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978-0-521-17249-3 - Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity

Iain D. Thomson

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Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity

Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity offers a radical new interpretation of Heidegger's later philosophy, developing his argument that art can help lead humanity beyond the nihilistic ontotheology of the modern age. Providing pathbreaking readings of Heidegger's "The Origin of the Work of Art" and his notoriously difficult *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, this book explains precisely what postmodernity meant for Heidegger, the greatest philosophical critic of modernity, and what it could still mean for us today. Exploring these issues, Iain D. Thomson examines several postmodern works of art, including music, literature, painting, and even comic books, from a post-Heideggerian perspective. Clearly written and accessible, this book will help readers gain a deeper understanding of Heidegger and his relation to postmodern theory, popular culture, and art.

Iain D. Thomson is Professor of Philosophy at the University of New Mexico, where he also serves as Director of Graduate Studies. He is the author of *Heidegger on Ontotheology: Technology and the Politics of Education* (Cambridge, 2005), and his articles have appeared in numerous scholarly journals, essay collections, and reference works.

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IAIN D. THOMSON

University of New Mexico



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*For Mungo, an artist who still amazes after more than forty years;
and for Kirsten, whose love discloses life's beauty every day.*

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At times of despair, we must learn to see with new eyes.

Desmond Tutu, *Believe*

It is enough to say that we understand in a *different* way, *if we understand at all.*

Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*

It would be necessary, in sum, to choose between art and death.

Jacques Derrida, *Copy, Archive, Signature*

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Acknowledgments

More than a decade teaching hermeneutic phenomenology in the high desert has taught me that a sense of real community is a rare and precious thing, especially for those of us caught between the established philosophical territories – *coyotes*, as we say in New Mexico, that is, border-crossers, smugglers, tricksters – “too continental” for the narrowly analytic, “too analytic” for the ideologically continental. Stealing across the desert, coyotes sometimes run afoul of the philosophical border patrol (self-appointed, self-righteous, and aggressively exclusionary toward those who dare to cross their arbitrary lines in the sand), but that is the price we pay to discover the stark freedom of the new expanse and the joy of finding our own paths. Those of us who do not feel entirely at home on either side of the continental-analytic divide, moreover, may take some comfort from the thought that the best way to move beyond such outdated territorial divisions is simply to populate the borderlands, thereby helping to create something more livable for the future. That task is no pipe dream, but (as I suggested at the end of *Heidegger on Ontotheology*) it can only be accomplished by communities of *individuals* (birds not of a feather who nevertheless flock together – from time to time). I feel truly fortunate to have received generous help from more unique and irreplaceable individuals (and the living communities they compose) than I can hope to thank here. Their thoughts made this book much better, so the problems that remain I happily claim as my own.

Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity is composed in large part of significantly revised and expanded materials first presented and published elsewhere, and I heartily thank all those whose thoughtful responses helped improve the work along the way, as well as those who originally published my work and allowed me to make use of it here. Chapter 1 began as a lecture delivered first to the Philosophy Department at Colorado College in their J. Glenn Gray colloquium series (7 February 2008), and then to the International Society for Phenomenological Studies (19 July 2008),

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and will be included in an abbreviated form in Daniel Dahlstrom, ed., *Interpreting Heidegger: New Essays*. For their helpful comments and criticisms on this chapter, I am especially grateful to Anne-Margaret Baxley, Kelly Becker, William Blattner, Ian Bogost, William Bracken, Taylor Carman, David Cerbone, Benjamin Crowe, Steven Crowell, Daniel Dahlstrom, Hubert Dreyfus, Manfred Frings, Rick Furtak, John Haugeland, Stephan Käufer, Jonathan Lee, Paul Livingston, Béatrice Longuenesse, Joachim Oberst, Robert Pippin, John Riker, Joseph Shear, Joeri Schrivers, Thomas Sheehan, Charles Siewert, Carolyn Thomas, and Mark Wrathall.

Chapter 2 was originally presented as the Gale Memorial Lecture to the Department of Art and Art History at the University of New Mexico (17 November 2008), Chapter 3 to the International Society for Phenomenological Studies, in Asilomar, California (21 July 2009). A shorter version of both was published as the entry on “Heidegger’s Aesthetics” in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (That piece contains links to some other art images that I could not afford to include here.) For helpful responses to these chapters, I would like to thank Kelly Becker, David Craven, Benjamin Crowe, Steven Crowell, Hubert Dreyfus, Jesús Adrián Escudero, Manfred Frings, Rick Furtak, Charles Guignon, Allison Hagerman, Brent Kalar, Jonathan Lear, Joachim Oberst, Mark Okrent, Tao Raspoli, Matthew Ratcliffe, James Reid, Joseph Rouse, Carl Sachs, Joseph Shear, Matthew Shockey, Gino Signoracci, Robert Stolorow, Tina Tahir, Mungo Thomson, Mark Wrathall, several anonymous referees, as well as the other participants of the inaugural meeting of the Southwest Seminar in Continental Philosophy, who heard parts of Chapter 3 here in Albuquerque, New Mexico (28 May 2010).

Thanks again to Mark Wrathall for the enthusiastic invitation to write the essay that formed the basis of Chapter 4, as well as for his many valuable suggestions about U2; an earlier version was published (under the same title) in *U2 and Philosophy: How to Decipher an Atomic Band*, Mark A. Wrathall, editor; © 2006 Carus Publishing. Here thanks also go to Anne Margaret Baxley, Francisco Gallegos, Sara Amber Rawls, and Christian Wood for sharing their insights. Chapter 6, the work of oldest vintage here, was originally written in the mid-1990s (and included in my 1999 dissertation); an early version was presented to the 21st annual “Heidegger Symposium” at the University of North Texas in Denton (20 April 2001) and published as “The Philosophical Fugue: Understanding the Structure and Goal of Heidegger’s *Beiträge*,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 34: 57–73, Wolfe Mays, editor; © 2003 British Society for Phenomenology. I would especially like to thank Keith Wayne Brown, Taylor Carman, Gerald Doppelt, Hubert Dreyfus, Michael Eldred, Manfred Frings, Ted Kiesel, Edward Lee, Ken Maly, Wayne Martin, Rajesh Sampath, Ananda Spike-Turner, and Tracy Strong for thoughtful responses.

Chapter 5 was first presented to a Philosophy Department Colloquium at the University of New Mexico (25 April 2003) and later delivered to the International Society for Phenomenological Studies (26 July 2010). It first appeared as “Deconstructing the Hero” in *Comics as Philosophy*, Jeff McLaughlin, editor; © 2005 University Press of Mississippi. Special thanks to Anne Margaret Baxley, Kelly Becker, William Blattner, Bill Bracken, David Carr, David Cerbone, Steven Crowell, Hubert Dreyfus, Kevin Hill, Brent Kalar, Stephan Käufer, Mark Lance, Leslie MacAvoy, Irene McMullin, Joe Schear, Kirsten Thomson, Mungo Thomson, Kate Withy, Gideon Yafee, and Chris Young for insights and critique, and especially to Jeff McLaughlin for encouraging me to write it in the first place. Chapter 7 was originally presented at the French Parliament of Philosophers’ international colloquium on “Heidegger: The Danger and the Promise” at the University of Strasbourg, France (4 December 2004), and was published with a different introduction as “Understanding Technology Ontotheologically, or: The Danger and the Promise of Heidegger, an American Perspective,” in *New Waves in Philosophy of Technology*, Jan-Kyrre Berg Olsen, Evan Selinger, and Søren Riis, editors. In addition to the editors, I would like to thank Anne Margaret Baxley, Kelly Becker, Joseph Cohen, Jacques Derrida, Hubert Dreyfus, Peter Gordon, Don Ihde, Carlos Sanchez, Gianni Vattimo, Samuel Weber, Mark Wrathall, and Holger Zaborowski for their critique and encouragement.

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Finally, to all my teachers, students, friends, family, and countless other philosophical interlocutors, named and unnamed: I could not have done this without you. As Heidegger saw, thinking *is* thanking, our best way of responding to what we are given. So, until we can think together in person again, please let this book serve as my humble *thanks*.

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Abbreviations Used for Works by Heidegger (Translations frequently modified)

- BC *Basic Concepts*. G. E. Aylesworth, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.
- BQP *Basic Questions of Philosophy: Selected "Problems" of "Logic."* R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994.
- BT *Being and Time*. J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1962.
- CP *Contributions to Philosophy (From Enowning)*. P. Emad and K. Maly, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.
- CPC *Country Path Conversations*. B. Davis, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010.
- EP *The End of Philosophy*. J. Stambaugh, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1973.
- DT *Discourse on Thinking*. J. Anderson and E. Freund, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1966.
- EHP *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*. K. Hoeller, trans. New York: Humanity Books, 2000.
- ET *The Essence of Truth*. T. Sadler, trans. London: Continuum, 2002.
- FCM *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*. W. McNeill and N. Walker, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.
- FS *Four Seminars*. A. Mitchell and François Raffoul, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003.
- G *Gelassenheit*. Pfulligen: Neske, 1959.
- GA1 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 1: *Frühe Schriften*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1978.
- GA3 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 3: *Kant und das Problem der Metaphysik*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1991.

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Abbreviations Used for Works by Heidegger

- GA₄ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 4: *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1981.
- GA₅ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 5: *Holzwege*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1977.
- GA₇ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 7: *Vorträge und Aufsätze*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2000.
- GA₈ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 8: *Was Heißt Denken?* P.-L. Coriando, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2002.
- GA₉ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 9: *Wegmarken*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1976.
- GA₁₁ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 11: *Identität und Differenz*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2006.
- GA₁₃ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 13: *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens, 1910–1976*. H. Heidegger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983.
- GA₁₄ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 14: *Zur Sache des Denkens*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2007.
- GA₁₅ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 15: *Seminare*. C. Ochwad, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1986.
- GA₁₆ *Gesamtausgabe* Vol. 16: *Reden und andere Zeugnisse eines Lebensweges, 1910–1976*. H. Heidegger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2000.
- GA₂₀ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 20: *Prolegomena zur Geschichte des Zeitbegriffs*. P. Jaeger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1979.
- GA_{29–30} *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 29–30: *Die Grundbegriffe der Metaphysik: Welt, Endlichkeit, Einsamkeit*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983.
- GA₃₄ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 34: *Vom Wesen der Wahrheit*. H. Mörchen, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1988.
- GA₃₈ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 38: *Logik als die Frage nach dem Wesen der Sprache*. G. Seibold, ed., Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1998.
- GA₃₉ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 39: *Hölderlins Hymnen "Germanien" und "Der Rhein"*. S. Ziegler, ed., Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1980.
- GA₄₀ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 40: *Einführung in die Metaphysik*. P. Jaeger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1983.
- GA₄₃ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 43: *Nietzsche: Der Wille zur Macht als Kunst*. B. Heimbüchel, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1985.
- GA₄₅ *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 45: *Grundfragen der Philosophie: Ausgewählte "Probleme" der "Logik"*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1984.

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[More information](#)*Abbreviations Used for Works by Heidegger*

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- GA50 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 50: *Nietzsches Metaphysik*. P. Jaeger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1990.
- GA51 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 51: *Grundbegriffe*. P. Jaeger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1981.
- GA65 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 65: *Beiträge zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1989.
- GA66 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 66: *Besinnung*. F.-W. von Herrmann, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1997.
- GA67 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 67: *Metaphysik und Nihilismus*. H.-J. Friedrich, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1999.
- GA69 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 69: *Die Geschichte des Seyns*. P. Trawny, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1998.
- GA75 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 75: *Zu Hölderlin – Greichenlandreisen*. C. Ochwad, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2000.
- GA77 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 77: *Feldweg-Gespräch*. I. Schüßler, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1995.
- GA79 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 79: *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*. P. Jaeger, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1994.
- GA90 *Gesamtausgabe*, Vol. 90: *Zu Ernst Jünger*. P. Trawny, ed. Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 2004.
- HB “Selected Letters from the Heidegger-Blochmann Correspondence.” F. Edler, trans. *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* 14–15 (1992): 559–77.
- HBC Heidegger, Martin, and Blochmann, Elizabeth. *Martin Heidegger-Elizabeth Blochmann, Briefwechsel 1918–1969*. J. W. Storck, ed. Marbach: Deutsche Literaturarchiv, 1989.
- HCT *History of the Concept of Time*. T. Kisiel, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985.
- HHI *Hölderlin’s Hymn “The Ister.”* W. McNeill and J. Davis, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996.
- HR *The Heidegger Reader*. G. Figal, ed. J. Veith, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009.
- ID *Identity and Difference*. J. Stambaugh, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.
- IM *Introduction to Metaphysics*. G. Fried and R. Polt, trans. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000.
- KPM *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. R. Taft, trans. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997.
- LQ *Logic as the Question Concerning the Essence of Language*. W. T. Gregory and Y. Unna, trans. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009.
- M *Mindfulness*. P. Emad and T. Kalary, trans. London: Continuum, 2006.

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Abbreviations Used for Works by Heidegger

- N₁ *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Art*. David Farrell Krell, ed. and trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1979.
- N₃ *Nietzsche: The Will to Power as Knowledge and as Metaphysics*. David Farrell Krell, ed. J. Stambaugh, D. F. Krell, and F. Capuzzi, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1987.
- N₄ *Nietzsche: Nihilism*. David Farrell Krell, ed. F. Capuzzi, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1982.
- NII *Nietzsche*. Pfullingen: G. Neske, 1961, vol. II.
- OBT *Off the Beaten Track*. J. Young and K. Haynes, eds. and trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002.
- P *Pathmarks*. William McNeill, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- PLT *Poetry, Language, Thought*. A. Hofstadter, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1971.
- Q&A *Martin Heidegger and National Socialism: Questions and Answers*. Günther Neske and Emil Kettering, eds. L. Harries, trans. New York: Paragon House, 1990.
- QCT *The Question Concerning Technology*. W. Lovitt, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1977.
- SZ *Sein und Zeit*. Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1993.
- T&B *On Time and Being*. J. Stambaugh, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1972.
- TTL “Traditional Language and Technological Language.” W. T. Gregory, trans. *Journal of Philosophical Research* XXIII (1998): 129–45.
- UK₁ “Vom Ursprung des Kunstwerks: Erste Ausarbeitung.” *Heidegger Studies* 5 (1989): 1–22.
- USTS *Überlieferte Sprache und Technische Sprache*. H. Heidegger, ed. St. Gallen: Erker-Verag, 1989.
- WCT *What Is Called Thinking?* J. G. Gray, trans. New York: Harper & Row, 1968.

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A Note on the Notes (Redux)

My fondness for footnotes can be cast in a postmodern light, as demonstrating another way in which our modern desire for completeness shatters our modern striving for unity – and so suggests the impossibility of both. The juxtaposition of text and notes generates an undeniable tension, one not easily resolved. I hope this tension proves productive, so I have elected not to repress the notes by consigning them to the back of the book. Footnote people like me find endlessly flipping to the end for endnotes tiresome. For those who find detailed footnotes too distracting from the flow of the text, my perhaps obvious suggestion is: *Please do not feel compelled to read every note as you go.* If you have an unanswered question about a sentence, paragraph, or section that ends with a note (or simply want to consult the secondary references), then you should read that note. With any luck your question will be answered there (and if it is not, then you will see that in fact I do not have *enough* notes). Otherwise, I invite you to read through the remaining notes at your leisure. Some supplemental and specialized argument gets done in the notes, and some *Holzwege* – other paths and views – can be found there as well.¹

¹ On the full meaning of “*Holzwege*,” a crucial Heideggerian term of art, see Chapter 3, section 1.3.