood as encompassing two fundamental aspects of place and of being in place: Earth is place as that which grounds, supports and shelters; world is place as that which expands and opens up.[12] Both of these are essential elements of place and in the 'Origin of the Work of Art' it is the tension between them – a tension that arises out of their being brought together in the work, that also opens up the space that belongs to the work, and that is the space of appearance, of understanding, and of truth.[13] Even though the lectures that make up the 'Origin of the Work of Art' may be thought of as a *Holzweg*[14] – a path that leads to its own 'clearing' but ends there, offering no direct way onwards[15] – still the basic shift to the idea of 'site' or 'place', continues into Heidegger's work of the 'forties, 'fifties and 'sixties. It is thus no 'dead-end', but rather constitutes a development central to Heidegger's later thinking (and is explicitly treated as such by Gadamer[16]), as well as to the thinking of place more generally.

As explored by Heidegger in the 'Origin of the Work of Art', the happening of truth is an establishing and opening up of world, and yet it occurs always and only in relation to a singular work – a work that stands in the midst of things at the same time as it draws things into relation and so also into appearance. Without the work, without the thing, there can be no happening of truth, nor any opening up of world. In Gadamer, the work has a similar primacy – it is in and through our relation to the work, whether it be a text or utterance, a performance or painting, a sculpture or a

building, it is the work that guides and constrains our interpretive engagement with it – and that also provides the mediative focus (with an emphasis here on the mediative as precisely that which pertains to the 'between' – *das Zwischen*) for our engagement with others. As Gadamer writes in *Truth and Method*, "Understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself", and, he adds, "this belonging can be illuminated only on the basis of the being of the work of art itself".[17] It is thus that 'The Origin of the Work of Art' does indeed take the artwork as central to the happening of truth, and it is precisely in the focus of attention on the being of the work that the importance of place itself becomes evident.

There is no work that does not also bring its own situatedness with it – the work, the thing, is always situated or placed. That situatedness belongs to the work and is that on the basis of which the work can appear as a work. In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', the situatedness of the work is partly captured through Heidegger's emphasis on the way the works stands before us, stands in a certain place, stands there, in the case of the Greek temple, on the rocky plain – stands, one might say, *on the earth.* Earth here appears as that which supports and sustains, but also that which places, as it provides a 'site-for' (in the sense of a clearing of ground).

In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', Heidegger's emphasis on the standing character of the work is complicated by a shift in Heidegger's German between *stehen* and *stellen* – a shift Heidegger later acknowledges and recognises a problematic. Both of these terms can be translated as 'to stand', but whereas *stehen* is the simple standing of that which stands, *stellen* is standing is the sense of being 'set in place' or 'positioned' (*stellen* is at work in a range of other terms including *her-stellen*, *vor-stellen*, and also *Ge-stell*).[18] In its own 'standing there' *in its place* the work possesses an autonomy (though not an autonomy, as becomes clearer below, that implies independence or separateness) that is the proper ground out of which comes its own determinative role in the happening of truth or of understanding. However, the 'placing' of the work associated with this sense of 'standing there' can easily be confused with the 'placing' that is a 'setting in place' of the work a 'placing' that is

imposed upon the work and that claims to determine the work rather than allowing the work to be determinative.

Recognising the centrality of the work, and in a hermeneutical context, of that which is the focus for understanding, whether it be artwork, text, or thing, thus also means recognising the placed character of the work. The work appears as work through the way in which the work itself stands in its own place, but this does not mean that the work stands alone and apart. Gadamer emphasises the way the work is no mere 'object', but rather, in standing in itself, the work "not only belongs to a world; its world is present in it".[19] The character of the work as belonging to its world in this way is taken up in Heidegger's later thinking through the inquiry into 'the thing' – exemplified by a simple jug or, elsewhere, a bridge.[20] Rather than understand the thing as some separate, self-subsisting entity or object, Heidegger takes the thing to be a dynamic nexus that draws together as it also sets apart. The thing gathers, and its gathering is also a gathering of world, but that gathering occurs through the thing's own 'standing there' (its *Da-stehen* – or as it might also be put, its own 'being there', its own *Da-sein*). In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', the work, for instance, the temple, functions in this same way. In being itself placed, the work opens up and establishes a place for everything else that comes into appearance around it:

> The temple's firm towering makes visible the invisible space of the air. The steadfastness of the work stands out against the surge of the tide, and in its own repose, brings out the raging of the surf. Tree and grass, eagle and bull, snake and cricket first enter into their distinctive shapes [*Gestalt*] and thus come to appearance as what they are.[21]

The 'gathering' that occurs in the work or the thing appears as an establishing of identity through differentiation. The work stands 'in itself', but in standing so, it also stands in relation to its world, and so also to everything that appears within the

world. The work stands, then, within a dense web of relations – through those relations it gives shape and focus to other things, but in doing so it also gives shape and focus to itself.

There is thus a mutuality that exists between work and world. The world is drawn to appearance in and around the work, even while the work itself appears through its standing within the world. There is, however, a certain priority within the mutuality that obtains here. This priority derives simply from the fact that the relationality at work here is indeed ordered or 'gathered', and it is the work or thing that is the focus for that ordering. This means that the relations that appear here do not ramify endlessly. The opening up of the world is not the opening up of a homogenous and horizon-less space lacking in orientation or direction (such a space would lack any genuine openness – would not be able to be grasped as a space), but is precisely the opening of an expansive and yet unified whole that is essentially configured in relation to what appears within it. The world is not given in relation to just any *one* thing, nor in just *one* place alone, and yet is configured in relation always to *some* thing and *some* place. It is only in and through things and places (the two being bound together) that the open-ness of the world is possible.

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The way Gadamer emphasises the role of the work in his reading of Heidegger is not merely a feature of that reading alone, but also reflects a central element in Gadamer's own hermeneutics. His claim that "understanding belongs to the encounter with the work of art itself" is thus intended as a claim that indicates a key direction in Gadamer's own account. It is to the character of the work, of the thing, of that which is the focus for understanding that is the key to unlocking the nature of understanding. In looking to the work and to the thing, we are also forced to attend to the manner of their being, and so also to the placed character of that being. In

discussing Heidegger's 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in a way relevant to his own as well as Heidegger's thinking, Gadamer comments:

> Heidegger speaks of the 'clearing of being' which first represents the realm in which beings are known as disclosed in their hiddenness. This coming forth of beings into the 'there' of their Dasein obviously presupposes a realm of openness in which such a 'there' can occur. And yet it is just as obvious that this realm does not exist without beings manifesting themselves in it, that is, without there being a place of openness that openness occupies.[22]

What appears here is a mutuality between 'beings' and the 'realm of openness' in which they are disclosed that mirrors the mutuality of work and world. As Gadamer puts it here, the 'realm of openness' is distinct from the 'there' of beings, since he talks of the 'there' presupposing that 'realm of openness'. I would argue that the 'there', understood as designating a certain place or placedness implies an openness that belongs with it rather than an openness that it presupposes,[23] but this does not affect the key point regarding the mutuality between beings and the open, and so the way place, whether understood in terms of the 'there' or openness as such, is indeed implicated here.

The openness that is at issue is an openness into which we also are drawn – and here the character of the openness that is tied to the thing connects directly with the character of the openness that belongs to *play* (which Gadamer takes as a concept central to the ontology of understanding) – an openness that belongs to the 'in between' character of play (it occurs between players, and also between players and the game itself), but also to play as itself open within the bounds of the 'space' in which the play is defined. Gadamer thus says of play that it "does not have its being in the player's consciousness or attitude, but on the contrary play draws him into its dominion and fills him with its spirit. The player experiences the game as a reality that surpasses him".[24] This 'surpassing' of the player is reflected in the character of

understanding as also a surpassing that occurs through the focus of understanding on that which is to be understood, and that occurs in the experience of art through our being taken up in the artwork. This 'surpassing' is itself a phenomenon that can be understood – and perhaps ought to be understood – topologically, since it involves a surpassing of the interiority of experience or thought in the direction of the exteriority of the thing and the world as that occurs through our being drawn into the space and place before us, into the space and place of the thing, the space and place of the play.

Gadamer's own talk of play, and much of his discussion of understanding, tends to emphasise the character of both as *events.* In his discussions of Heidegger, too, it is often the idea of the event that is to the fore. So, for instance, when Gadamer asks the question as to the nature of the 'there' – the *Da* that appears in the term *Dasein* – he answers:

> …this *'Da'* does not mean something merely being present: rather it *signifies* an event. Every *'Da,* like all things earthly, dwindles, passes away, and is carried off into oblivion – yet it is a *'Da'* precisely because it is finite, that is, aware of its own finitude. What is happening there [*da*], what happens as a *'Da',* is what Heidegger later calls the *clearing of Being* [*Lichtung des Seins*].[25]

Two points emerge here: one is the dynamic character of the *Da*; the other is its finitude. Both might be said to be tied to modes of temporality, and yet that connection can also be a misleading one. Although Gadamer seems, in this passage, to insist on understanding the topological in terms of the temporality of the event, I would argue that only if the temporality of the event is understood topologically, can it be understood aright. I would argue further that such an understanding is implicit in Gadamer, as it is in early Heidegger also, although the fact that it often remains implicit means that its significance is also sometimes overlooked.

To be 'there', that is to say, to be in a place, is already be situated within a complex set of relations that connect to other things, other places – to be 'there' is, in this respect, to be situated within the world. But just as the 'there', and that which 'is there', does not stand apart from things, but as interconnected with them, so the 'there' and what 'is there', is not some mere 'being present', as if it's being were just a matter of some static perdurance, To be there is to be bound up in the world, and to be bound up in relation, but that worldly relationality is itself an active and dynamic ordering – an ordering or gathering, as we saw above, that occurs in and through that which is 'there', and so in and through the thing or the work. Perhaps the simplest way to see this is to reflect on the character of orientation – understood as a both of being in place and of having a sense of relation to place. Such orientation is not a matter of what might be referred to as mere 'positionality' – of being at such and such a point or location – but rather of being actively focussed on the place in such a way that enables one to move and also to act within it. This is what orientation is: most literally, to have a sense of the east (the orient), of the position of the sun, and so to have a sense of the ordering of movement that belongs to the place; and then, since one cannot have any sense of such movement unless it is related back to oneself (as Kant emphasises),[26] also to have a sense of the ordering of one's own movements or capacities for movement in that place.

Neither place no placedness can be understood other than as already having a dynamic character that belongs essentially to them, and that is itself directly related to their relational character. This may lead us to say that places are events, except that events cannot themselves be understood other than in relation to place – events are, one might say, always happenings of place. That this is so is part of what is indicated by the centrality of the work or thing in the happening of art as well as in the event of understanding. Once again, the work or thing may be said to have an event-character, but equally if not more significant here is the way in which the work or thing provides a unitary focus for the happening that occurs in and around them – the way, in other words, in which they gather. Such gathering cannot be

understood as a purely temporal phenomenon (and so 'event' itself is not a purely temporal notion either), but is also spatial (and necessarily so), although the spatiality at issue, because it is focussed and ordered (and so, is in an important sense, bounded), can only be made sense of in relation to place. Place is itself the key concept here, and it is the notion of place that is actually invoked by ideas of finitude and the finite. Human being is itself finite, not merely in virtue of its being curtailed in time, but rather through it being turned back towards its own there, towards its own being as given in the there – which, as with the experience of art, or the event of understanding is given content and meaning through being oriented and placed, through being focussed on the *singularity* of its being, a singularity that is precisely a consequence of its *being placed*.[27]

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The topological is at work in Gadamer no less than Heidegger. It can be discerned in Gadamer's own constant resort to spatial and topographic ideas or to notions that presuppose such ideas – whether in relation to the notion of play, the between, the fusion of horizons, the circularity of understanding, the nature of conversation, or of the worldly character of understanding. The way the topological is at work in Gadamer's thinking is particularly evident in his account of language. That this is so is partly a function of the character of language as already 'outside' of ourselves, and so as moving in that common realm that exists 'between'.[28] As is so often the case, the way Gadamer approaches this is initially through a claim about temporality, but the discussion almost immediately moves to draw upon spatial and topological ideas. So Gadamer writes:

> It is man's having language that sets off his form of life from that of certain kinds of herd animals. His communication is not just the expression of a particular condition …. It manages to make manifest what is helpful and what is harmful.

That means pointing out things that we want to recommend or warn against even when they do not immediately recommend themselves … One thinks of bitter medicine, or of the doctor's painful surgery, which requires a distance from what is present and a looking forward to what is coming. One is no longer given over and delivered up to the rush of the moment. This, then, is what we recognise in the essence of language: a distance by means of which, in the breath of our voice, fleeting as it is, we can embody everything that occurs to us, making it audible and communicable to others. Obviously it is this kind of distance with respect to ourselves that opens us up to the other…[29]

How are we to interpret language of space and distance by which Gadamer here explicates the opening up that occurs in language? First, it is crucial that, pace Lakoff and Johnson, we not immediately resort to the metaphorization of this language. Not only is there nothing to indicate that it is a metaphorical use of distance that is at issue, but it is quite unclear how such a metaphor would work or what it could mean. Indeed, I would go so far so to assert that *in ontology*, which is surely what is at issue here, *there are no metaphors* – at least not in any straightforward sense (which is not to say, however, that there may not be other tropes at work).[30] Second, one might be inclined to say that what Gadamer describes here is an opening of the temporal, and so the language of the spatial and the topological has to be understood in light of that temporal focus – except that what is at issue is also a freeing from the temporal, or at least from the temporal understood as the 'rush of the moment' (or even the succession of moments) in which we might otherwise be thought to be trapped.

Inasmuch as the temporal is invoked here it is both as that *from which* we are freed and as that *into which* are freed that is achieved through the rethinking of the temporal as itself an open domain. But this 'freeing into' is actually a freeing into time understood as an oriented region, as determined in terms of place. The rethinking of time that is at work here already occurs in Heidegger's work,

particularly in, but not restricted to, *Being and Time* (which suggests a re-reading of that work as *Being and Place,* no less than it is *Being and Time*). In 'The Origin of the Work of Art', this rethinking of the temporal occurs through the thinking of the topological character of the event and that rethought conception carries through into the later Heidegger and is itself at the heart of the idea of the *Ereignis* (literally, the Event, but also translated in various other ways also) as well as the fourfold (*Das Geviert*).[31] At the very end of *Truth and Method,* Gadamer also addresses the character of language in a way that emphasises this idea of the temporal as topological, and so draws attention, once again, to the topological character of language – but the starting point here is the event of understanding *as linguistic*, and of language as itself a *play*:

> The weight of things we encounter in understanding plays itself out in a linguistic event, a play of words playing around and about what is meant. Language games exist where we, as learners – and when do we cease to be that? – rise to the understanding of the world. Here it is worth recalling what we said about the nature of play, namely that the player's actions should not be considered subjective actions, since it is, rather, the game that plays, for it draws the players into itself and thus itself becomes the actual subjectum of the playing. The analogue in the present case is neither playing with language nor with the contents of the experience of the world or of tradition that speaks to us, but the play of language itself, which addresses us, proposes and withdraws, asks and fulfils itself in the answer.[32]

In the last sentence here, Gadamer evokes a way of thinking about language that draws language into the topological – that lets it appear as topological. Language belongs to the very play of place, and that play itself belong to language.

The topological character of language that emerges here is an enormous and hugely important, yet also relatively neglected topic. One might argue that, from a

certain perspective, the topic ought to be taken to be the most pressing concern of any future hermeneutical inquiry. It is this topic, moreover, that also draws us directly back, as is already evident, to some of the issues that underline the inquiries of Lakoff and Johnson. I noted at the very beginning of this discussion how understanding seems to bring a certain topology with it. Lakoff and Johnson argue for space and the body having a key role in the way we think as well as in our thinking about thinking. Their approach, however, is one that takes the focus on space and the body as part of a larger role played by metaphor in thought and cognition. As soon as we begin to recognise the genuinely topological character of understanding – and so of thought and cognition – then we are also led to recognise the topological character of language itself (something implied by Lakoff and Johnson's approach but not itself directly thematized or taken up). But that ought to render uncertain the very idea of the metaphorical as a notion that can be assumed in any straightforward way. If part of what is at issue is the topological character of language, then the topological has to be recognised as operating at a level that may itself turn out to be presupposed by the very idea of metaphor just inasmuch as metaphor already presupposes the structure of language.

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It would seem dubious to suppose that we could use metaphor to understand the topology of language, since it must surely be in the very topology of language that metaphor finds its own ground. The role of topology, then, whether understood as referring to a structure or the inquiry into that structure, is not as a source of metaphor nor does topology work primarily or solely through metaphor. The task that the recognition of the topological character of understanding presents is the task of explicating the topology that belongs to understanding – of explicating the proper *place* of understanding – but this also means explicating what topology itself might mean here. It is this task that must lie at the heart of any genuinely philosophical

hermeneutics, moreover that task is also a task that involves an explication of the topological character of the hermeneutical, and so might be said to involve the explication of the hermeneutical character of the topological as well, and that does so with an explicitly *ontological* orientation. The task at issue is one of providing an articulation of the ontology of understanding in a way that takes seriously the topological character of understanding as well as of ontology.[33]

The turn towards place that is at issue here is one that follows from the hermeneutical focus on the finitude of understanding and on such finitude as the enabling condition of understanding – an idea that is at the very heart of the philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger and Gadamer.[34] The turn towards place cannot be characterised as merely temporal or spatial in its orientation, but rather encompasses both – as place itself does. Similarly, it is not a turn towards work or thing taken on its own, nor towards pure relationality, but instead attends to both thing and the relationality within which the thing is embedded. The turn towards place is not a turn towards any form of constructionism, since place is that which determines the very ontology within which any form of construction must itself be understood (constructionism is, in any case, and to use a Heideggerian distinction, an 'ontic' more so than an 'ontological' position, playing a role within certain contemporary theoretical discourses, but inadequate as a grounding concept within or with respect to those discourses). Place cannot itself be understood as either a subjective or an objective phenomenon, being that out of which the very distinction of subjective from objective emerges.

The turn towards place, and so also the topology to which hermeneutics leads and which it embodies, is a turn that is directly relevant to many contemporary intellectual developments: 'externalist' conceptions within analytic philosophy converge with elements of topological thinking;[35] topology connects with key ideas at work in so-called "material culture studies";[36] holistic and relationalist conceptions can be seen to themselves draw on an essentially topological mode of thinking; the emphasis on the geographic – whether in psycho-geography or geo-

criticism – can be read as implying an emphasis on the placed no less than the spatial.[37] It is partly because of its connection with such a range of developments that the real potential and significance of hermeneutics, and certainly one of the most productive areas for future work, seems likely to lie in the direction of a more explicit engagement with the topological. Such an engagement would also constitute, if my argument here is correct, a more explicit engagement with what the hermeneutical itself *is*.

[1] See *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology*, ed. Robert K. Barnhart (Edinburgh: Chambers, 2001), p. 1183.

[2] So the entry in the *Online Etymology Dictionary* includes a similar derivation to the *Chambers*, but adds: "perhaps the ultimate sense is 'be close to'" – see http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=understand (accessed April 16, 2015).

[3] Heidegger, Seminar in Le Thor 1969', *Four Seminars*, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell and François Raffoul (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p.40. The *Chambers Dictionary of Etymology* entry for 'understanding' also refers to the German as having the sense of 'to stand in front or on top of', and the *Online Etymology Dictionary* notes that "Similar formations are found in Old Frisian (*understonda*), Middle Danish (*understande*), while other Germanic languages use compounds meaning "stand before" (German *verstehen*, represented in Old English by *forstanden* 'understand,' also 'oppose, withstand')".

[4] The French post-colonial theorist Edouard Glissant take up precisely this aspect of the etymology of *comprendre* as a reason for being suspicious of the usual language of 'comprehension' and 'understanding' – see Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*, trans Betsy Wing (University of Michigan Press, 1997), esp the 'Translator's Introduction', p.xiv. Glissant pays no attention, however, to the broader topologies that might be at issue here.

[5] Of course, the examples adduced here are from European languages alone, and it is an empirical question whether quite the same examples could be found in other languages, especially other non-European languages. Unfortunately, there has been very little exploration of these sorts of conceptual and linguistic issues across languages and cultures outside the European, or even English, context – the work of Lakoff and Johnson, for instance (see below), is restricted to English alone. Chinese offers enormous scope for exploration of the spatial and topological in virtue of its use, in its written form, of both phonological and optical-graphical components (ideograms) – this is evident, for instance, in Tze-wan Kwan's approach to Chinese script as set out in 'Phenomenological Interpretation of the "Six Ways" of Chinese Script Formation', in *Visualizing Knowledge in Signs: Encoding Meanings in Logographic and Logophonetic Writing Systems, Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient* (BBVO), Vol. 23 (Berlin: Pe-We-Verlag, 2014), pp. 157-202.

[6] *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

[7] *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

[8] This exploration is one that I have also undertaken (though in different ways) elsewhere, most specifically in 'Place and Situation', in *Routledge Companion to Philosophical Hermeneutics*, edited by Jeff Malpas and Hans-Helmuth Gander (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), pp.354-366, and '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 – see also 'Self, Other, Thing: Triangulation and Topography in Post-Kantian Philosophy', *Philosophy Today*, 59 (2015), pp.103–126. Although not always addressed in so direct or explicit a fashion, the connection between hermeneutics and topology is a theme that can be said to run throughout my work – it is already present, for instance, even if couched in slightly different terms, in *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

[9] See Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art', in *Off the Beaten Track,* trans. Julian Young and Kenneth Haynes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp.1-56.

[10] See Gadamer, 'Reflections on My Philosophical Journey', in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer,* Library of Living Philosophers 24 (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), p.47.

[11] See, for instance, Julian Young, *Heidegger's Philosophy of Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.40.

[12] See my 'Place and Singularity', in Jeff Malpas (ed.), *The Intelligence of Place: Topographies and Poetics* (London: Bloomsbury, in press, 2015).

[13] Gadamer writes that: "earth is the counterconcept to world insofar as it exemplifies self-concealment and concealing as opposed to self-opening" ('Heidegger's later Philosophy' in *Philosophical Hermeneutics,* trans. and ed. David E. Linge [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976], p.222). Although I think the contrast between concealing and opening is indeed present in the contrast between earth and world, I also think that it is important to recognise that neither term can be wholly identified with one or the other, since the event of truth, which arises out of the conflict of earth and world, is itself an event that encompasses both concealing and opening (it is an event of opening out of concealment).

[14] The volume in which 'The Origin of the Work of Art' originally appears is *Holzwege,* (*Gesamtausgabe 5* [*Frankfurt: Klostermann, 2003*] first published in 1950). The term *Holzweg* (literally: 'wood path') is peculiar to German, and usually refers to a path in the woods that leads nowhere in particular, hence the rendition of *Holzwege,* in the French translation of the volume, as 'paths to nowhere' – see *Chemins qui ne menent nulle part,* trans. Wolfgang Brokmeier, ed. François Fédier (Paris: Gallimard, 1962).

[15] Their character as a *Holzweg* is reinforced by the problematic character of much of Heidegger's thinking during this period – a thinking that often remains compromised by Heidegger's entanglement with Nazism, and that is still searching

for a way forward after the impasse of *Being and Time*. See my discussion in 'On the reading of Heidegger: Situating the Black Notebooks', in Ingo Farin and Jeff Malpas (ed.), *Reading Heidegger's Black Notebooks 1931-1941* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, in press, 2015).

[16] The lectures are thus the central focus for Gadamer's discussion in 'Heidegger's Later Philosophy'.

[17] *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 2nd rev. edn., 1992), p.100.

[18] See my discussion in 'Nihilism and the Thinking of Place', in Laurence Paul Hemming and Bogdan Costea (eds), *The Movement of Nihilism* (London: Continuum, 2011), pp.110-127.

[19] 'Heidegger's Later Philosophy', p.222.

[20] See *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper and Row, 1971): 'The Thing', pp.161-184, and 'Building Dwelling Thinking', pp.141-160.

[21] 'The Origin of the Work of Art', p.21.

[22] 'Heidegger's later Philosophy', p.225.

[23] Place, to which the 'there' is surely related in an essential way, is itself best understood as a bounded openness – see my *Place and Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.21-22

[24] *Truth and Method*, p.109.

[25] 'Martin Heidegger – 75 years', in Heidegger's ways, trans. John W. Stanley (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p.23.

[26] See Kant 'What is Orientation in Thinking?', in *Kant: Political Writings*, trans. H. B. Nisbet Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, rev. edn. 1991), pp.238-239; Kant, 'Concerning the Ultimate Ground of the Differentiation of Directions in Space' [1768], trans. David Walford and Ralph Meerbote, in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770*, The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Immanuel Kant (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp.361-372. See also my own discussion of this issue in

'Heidegger, Space, and World', in Julian Kiverstein and Michael Wheeler (eds), *Heidegger and Cognitive Science* (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2012), pp.312-317.

[27] On the singularity that belongs to place see my discussion in 'Place and Singularity'.

[28] Heidegger himself writes of "the factical mode of the actualizing of λόγος", which he takes to be at work in hermeneutics, as directed towards "making something accessible as being there out in the open, as public," *Ontology: The Hermeneutics of Facticity*, trans John van Buren (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), p.8. See my discussion in 'The Beckoning of Language: Heidegger's Hermeneutic Transformation of Thinking', in Ingo Farin and Michael Bowler (eds.), *Hermeneutic Heidegger* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, forthcoming, 2015).

[29] *Praise of Theory: Speeches and Essays*, trans Chris Dawson (new Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p.6.

[30] This is a point that becomes very clear in Heidegger, even though it is a point to which attention is seldom given. See my 'Poetry, Language, Place.'

[31] On the topological character of *Ereignis* and Fourfold see esp. my *Heidegger's Topology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT press, 2006), pp.221-230.

[32] *Truth and Method*, p.490.

[33] See my 'The Beckoning of Language' in which I discuss the way in which Heidegger's transformation of ontology through the turn to hermeneutics (and of hermeneutics through the turn to ontology) is also tied to a turn to the topological.

[34] My reading of the topological underpinnings to the hermeneutics of both Heidegger and Gadamer puts my account somewhat at odds with that of Günter Figal (as set out, in particular, in Figal, *Objectivity: The Hermeneutical and Philosophy*, trans. T. D. George, [Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2010], esp. pp.121–53; see also Figal, *Unscheinbarkeit. Der Raum der Phänomenologie* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015]), even though it also draws close to Figal's account on some points. Where Figal and I can be seen as largely in agreement is in the centrality of some notion of spatiality to the hermeneutical. Where we differ, most significantly, is on the understanding of

spatiality itself – Figal takes spatiality as the key notion, with no reference to any developed notion of place, and his concept of spatiality seems essentially that of unbounded extension. My account takes spatiality always to be derivative of place, the latter being the key concept, and so the concept of space at work in my thinking is always a *bounded* spatiality. Where we also differ is in our respective readings of Heidegger and Gadamer – I read a topological account into their thinking, whereas Figal tends to develop his spatialised account of hermeneutics partially in opposition to the sort of account he sees in Heidegger and especially in Gadamer. For a brief discussion of Figal's position, see my 'Place and Situation', pp.362-363.

[35] See (among many other works) my *Donald Davidson and the Mirror of Meaning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992) as well as 'Place and Situation'. Björn Ramberg attempts to approach the issue of externalism in direct relation to Gadamer's hermeneutics in 'The Source of the Subjective', in Lewis Edwin Hahn (ed.), *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, The Library of Living Philosophers XXIV (Chicago: Open Court, 1997), pp.459-472, but Gadamer's response (see 'Reply to Björn T. Ramberg', *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, pp.472-474) is more one of bafflement than genuine engagement. The exchange reflects the difficulty of this sort of encounter across philosophical traditions – the same difficulty is evident in Davidson's contribution to the volume ('Gadamer and Plato's *Philebus'*, *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, pp.421-433) as well as Gadamer's reply ('Reply to Davidson', *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*, pp.433-436), and in Gadamer's reply to the essay by David Hoy (Gadamer, 'Reply to David C. Hoy', pp.129-130, and Hoy, 'Post-Cartesian Interpretation: Hand-Georg-Gadamer and Donald Davidson', pp.111-129, both in *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer*).

[36] Into which Dan Hicks and Mary C. Beaudry (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Material Culture Studies* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) provides a useful point of entry. The focus on material culture has become an increasingly prominent theme in contemporary archaeology, anthropology, cultural theory, and sociology. For myself, I would prefer to talk, less of a purely 'materialist' focus, but instead of a

form of 'materialist romanticism' or 'romantic materialism' (since what is at issue is the embedding of the romantic – memory, belief, desire) in the 'material' and of the material in the 'romantic, rather than of a pure materiality alone – see, for instance, my 'Building Memory', *Interstices: Journal of Architecture and Related Arts* 13 (2012), pp.11-21.

[37] See my 'Putting Space in Place: Relational Geography and Philosophical Topography', *Planning and Environment D: Space and Society*, 30 (2012), pp.226-242.