

Heidegger and the Thinking of Place

Explorations in the Topology of Being

JEFF MALPAS



Heidegger and the Thinking of Place

philosophy

Explorations in the Topology of Being

JEFF MALPAS

The idea of place—*topos*—runs through Martin Heidegger's thinking almost from the very start. It can be seen not only in his attachment to the famous hut in Todtnauberg but in his constant deployment of topological terms and images and in the situated, "placed" character of his thought and of its major themes and motifs. Heidegger's work, argues Jeff Malpas, exemplifies the practice of "philosophical topology." In *Heidegger and the Thinking of Place*, Malpas examines the topological aspects of Heidegger's thought and offers a broader elaboration of the philosophical significance of place. In doing so, he provides a distinct and productive approach to Heidegger as well as a new reading of other key figures—notably Kant, Aristotle, Gadamer, and Davidson, but also Benjamin, Arendt, and Camus. Philosophy, Malpas argues, begins in wonder and begins in place and the experience of place. The place of wonder, of philosophy, of questioning, he writes, is the very *topos* of thinking.

Jeff Malpas is Distinguished Professor at the University of Tasmania and Adjunct Professor in the School of Architecture at RMIT University. He is the author of *Heidegger's Topology: Being, Place, World* (MIT Press).

"Malpas does a brilliant job. ... [T]his book constitutes another impressive achievement by Jeff Malpas in reconsidering the importance and senses of place, not only in Heidegger's work, but also more broadly in philosophy itself."—*Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews*

"*Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* not only confirms Jeff Malpas as a central interpreter of Heidegger, it reinforces his position as one of the most significant philosophers writing on the concept of place today."—Andrew Benjamin, Professor of Critical Theory and Philosophical Aesthetics, Director Research Unit in European Philosophy, Monash University

"*Heidegger and the Thinking of Place* far exceeds the bounds of Heidegger exegesis. It is a major work by the most original philosopher working in Australasia today."—Julian Young, William R. Kenan Jr. Professor of Humanities, Wake Forest University

Cover image: Colin McCahon, *French Bay*, 1956, oil on canvas, 1270 x 965 mm, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, by kind permission of the Colin McCahon Research and Publication Trust and the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa.

The MIT Press
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Massachusetts 02142
<http://mitpress.mit.edu>

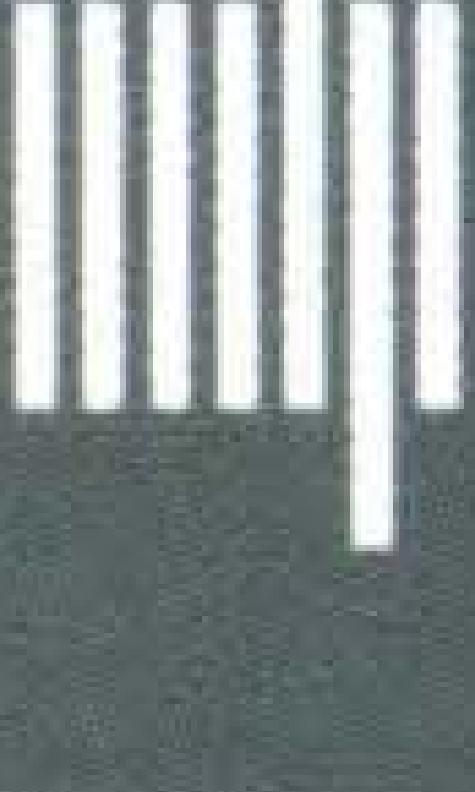
978-0-262-53367-6



Heidegger and the Thinking of Place

Explorations in the Topology of Being

JEFF MALPAS



Heidegger and the Thinking of Place

Explorations in the Topology of Being

Jeff Malpas

**The MIT Press
Cambridge, Massachusetts
London, England**

© 2012 Massachusetts Institute of Technology

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form by any electronic or mechanical means (including photocopying, recording, or information storage and retrieval) without permission in writing from the publisher.

For information about special quantity discounts, please email special_sales@mitpress.mit.edu

This book was set in Stone Sans and Stone Serif by Toppan Best-set Premedia Limited. Printed and bound in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Malpas, Jeff.

Heidegger and the thinking of place : explorations in the topology of being / Jeff Malpas.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p.) and index.

ISBN 978-0-262-01684-1 (hardcover : alk. paper)

1. Heidegger, Martin, 1889–1976. 2. Place (Philosophy). I. Title.

B3279.H49M2719 2012

193—dc23

2011021053

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Heidegger and the Thinking of Place

We shall not cease from exploration / And the end of all our exploring / Will be to
arrive where we started / And know the place for the first time.

—T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets* ("Little Gidding")

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Philip Laughlin and the team at the MIT Press for their support in bringing this project to fruition. Thanks are also due to the Australian Research Council for providing the fellowship that enabled this work to be completed, as well as the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation for their continuing support over a decade or more.

There are many friends and colleagues who have contributed in various ways to the ideas set out here, but I would particularly like to thank Bernardo Aïn binder, Andrew Benjamin, Miguel de Bestegui, Andrew Brennan, Chan-Fai Cheung, Steve Crowell, Stuart Elden, Ingo Farin, Hans-Helmuth Gander, Laurence Hemming, Norelle Lickiss, Linn Miller, Dermot Moran, James Phillips, Edward Relph, Glenda Satne, Ligia Saramago, David Seamon, Lucy Tatman, Lubica Ucnik, Jin Xiping, Julian Young, and Günter Zöller. I am also grateful for the continuing support of the School of Philosophy at the University of Tasmania, and especially the help of Irene Sawford, as well as Bronwyn Peters and Sally Laing.

I would like to thank the original publishers for allowing me to make use of the following material:

"The Place of Topology: Responding to Crowell, Bestegui, and Young," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 19 (2011): 305–325 (chapter 3); and "Heidegger in Benjamin's City," *Journal of Architecture*, 12 (2007): 489–499 (chapter 11)—both with kind permission of the publisher, Taylor & Francis Ltd., <http://www.informaworld.com>.

"From the Transcendental to the Topological: Heidegger on Ground, Unity, and Limit," in *From Kant to Davidson: Philosophy and the Idea of the Transcendental*, ed. Jeff Malpas (London: Routledge, 2002) (chapter 4); "Objectivity and Self-Disclosedness: The Phenomenological Working of Art," in *Art and Phenomenology*, ed. Joseph Parry (London: Routledge, 2010) (chapter 12); "Death and the Unity of a Life," in *Death and Philosophy*, ed. J. E.

Malpas and Robert C. Solomon (London: Routledge, 1998) (chapter 12); and “Beginning in Wonder,” in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (London: Routledge, 2006) (epilogue)—all with kind permission of Routledge and the Taylor & Francis Group.

“Nihilism and the Thinking of Place,” in *The Movement of Nihilism*, Laurence Paul Hemming and Bogdan Costea (London: Continuum, 2010) (chapter 5), with kind permission of the Continuum International Publishing Group.

“Heidegger, Space, and World,” in *Heidegger and Cognitive Science*, ed. Julian Kiverstein and Michael Wheeler (London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2010) (chapter 6), with kind permission of Palgrave Macmillan.

“Heidegger, Geography, and Politics,” *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2 (2008): 185–213 (chapter 7); and “Philosophy’s Nostalgia,” in *Philosophy’s Moods: The Affective Grounds of Thinking*, ed. Hagi Kenaan and Ilit Ferber (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011) (chapter 8)—both with kind permission of Springer Verlag.

“Locating Interpretation: The Topography of Understanding in Heidegger and Davidson,” *Philosophical Topics* 27 (1999): 129–148 (chapter 10) (©1999 University of Arkansas, <http://www.uapress.com>), with kind permission of the University of Arkansas Press.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to acknowledge, and express my thanks for, the continuing love and support of my wife, Margaret, without which neither these essays, nor much else besides, would have been possible.

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Introduction: The Thinking of Place 1

I Topological Thinking 11

1 The *Topos* of Thinking 13

2 The Turning to/of Place 23

3 The Place of Topology 43

II Topological Concepts 71

4 Ground, Unity, and Limit 73

5 Nihilism, Place, and "Position" 97

6 Place, Space, and World 113

7 Geography, Biology, and Politics 137

III Topological Horizons 159

8 Philosophy's Nostalgia 161

9 Death and the End of Life 177

10 Topology, Triangulation, and Truth 199

11 Heidegger in Benjamin's City 225

12 The Working of Art 237

Epilogue: Beginning in Wonder 251

Notes 269

Bibliography 343

Index 361

Introduction: The Thinking of Place

Accordingly, we may suggest that the day will come when we will not shun the question whether the opening, the free open, may not be that within which alone pure space and ecstatic time and everything present and absent in them have the place which gathers and protects everything.

—Martin Heidegger, “The End of Philosophy and the Task of Thinking,” in *On Time and Being*

The idea of place—of *topos*—runs through the thinking of Martin Heidegger almost from the very start. Although not always directly thematized—sometimes apparently obscured, displaced even, by other concepts—and expressed through many different terms (*Ort*, *Ortschaft*, *Stätte*, *Gegend*, *Dasein*, *Lichtung*, *Ereignis*),¹ it is impossible to think with Heidegger unless one attunes oneself to Heidegger’s own attunement to place. This is something not only to be observed in Heidegger’s attachment to the famous hut at Todtnauberg;² it is also found, more significantly, in his constant deployment of topological terms and images, and in the situated, “placed,” character of his thought, and of its key themes and motifs.³

Heidegger’s work exemplifies the practice of what might be thought of as “philosophical topology,” yet Heidegger must also be counted as one of the principal founders of such a mode of place-oriented thinking.⁴ The aim of this volume is to contribute to both the topological understanding of Heidegger and the continuing articulation and elaboration of topology as philosophically conceived. In this respect, the essays aim to supplement and expand the analysis of Heideggerian topology already begun in my *Heidegger’s Topology*,⁵ but they can equally be seen as contributing to my own project of philosophical topography as first set out in my earlier volume *Place and Experience*.⁶ The essays collected here (essays that span a decade or more of writing) thus focus on the idea of place, first, as it appears in Heidegger’s thinking as it arises in a number of ways and in

relation to a range of issues, and, second, as it can be seen to provide the focus for a distinctive mode of philosophical thinking that encompasses, but is not restricted to, the Heideggerian.

In this respect, the focus on place that appears here, while certainly finding a fruitful setting in Heidegger's work, does not derive from a Heideggerian perspective alone. It is not that, taking Heidegger as a starting point, the idea of place as philosophically significant comes into view, but rather, beginning with the idea of place as philosophically significant, one comes to a different reading, and perhaps a different appreciation, of the thinker from Messkirch, as well as of a number of other key figures—most notably perhaps, Kant, Aristotle, Gadamer, and Davidson, but also Benjamin, for instance, and, although they make but the briefest of appearances here, Arendt and Camus. The idea that place should be philosophically so significant in this way—that it might actually be central to philosophy as such (and that it is so is the underlying claim throughout much of my work as well, I would argue, of Heidegger's)—is to some extent a claim defended and elaborated upon, in various ways, throughout the essays contained here, but it is perhaps worth saying a little more by way of such a defense or elaboration from the very start. What underpins my conviction concerning the philosophical centrality of place, not only in Heidegger, but also more generally, is something that involves both a philosophical idea as well as a matter of personal experience or personal "phenomenology." I will say a little about the personal element that is at issue here, but first let me address the philosophical.

One of the features of place is the way in which it establishes relations of inside and outside—relations that are directly tied to the essential connection between place and boundary or limit.⁷ To be located is to be within, to be somehow enclosed, but in a way that at the same time opens up, that makes possible. Already this indicates some of the directions in which any thinking of place must move—toward ideas of opening and closing, of concealing and revealing, of focus and horizon, of finitude and "transcendence," of limit and possibility, of mutual relationality and coconstitution. It is not surprising, therefore, to find such an important focus on "being-in," essentially a focus on place and placedness, within Heidegger's analysis in *Being and Time* (notably in §12)—although it is also a problematic focus within the structure of the early work in that Heidegger struggles to find a way of understanding the topological structure that is at issue here.⁸ If we are to take the primary datum for philosophy to be our own being-in-the-world (a datum that is not first given in terms of an encounter with consciousness, with sense data, or with any

other such “derivative” notion, but rather first presents itself precisely as an encounter in which self, other, and world are given together as a single unitary phenomenon), then where philosophical inquiry must begin is indeed with place or placedness, since this is fundamentally what is already at issue in the phenomenon of being-in-the-world. Although Aristotle’s mode of thinking operates within a very different vocabulary and frame, his own emphasis on the importance of *topos* in the *Physics* captures something of this priority of place, particularly given his analysis of *topos* as precisely a mode of “being-in.” Unfortunately, but perhaps not surprisingly, the primacy of place that appears here has been too often overlooked in philosophy—partly because it is so ubiquitous as to seem “commonplace” or even trivial, and partly because place remains so resistant to the forms of more “technical” analysis to which philosophers so often tend. Heidegger is perhaps unusual in this respect, in that his own thought seems already to begin with a recognition, even if not well worked out or articulated, of the primacy that must be accorded to place. The development of his thinking is a gradual working out of what this involves and of how it must be understood, and so also a gradual making explicit of the fundamental role of topology. Not only the analysis of being-in-the-world as worked out in *Being and Time* (and with it the understanding of originary temporality), but also the idea of the clearing (*Lichtung*) that is the happening of truth, the *Ereignis*, and the happening of the Fourfold all turn out to represent successively developed attempts at the articulation of the *topos* that itself lies at the very heart of the question of being.

The personal experience or phenomenology that is also at work in my thinking on this matter may be said to derive from a childhood lived between Australia, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom (at a time when travel between these places was still by sea, and so necessarily involved encounters with many other places besides just these), from a traveling lifestyle that was operative even when my family was in a more settled location (a result of the fairground work in which we were often involved), and also from the strong sense of place that is such an important element in the New Zealand culture (both Pakeha and Maori) in which I mostly grew up, and that is equally powerful, if not even more so, in Tasmania, where I now live. The experience of place, and the significance of a sense of place, has never seemed to me simply a matter of sentiment or feeling, but to be something much deeper and more profound—so that it should be unsurprising to find it clearly and powerfully evident in so many different forms of human expression and experience—and to be indicative of

exactly the sort of philosophical or ontological primacy of place that emerges from philosophical reflection.

The understanding of place that is evident here is thus one that implies a changed conception of both our usual ways of thinking about philosophy, about ourselves, and about our own experience of involvement in the world. The ubiquity of topological or topographical ideas and images, the sense of place that is such a common feature of human experience, can now be seen to be not mere psychological or social artifacts (or just as products of an evolutionary history), but rather to arise from a more fundamental *ontological* structure (albeit one that is not to be found *beneath* the surfaces of things so much as in the very iridescence of surface itself—surface, like boundary, and also, I would argue, like the concepts of unity and ground, being itself an essentially topological concept). The structure at issue here is the structure of place, of *topos*, a structure that encompasses the being of individual places, of individual human lives, and of much more besides (the being of all that Heidegger includes in the term *Seiendes*). It is also a structure that resists any reductive analysis, being constituted through an essential mutuality of relation at every level, and that is unitary even while it also contains an essential multiplicity. The aim of this volume, as with much of my work elsewhere, is the exploration of this *topos*. It is an exploration that can never be complete, but always and only proceeds through the following of particular pathways that follow particular directions and move through particular landscapes. Recognizing the topological character of such thinking gives an added significance to Heidegger's insistence on his own thinking (and genuine thinking as such) as always "on the way." Moreover, because the project undertaken here is indeed a form of topological exploration, a series of philosophical peregrinations, it assumes a willingness on the part of the reader to participate in that exploration, and in the peregrinations that make it up. This is not to say that it requires an uncritical acceptance of the particular paths that are taken—far from it—but it does require some degree of willingness to walk along those paths, and to participate in the conversation that ensues. For this reason, too, one might say that the approach adopted in these essays tends not to be a polemical one. Although some disagreements are noted here (perhaps most often with certain pragmatic readings of Heidegger), the aim is more to work from within a certain place, rather than give too much attention to taking issue with other places, or other paths.⁹

The volume presented here is divided into three main sections, together with this introduction and also an epilogue. Part I deals with the ideas of