Beyond Presence?

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INTRODUCTION: RICHARD POLT

With this symposium, *Gatherings* inaugurates an experiment. I invited several experienced readers of Heidegger to submit brief statements on the topic of presence, and to compose even briefer reflections after reading each other's initial statements. Their texts are followed by a few words from me on the theme. However, I do not have the last word: our readers are invited to submit their own comments of up to 1000 words on this symposium (as on every article in this journal).

My invitation to the participants ran as follows.

For purposes of this discussion, we will take the word "being" to designate *das Sein des Seienden*, which can be glossed as what it means for entities to be something instead of nothing. Heidegger asks several questions about being:

1. What are the ways in which being has been understood in the West?
2. How do these understandings cohere?
3. What makes it possible for us to understand being in the first place?
4. Is there a better alternative understanding of being?

In many texts, he argues that 1, the Western understandings of being range from *physis* to *Gestell*, and 2, they all descend from an early Greek experience of being as presence or presencing. His main answers to 3 are temporality and *Ereignis*.

As for 4, Heidegger often suggests that presence is too narrow, and that once we see that the understanding of being as presence is made possible by a further source, we can be open to alternatives. For example (my translations):

Being and Time:

> Here it becomes clear that the ancient interpretation of the being of beings is oriented toward the "world," or "nature" in the broadest sense, and that in fact it gains its understanding of being from "time."…That which is, is grasped in its being as "presence" [*Anwesenheit*]; that is, it is understood with a view to a particular mode of time, the "present" [*Gegenwart*]. (GA 2: 34/SZ 25)

Contributions to Philosophy:

> The first inception thinks beyng as presence [*Seyn als Anwesenheit*] on the basis of presencing [*Anwesung*], which constitutes the first flashing of *one* essencing [*Wesung*] of beyng. (GA 65: 31/26, tm)

> Essencing, without being conceived as such, is presencing. (GA 65: 189/148, tm)

What Is Called Thinking?:

> Even before it begins, the thinking of the Greeks
> dwells in the sway of the ἐόν as the presencing of what
> presences [*Anwesen des Anwesenden*].…This does not
> yet guarantee in any way that such thinking already
> brings the presencing of what presences into words in
> every respect and with all possible clarity. Much less
> does this decide whether, in the "presencing of what
> presences," there comes to light what the presencing
> of what presences rests upon. Thus, we would fall prey
> to an error if we wanted to believe that the being of
> beings signified only, and for all times, the presencing
> of what presences. (GA 8: 239/235, tm)

Taking Heidegger's proposals into consideration, we can ask: Do we
need an alternative to presence as an understanding of being? If not,
why not? If so, why, and what could the alternative be?

Our five participants' initial statements and their follow-up re-
sponses are presented in the alphabetical order of their last names.

JUSSI BACKMAN: THE POSTMETAPHYSICAL COMPLICATIONS OF PRESENCE

In its first, Presocratic beginning, Heidegger tells us, philosophy started out as a quest for that which unifies the diverse things that are meaningfully accessible – in other words, *present* – to thinking and perceiving: their *presence* (*Anwesenheit*), or, rather, their active "presencing" (*Anwesen*), their process of self-presentation (GA 5: 371/280). This is most explicit in the Poem of Parmenides, where a nameless goddess exhorts the narrator-thinker to consider all determinate things, whether present or absent in space and time, in terms of their unifying, indeterminate, and homogeneous intelligibility, their ability to be grasped in thought: "Being-aware [*noein*] and being-there [*einai*] are one and the same," and "even absent things [*apeonta*] are steadfastly present [*pareonta*] to awareness [*noos*]."[1] This pure intelligible presence is as such absolutely self-sufficient and self-immanent, devoid of any relation or reference to non-presence, which must mean simply absolute inaccessibility and with which philosophical thinking can have no involvement.

The being of beings is thus conceived as the presence of what is present. Accordingly, Heidegger maintains, the Platonic-Aristotelian key term *ousia*, "beingness," is fundamentally understood as *parousia*, (constant) presence. In what Heidegger characterizes as the "ontotheological," hierarchical metaphysics of Plato and Aristotle, the focus shifts from indeterminate presence as such to referring all beings back to a supreme and perfect, most complete and most constant, *instance* of presence. The most fundamental criteria of this presence are, again, completeness and self-sufficiency: in Aristotelian-scholastic theology, the divinity is pure and necessary actuality (*energeia*), purely identical with its essence, and absolute in the sense of being absolved from all constitutive relations to anything beyond itself.

In the Heideggerian narrative, in modern philosophy since Descartes the Archimedean point gradually shifts to the immediate presence of the thinking subject to itself. This shift culminates in Nietzsche's metaphysics of subjectivity as will to power, as life's self-referential and self-immanent drive to self-preservation and self-enhancement. The permanence of this will that ultimately wills only

itself is of a peculiar kind: it consists in a permanent state of becoming without external end, in a change for the sake of change that amounts to an "eternal recurrence of the same." As Heidegger puts it, its essence is a "making-constant [*Beständigung*] of becoming in presence [*Anwesenheit*]," which, for him, amounts to the extreme unfolding of the Greek understanding of being as constant presence (GA 6.1: 591–92/N3 155–57).Nietzsche opens a view upon the "apparatus" or "setup" (*Gestell*) of late modern Western technical reality as a domain of pure instrumentality and of resources available for disposing and allocating (*Bestellen*).[2] The metaphysics of presence thus culminates in a matrix of total availability and disposability.

Metaphysics, for the later Heidegger, was not a mistake but rather an "inevitable" development: an inquiry into the encounter between being and thinking could only start with the fact of intelligible presence (GA 7: 75–76/EP 90–91). However, from the outset, metaphysics entailed an implicit restriction, limitation, or exclusion, voiced by Parmenides' goddess: "Being-there is there [*esti gar einai*], and nothing is not there."[3] The focus is on presence *exclusively*; any other-than-presence is absolutely excluded from philosophy's scope. This exclusion amounts to an intensifying "forgetfulness" of being in the wide sense: metaphysics is oblivious to the meaning-constituting processes that are never in themselves immediately present but rather provide the dynamic background context *against* which the foreground of meaningful presence is possible.

In *Complicated Presence: Heidegger and the Postmetaphysical Unity of Being* (2015), I have argued that the core topic of Heidegger's postmetaphysical thinking – what in the period of fundamental ontology is addressed as the meaning or "sense" (*Sinn*) of being and later as the "truth" (*Wahrheit*) of being – is precisely this dynamic background context ignored by metaphysics. Heidegger's fundamental project consists in placing pure presence (*ousia*, the beingness or presence common to determinate beings) into a multidimensional, referential background that does not itself become immediately present as a determinate being (and is accordingly referred to by Heidegger as "nothing"), but simply

backgrounds and contextualizes presence. In the most comprehensive perspective, it is precisely the dynamic interaction between these two aspects — their differentiation, on the one hand, and their referential intertwining, on the other — that "grants" and "gives" presence as meaningful and is designated by Heidegger as "discharge" (*Austrag*) and, more importantly, as event (*Ereignis*).

As I see it, we find two successive key models in Heidegger for articulating this dynamic background/foreground structure of presence. The first is the account of the ecstatic temporality (*Zeitlichkeit*) of Dasein in *Being and Time* and the abortive attempt to correlate it with the temporality (*Temporalität*) of being as its horizon. In this model, access to the temporal present as a meaningful singular situation ("presenting," *Gegenwärtigen*) is oriented by a dimension of open possibilities and orientations (futurity or "forthcoming," *Zukunft*) that itself grows from a factical historical and cultural background (already-having-been, *Gewesenheit*). The second is the enigmatic fourfold (*Geviert*), which Heidegger gradually develops since the mid-1930s and fully announces in his 1949 Bremen lectures. The thing encountered as meaningful here becomes an intersection of two background axes, divinities/mortals and sky/earth, which can be interpreted as standing for 1) ultimate aims and purposes vs. the finite cultural and linguistic community that shares them and for 2) the open space of visibility and determinate and articulated appearing vs. inarticulate materiality. The temporal contextuality of *Being and Time* has here been complemented with spatial connotations.

Both models present meaningful presence as a node of references to dimensions that in themselves irreducibly transcend determinate and immediate presence, yet orient, contextualize, and configure presence, thus making it meaningful in a dynamic and singular manner. While for the philosophical tradition since Parmenides, the ideal of presence was self-sufficient, homogeneous, and self-identical — in a word, *simple* — Heidegger's contextual models render presence fundamentally relative, heterogeneous, and self-transcending — radically *complicated*, in the literal sense of an intertwining or folding-together

(Latin *complicare*) of multiple background dimensions, a "onefold of four," as Heidegger puts it (GA 7: 175/PLT 171, tm). *Complicated presence* would thus be a possible title for Heidegger's attempt to rethink the hidden background that the Western metaphysics of presence ultimately presupposes but has failed to address, his attempt to answer the neglected "basic question" of metaphysics, "Why is there something rather than nothing?" by considering the no-thing that allows a some-thing to be meaningfully present in the foreground. Another possible title would be *radical contextuality*.

Both of these titles, one can add, also characterize post-Heideggerian philosophical hermeneutics and poststructuralist thought as a whole. Putting presence in context, insisting on the irreducible situatedness and relationality of singular instants of meaningful access to things that resist the type of absolutization and absolution of presence that was always at the heart of ontotheological metaphysics, has become one of the principal topics of philosophical late modernity from Gadamer to Derrida.

NOTES

1   Parmenides, 28 B 3, 4; in Hermann Diels and Walther Kranz, *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: Griechisch und deutsch* [DK], vol. 1, 6th ed. (Berlin: Weidmannsche Buchhandlung, 1951).

2   On *Gestell* as "apparatus" and as a Foucauldian "dispositif," see Giorgio Agamben, *What Is an Apparatus and Other Essays*, trans. David Kishik and Stefan Pedatella (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 12.

3   Parmenides, DK 28 B 6.

TAYLOR CARMAN: PRESENCE AS THE TRUTH OF BEING

What question is "presence" or "presencing" (*Anwesen*) supposed to be the answer to? At times Heidegger seems to say that it answers the question, *What is the meaning of being?* But that would be strange, since the central thesis of *Being and Time* was that the meaning of being is not presence but time, the present (*Gegenwart*) being just one of the three temporal ecstases, along with past and future – indeed, the one ecstasis *wrongly* privileged by traditional ontology. Moreover, in the historicized inflection of his later thought, Heidegger maintains that there is not just *one* ahistorical meaning of being, but a succession of meanings corresponding to the different understandings of being that constitute the various epochs in the history of Western thought, from Greek antiquity to modern technological culture.

Where and how to fit the concept of presence in Heidegger's thought is just one of many problems issuing from a fundamental but still poorly understood shift that occurred in his thinking in the late 1930s, a shift marked most obviously by his rather abrupt disavowal of *metaphysics*. As late as 1935 Heidegger was still using the term as a synonym for *philosophy*, notably in the lecture course entitled *Introduction to Metaphysics*, in which he began outlining a history of the understanding of being, from the Presocratics to his own thought. Soon thereafter, however, "metaphysics" became, for him, a pejorative term referring exclusively to a tradition beginning with Plato (thus excluding the Presocratics) and culminating with Nietzsche (thus excluding Heidegger himself). Whereas in the 1920s he claimed to be correcting, hence continuing and in a sense vindicating, a philosophical tradition that had deviated from its own essential question concerning the *meaning* of being, in the late 1930s Heidegger came to speak of an "other beginning," a radical alternative to Western metaphysics, by which he now meant a kind of thinking – what he also calls *representational* or *calculative* thinking – that is defined by its incapacity to think being. Metaphysics is not the *thinking* of being, he now maintains, but a *forgetting* of being, not a pathway but an obstacle.

The change of philosophical orientation beginning in about 1936 is also marked by a new distinction that will be crucial to all of Heidegger's subsequent work, namely the distinction between the *meaning* and the *truth* of being. The meaning (*Sinn*) of being is what it means for entities (*das Seiende*) to be; it is what (as it were) "makes" or defines entities, what allows us to understanding them *as* entities, entities *as such*. The *meaning* of being is, in short, being understood as the being *of entities*. Metaphysics is not, as some say, thinking entities instead of being, but rather thinking being not *as such*, but merely as the being of entities, or worse as a kind of occult property. Western philosophy has always been saying, or trying to say, explicitly or implicitly, what it means for entities to be. It has always articulated, whether overtly or in its "unthought," the meaning of being, and to the question concerning the meaning of being it has offered up a series of answers: for Heraclitus being meant *phusis*, for Plato *eidos*, for Aristotle *ousia*, for the Christian Middle Ages *creation*, for Descartes *substantia*, for Kant *positing* or *representation*, for Nietzsche *will to power*; for scientific and technological modernity *objectivity* and *enframing*.

None of these answers to the question of being was either correct or incorrect, since factual correctness pertains only to entities, not to being. Even judged by Heidegger's own concept of truth as *unconcealment*, each interpretation of being can claim to reveal entities; they just do so in fundamentally different ways. The *Oresteia* enacted the battle of the gods; Gothic cathedrals opened up the space between heaven and earth; modern technology, in accord with Einstein's equation of matter and energy, grasped that physical nature is malleable resource material.

All of those discoveries, each grounded in a distinctive understanding of being, are "true" in Heidegger's sense of that word, that is, they all reveal entities. They differ dramatically, however, in that being *as such* – being *qua* being – is not itself manifest to the same degree of openness or explicitness in the various epochs. Entities are always essentially manifest in light of an understanding of being, but *being*, Heidegger now says, has itself been receding, withdrawing, passing (though never entirely) from memory into forgetting. This historical digression is no

mere change in the *meaning* of being, but a transformation in what Heidegger now calls the *truth* of being, that is, its unconcealment. The truth of being is not being understood simply as the being *of entities*, but being experienced *as such*, in its own unconcealment. The *truth* (unconcealment) of being is not *what* it is for entities to be, but rather *how* being – in contrast to entities – manifests itself. Changes in the truth of being therefore cannot be named and described in the way the successive epochs in the history of being can be. The truth of being is being's "own" unconcealment – hence Heidegger's most famous word for it, *Ereignis*.

The prompt for our symposium asks, "Do we need an alternative to presence as an understanding of being?" I think the answer is *no*, but for two reasons, since the question contains an ambiguity. An understanding of being could be construed as an understanding either of the *meaning* or of the *truth* of being. But *Anwesen* – presence or presencing – is not a name, not even a very general name, for the *meaning* of being (understood as the being of entities); rather, like *Ereignis*, it refers to the *truth* of being, to its unconcealment as such. Presence therefore does not belong on the same register, or in the same discursive space in Heidegger's thinking, as terms such as *phusis*, *ousia*, *creation*, *representation*, *will*, or *enframing*. It is not just an abstract way of saying what it is for entities to be. Nor is it merely a generic characterization of what the specific understandings of being have in common; it is not *genus* to their *species*. It is instead a word whose philosophical purpose is to evoke – without any pretended explanatory or classificatory import – the truth or unconcealment of *being as such*, in contrast to that whose meaning makes *entities as such* manifest. Presencing is the truth of being. Since I doubt that there is much more to say about the truth of being, beyond gesturing at it with suggestive terms such as *Ereignis* and *Anwesen*, I don't see the need for anything like a new word or concept that might do more or better than the humble, barely articulate work those words are already doing.

DANIEL O. DAHLSTROM: HEIDEGGERIAN RUMINATIONS ON BEING AND PRESENCE

As Aristotle puts it, "being" (used interchangeably with "existence" here) is said in many ways, including many opposing ways. Potentialities exist precisely as potentialities for specific actualities, but the potentialities and the respective actualities for which they are potentialities are not identical to one another, even though they are determinable only in terms of one another (e.g., the acorn and the mature oak, the glass before and after shattering). In this sense being exceeds the exclusive disjunction of potentialities and their respective actualities.

Something analogous holds for creators and creations, universals and instances, what is and what is not changing, and subjects and objects. Both creators and creations exist, and yet, while not identical, one is never without the other (unlike potentialities and their specific actualizations). Whereas instances exist only by instantiating universals, universals seem to exist only by virtue of being able to be instantiated, even if only in a thought (e.g., both Goodman's grue and the monster). x can be said to change relative to y only while either y or the relation between x and y in some respect do not change; thus, a birthday marks a change while the markers – the numbers of years and the numbers themselves – do not. Similar considerations apply to modern distinctions between subjects and objects. While not identical, both subjects exist and objects exist as do relations between them (and the place, as Heidegger puts it, where they are together).

These general preconsiderations bring us to the topic of presence. Presences are always correlative with absences, and not just in thought. They exist in mutually inherent ways and this inherent relatedness holds for each of the overarching ways that something can be said to be present or absent. Thus, we say that something is present *now* in view of the fact that it was absent and will be in the near future, that it is present *here* because it is absent somewhere else, or that it is present *to* an observer because it is also absent from the observer in some respect. The notion of this interplay of presence and absence encapsulates Husserl's insight that nothing is perceived adequately through the senses and

Heidegger's complementary contention that various sorts of absences no less than presences generally make up entities' manners of being. The two claims floated here (that presences and absences are correlative and that being is said of both) entails that being and presence are not identical.

The fact that being is said in these contrary ways, e.g., that it is both present and absent (actual and potential, etc., albeit not in the same respect), may suggest that being is hopelessly indeterminate, that talk of being must equivocate. But, apart from the fact that we can unequivocally register the indeterminate, it would be a mistake to suppose that determinacy and univocity are defined by those very contrarieties themselves. If being applies meaningfully to both sides of the disjunction as well as to the disjunction itself, then its meaning cannot be legitimately restricted to one side. Nor does it follow that being is neither present nor absent (neither potential nor actual, neither creating nor created, etc.). Probably more on target is Heidegger's suggestion (in the 1930s) that the "truth of being" is a determinate, unfolding, prevailing (*wesend*) interplay of presences and absences — a truth that is inaccessible (hidden) if one insists on identifying being with only one side of a particular disjunction.

Much as Quine notes that we are used to speaking principally of middle-sized objects, Heidegger observes that we are mostly concerned with beings, not being. Our survival depends upon distinguishing "things": potentialities from actualities, presences from absences, what is moving from what is not, and so on. As a result, our ordinary, practical ways of conceiving things and the theories they generate predispose us to think in terms of such entities and relations between them. If we turn our thoughts to being, it is accordingly natural to bring these ordinary ways of thinking (these bifurcations) along with us. Our natural proclivity ("fallenness") is to obscure the difference between being and beings by construing it as a difference between beings. Such a tendency is not only natural (rooted in our nature as organic beings, dependent upon interaction with beings, the rest of nature) but also historical. Our ways of thinking of being — including the ways glossed on this

page – are necessarily traditional. Although handed down to us, they are not fully ours until we have decided, following due consideration, to make them our own. Hence, these inherited ways of thinking are in need of critical, authenticating analysis (what Heidegger somewhat histrionically deems "destruction") that remains irredeemably fallible. Indeed, the history of metaphysics (emblematic of the history of being) strongly suggests that every epoch conceives being (ontology) in terms of a particular disjunction – e.g., creation, an all-objectifying subjectivity, technological (re-)producibility – and privileges one of the disjuncts as the primary being or sense of being (theology). In this sense every epoch is literally an ἐποχή, a "withdrawal" of being. Accordingly, while not unrelated, each epoch in a different way is forgetful of being itself, the unfolding of things that is both present and absent. So part of the task of thinking of being entails thinking being historically, i.e., appropriating and allowing ourselves to be appropriated by the event in which being conceals itself, albeit by no means without a trace. The task of the thinker is to bear witness to these traces of being, precisely as it refuses to yield to any attempts to master it, conceptually and otherwise.

GRAHAM HARMAN: TWO SENSES OF PRESENCE: BOTH OF THEM BAD

In your prompt, Richard, you touch on two major senses of presence in Heidegger: *Anwesenheit* and *Gegenwart.* Although both are linked with time, the second is more explicitly so. Reversing the old Leibnizian maxim, it seems to me that Heidegger is right in what he denies but wrong in what he affirms. Let's talk first about presence in the sense of presence-at-hand, and then about presence in the temporal sense, both of them obviously targeted by Heidegger for severe criticism.

The reason I've written so much about the tool-analysis – and we should not forget that it appears as early as 1919 in *Towards the Definition of Philosophy* – is that it is so widely familiar in both the continental and analytic traditions, yet still seems to be misunderstood: and I mean *philosophically* so, perhaps even by Heidegger himself (in GA 56/57). Here I will consider just one part of the misunderstanding.

The most concrete sense of presence is presence-at-hand, *Vorhandenheit.* Though Heidegger gives different examples of what counts as present-at-hand, he characterizes them all as a false sort of independence or autonomy of individual elements. Cartesian spatio-temporal substances are wrongly abstracted from their entanglement with each other and with Dasein, and the same holds for everything that is present-at-hand in consciousness for Husserlian phenomenology. What Heidegger proposes in opposition to this is his relational conception of world: "Taken strictly, there is no such thing as *an* equipment" (GA 2: 92/SZ 68). Everything is wrapped up with everything else, and nothing exists independently except insofar as it is abstracted or decontextualized, which simply makes entities present at the cost of concealing their being. In short, readiness-to-hand or *Zuhandenheit* is conceived in relational terms and *Vorhandenheit* in non-relational terms.

But Heidegger gets it backwards, if I may say so. Note that there is nothing the least bit autonomous about presence-at-hand in any of its forms. Cartesian substances are certainly abstractions, but they are abstractions *for us*; they exist only in correlation with some Dasein who abstracts them. Broken tools may seem to have become free from their deeper contexts, yet they are so only for the Dasein who perceives them.

In other words, presence is always presence *for* someone or something, and is therefore relational through and through, the opposite of what Heidegger says.

What about the supposedly relational being of tools? Before it breaks, the hammer seems to be relationally entangled with wood, nails, building projects, and the like, and only later is it said to become decontextualized. But what is overlooked is that the tool can break only because its being was *never fully deployed* in its use. However smoothly the hammer functioned, it was always a surplus beyond its smooth functioning in the equipmental contexture. For this reason, the tool-system would remain efficiently constant, would never go awry, unless the entities participating in it are conceded to have some sort of autonomous reality outside their entanglement in the system. Thus, Heidegger gets it backwards again. Although the phrase "readiness-to-hand" suggests utility, ready-to-hand entities must exist as a surplus prior to their interactions. Read properly, then, Heidegger should be seen as a realist with a strange new conception of autonomous substance. I admit that he would not appreciate this conclusion, given his well-known contempt (found also in Husserl) for the realism/anti-realism dispute.

To summarize, the present-at-hand is relational, and the ready-to-hand is non-relational, which is the exact opposite of what Heidegger says. But there is another point that needs to be stressed, counterintuitive though it may sound. Since tools in their use are clearly in relation with the rest of their environment, as Heidegger shows so nicely, then entities qua tools are *present-at-hand* rather than ready-to-hand. Perhaps a clearer way to say it is that the difference between theory and praxis, however dear to Heidegger and many commentators, is negligible, since both deal with entities solely as present. Whether I observe a hammer, invent theories of hammers, or simply use a hammer, in all of these cases I am *in relation* to this entity, which means that even the unconscious use of a thing is a way of rendering it present. In order to get at what is deeper than presence, it is not enough to retreat from theoretical to practical comportment. Instead, we have to consider the things prior to *any* contact we may have with them, regardless of

whether that contact is "practical" or "theoretical." Here I will not go into my further claim that inanimate entities "objectify" each other as well, meaning that it is not just Dasein that objectifies the world in the pejorative sense.

To avoid presence, in any case, inevitably means to avoid relationality. Does this not leave us stranded in a "negative theology," since we cannot speak of anything without relating to it? It does not. Heidegger's own reflections on poetic language remind us of what we already know from everyday life: much communication consists of allusion, hint, innuendo, and rhetorical enthymemes rather than the explicit prose propositions that occupy too much of our philosophical energy. The path forward from Heidegger therefore requires our renewed attention to aesthetics in the widest possible sense: not just art, but indirect access of every kind.

I will now speak more briefly of presence in the sense of time, which I also think is misunderstood both by Heidegger and by many of his commentators. Here it is most useful to distinguish between Heidegger and Bergson. For Bergson, of course, time is a continuum, just as for Aristotle in the *Physics*. Most famously, Bergson holds that we cannot reconstruct time from a discrete number of moments or cinematic frames. To break up the continuous flow of time into instants or individual entities is merely an abstraction by the human mind from a more primal becoming. But this is not the same as Heidegger's insight into time. Unlike Bergson, Heidegger *does not* escape the presence of the present by saying that no present moment can be isolated in the first place. We can see this from his fascination with the *Augenblick* or moment of vision, an idea that would have no place in Bergson's works.

Heidegger's philosophy of time by no means asks us to exclude individual moments as a mere abstraction. What he shows, instead, is that even if we look at an individual moment, it *already* has an intricate threefold temporal structure. Consider a single instant: a mental exercise that Bergson forbids, but that Heidegger does not. Even here, we find that Dasein is already thrown into a situation (*Vergangenheit*), projects possibilities upon it (*Zukunft*), and experiences the strife of

both at once (*Gegenwart*). By allowing us to consider the complexity of individual temporal moments, Heidegger shares something in common with the occasionalist tradition of discontinuous instants (even though he does not call upon God to link them), the exact opposite of Bergson's position.

My conclusions are as follows. First, we still need to follow Heidegger in his rejection of *Vorhandenheit*, but for the unexpected reason that presence-at-hand means *relation*, and that to relate to anything only gives us a translation or objectification of it rather than the thing itself. Second, we also need to follow Heidegger in rejecting the notion that the present is a boring lump, since as Levinas notes, the present "is not one lump; it is *articulated*." Yet despite what most commentators hold, Heidegger remains stranded in the discontinuous instant, and never accounts for how to reach the continuous flow of time from the starting point of a threefold articulated moment. For this reason, Bergson's insight is never accounted for in Heidegger's philosophy, and to do so would force us to modify Heidegger's theory of time in ways too intricate to discuss here.

MICHAEL MARDER: "...AS *PAROUSIA* OR *OUSIA*..."

The title I propose for my contribution to the *Gatherings* Symposium on the theme "Beyond Presence?" is a tiny, fragmentary quotation from the Introduction to *Being and Time*. I suggest directing a sort of hermeneutical flashlight onto the words "...as *parousia* or *ousia*..." still without specifying what appears before and after them. The advantage of partial illumination, letting these words' textual neighborhood provisionally drift into darkness, is that it fixes the theoretical gaze on a pair of observations a reader typically skips over.

First observation: the senses of *parousia* and *ousia* are so tightly intertwined that they are, in effect, interchangeable, the disjunctive conjunction *or* slotted between them. Nevertheless, they are two separate terms that, while sharing the same root, branch further away in the Christian rendition, where *parousia* names the second coming of Christ. How close do their senses have to be to become mutually replaceable? Can they ever be close enough to meld into one? Does *parousia*, by literally swallowing *ousia* up, by including it in the body of the word, affirm the possibility and, indeed, the actuality of this coalescence? Or, does *ousia* unfurl into *parousia*? Does the one secretly shelter or elliptically omit the other in its contrived simplicity?

Second observation: Heidegger offers the nearly identical – though not quite – nouns as a way of explicating something else. The third term would give a sign of itself, would articulate itself in the general structure *this as that*, where *that* is "*ousia* or *parousia*." The formulaic articulation is, of course, how Aristotle grasps second *ousia*, the *this* articulated as *that which it is*. Presumably simple in comparison to *parousia*, *ousia* divides into the first and the second, the isolated *this* (*tode ti*) and the sense of the *this* comprehended as *that*. While the curtain is still drawn on what the *this* refers to in Heidegger's text, it is already clear that the expression "*ousia* or *parousia*" is formally a part of the second *ousia*. Which makes this word (or these words) both more and less than itself (or themselves).

Let's put all the cards on the table. The minuscule fragment I have concentrated on is included in the "outward evidence" Heidegger cites

for the Greeks' understanding of being in terms of time. He locates a crucial evidentiary piece in their "treatment of the meaning of being as *ousia* or *parousia*" (GA 2: 34/SZ 25). So, the *this*, which has been hidden from view up until now, is "the meaning of being." That is the first *ousia* here; however, as a meaning structure, it is already an articulation of *this as that*, of being identified as that which it is, namely time. The first *ousia*, therefore, is the second. But that is not all. Preceding "*ousia* or *parousia*" is "the meaning of being" it spells out; succeeding it is the interpretation of being in "ontologico-temporal terms" as "'presence'" (*'Anwesenheit'*). Between the meaning of being (as time) and presence, "*ousia* or *parousia*" forms a bridge, along which being perpetually passes into time.

I think – or, at least, I hope – that the above exegetical exercise may point toward broader conclusions regarding Heidegger's problematic of presence. Chief among these is the idea that beyond presence is… presence, or, differently put, that presence is invariably beyond itself. Should it deflect its beyond, presence would lapse into an absence: the unique, idiosyncratic, idiotic, hermetically and hermeneutically sealed first *ousia*, translatable as a pure *this*, is not. Rather than an alternative, beyond-presence is what is most proper to presence without, at the same time, warranting the concept's totalizing imperialism.

What justifies the leap from my nanoscopic exegesis to these panoramic conclusions? No matter how proximate to itself, Heidegger's presence does not coincide with itself. "…as *parousia* or *ousia*…" is a symptom of its non-coincidence with itself, whether due to the imperfect duplication of presence into terms that are almost the same or due to the maddening dance of first and second *ousias*, in the course of which they incessantly change places. I could say, within this line of argumentation, that an undercurrent of *Being and Time* is the effort to replace the disjunctive conjunction *or* between *ousia* and *parousia* with the copula, yielding *Ousia is parousia* and, hence, *Presence is a coming-into-presence*, or, again, *The meaning of being is time*. Heidegger will ultimately find his own efforts unsatisfactory and embark on an elaboration of *Ereignis*, the appropriating event, exploring the constitutive *beyond* of presence.

In short, there is no need for an alternative to presence as an understanding of being because such an understanding *is* its own alternative. Sorely needed, in turn, is an alternative to the *presentist* understanding of presence (the understanding that blocks presence's constitutive *beyond*) and, by implication, of being. Presence is never abstract: something that or someone who is in attendance is present *at* a given site and time. Presence is presence-at. The *at* portion of presence-at leads it beyond "mere" presence, which transfixes the presentist interpretation. The meaning of being as presence indicates that being is presence at itself (as other to itself). *Ereignis*, for its part, provides the whereabouts at which presence can be present. Neither in itself nor outside itself, being is beside itself in its distance from and proximity to itself. That is what the temporal ecstases of Dasein signal, what pre-sence actually says, and what the *par(a)-* of *parousia* imparts to *ousia*, or, more exactly, in a mélange of Aristotelian categories, teases out of *ousia*'s silence on the subject of its whereabouts and of how it has arrived there.

Perhaps, the preposition *at* is a key – one of many – to the meaning of being encoded in presence. It may well demarcate the zone of ontico-ontological difference. Perhaps, it is a more accurate translation of *parousia*'s prefix than *beside*. (In one way or another, presentist interpretations of presence get the preposition wrong or dispense with it altogether. It would have been more forgivable to drop *presence* and to keep *at* in reflections on being – that is, to equate being with at-ness.) Spatially and temporally, being's presence at itself is being at a limit. Precisely as presence-at, being is a limit term, not a centerpiece of the so-called metaphysics of presence, which is the most recent moniker for presentism. It espouses finitude in its form and thematic content, minus a crass dialectic of absence and presence, the inner complexities of which escape the dialectical mindset. What else holds the potential to deconstruct the metaphysics of presence, if not the interpretative unfolding of being's presence at itself?

RESPONSE: JUSSI BACKMAN

Reading through our contributions, I am impressed by the fact that despite obvious differences in emphasis and wording, we all ultimately seem to move within the same hermeneutic dimension, facing the topic at the heart of Heidegger's philosophical project that I like to designate as "complicated presence" but which can, as Heidegger has taught us, be approached from a ceaseless variety of viewpoints using a ceaseless variety of terms.

I completely concur with Taylor Carman's observation that we do not need an *alternative* to presence as an understanding of being – since presence, intelligible accessibility, is inevitably the *focal point* of our understanding of what it is to *be* – and also with Dan Dahlstrom's remark that neither are being and presence *identical*, since being in the full sense is constituted by an "interplay of presences and absences." Since my rendering of Heidegger's trajectory puts the emphasis on the *contextuality* of all meaningful accessibility as precisely what makes presence ultimately complicated, I also heartily subscribe to Graham Harman's summary of the Heideggerian analysis of tool-being: "Nothing exists independently except insofar as it is abstracted or decontextualized" and "to avoid presence . . . inevitably means to avoid relationality" (the latter statement points out the direction in which Harman's own philosophical project is headed).

Of particular importance for me is Michael Marder's elegant reminder that "presence is invariably beyond-itself" and is thus always already its *own alternative*; what calls for deconstruction is the metaphysical "presentism" that "blocks presence's constitutive *beyond*." It is the presentist view on presence that is too "narrow," as Richard Polt puts it in the introduction. The constitutive beyond, the self-transcendence of presence into a background or context that is not itself present but is involved in and implicated by presence, not itself "there" except as a referential dimension, a toward-which – this, I suggest, is what our symposium on presence ultimately gravitates towards. This beyond, this *trans-*, or this beside, this *para-*, is one way of looking at the "truth" (*Wahrheit*) of being that now and again resurfaces in our statements:

as the trans- or para-present background that preserves and protects (*wahren*) truth in the sense of situated and contextual unconcealment and accessibility.

In the Presocratic first beginning or inception of philosophy, "in order to grasp being at all, presencing [*Anwesen*] must be maintained as the first and nearest feature of the emergence [*Aufgehen*] of being"; because of this exclusive concentration on presence as such, Heidegger maintains, "the truth of being must remain concealed" to Anaximander, Heraclitus, and Parmenides (GA 65: 459–60/362). The ultimate outcome of the subsequent tradition of presentist metaphysics is the late modern technical *Gestell* as the "completed oblivion of the truth of being" that is already being challenged by what it excludes: the fourfold world-context as the "guarantee" (*Wahrnis*) of being, as the multiple "beyond" presupposed by complicated presence itself (GA 79: 53/50).

RESPONSE: TAYLOR CARMAN

In my initial comments I drew attention to Heidegger's disavowal, in the late 1930s, of *metaphysics* – both the name itself and, I believe, the failure to comprehend the question (which is to say, the mystery) of being that it has represented, beginning with Plato and culminating in Nietzsche. Soon after his 1935 lectures, significantly entitled *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Heidegger drew a new distinction between the *meaning* of being understood as the being *of entities* on the one hand, and the *truth* of being or being *as such* on the other. Metaphysics, he now says, has always been an interpretation of the being of entities, but it has never thought – indeed *cannot* think – being as such.

Reading the other contributions to this discussion has made me realize that I should have related that distinction more explicitly to the verbal device by which Heidegger also frequently drew attention to it, namely, the difference between "presentness" (*Anwesenheit*), that is, being understood as a kind of aspect or quality *of* entities, and "presence" or "presencing" (*Anwesen*), by which he means the self-manifestation or unconcealment – the *truth* – of being as such. Traditional metaphysical understandings of being have indeed been

understandings of the *meaning* of being as various forms of present-ness, from Platonic aspectual forms to the Nietzschean technological will to power. It was presencing as such that I meant to exempt from that metaphysical history by equating it with the *truth* rather than with the *meaning* of being.

I can therefore agree with much of Jussi Backman's brilliant and illuminating account of what he rightly calls "Heidegger's attempt to rethink the hidden background that the Western metaphysics of presence ultimately presupposes but has failed to address." I do not, however, agree with Backman that Heidegger was ever trying "to answer the neglected 'basic question' of metaphysics, 'Why is there something rather than nothing?' by considering the no-thing that allows a some-thing to be meaningfully present in the foreground." Simply put, I don't see how any appeal to such a "no-thing" could render it sufficiently intelligible to shed any light on what I think Heidegger regards as the primitive mystery of being as such, which he simply calls *Ereignis* and *Anwesen*, with no pretense to explanation.

I also agree wholeheartedly with Daniel Dahlstrom's suggestion that "being and presence are not identical," since for Heidegger, "the 'truth of being' is a determinate, unfolding, pre-vailing (*wesend*) interplay of presences and absences – a truth that is inaccessible (hidden) if one insists on identifying being with only one side of a particular distinction." Being is not presence as opposed to absence; rather, the presencing of being as such just *is* the twofold horizon of concealment and unconcealment, dispensation and withdrawal. Michael Marder makes this point nicely when he proposes that what is needed, more than an alternative to the concept of presence as such, "is an alternative to the *presentist* understanding of presence (the understanding that blocks presence's constitutive *beyond*)." That, I take it, is the gist not only of Heidegger's later critique of metaphysics, but of his envisioned "dismantling" of traditional ontology of *Being and Time*.

The only comments I find myself seriously at odds with are those of Graham Harman. Harman maintains that Heidegger characterizes things (supposedly) present-at-hand (*vorhanden*) generally as having "a

false sort of independence or autonomy" (my emphasis) and so refers in passing to what he takes to be Heidegger's "rejection of *Vorhandenheit*." But Heidegger does *not* reject that notion: he *invokes* it as a legitimate schema for the cognition of entities understood as objects with properties, in contrast to things defined by their involvement in our practices. Moreover, it seems to me that any reading of *Being and Time* that charges Heidegger with such egregious "misunderstandings" of his own concepts, as Harman asserts, merely casts doubt on its own plausibility as an interpretation of the text.

RESPONSE: DANIEL O. DAHLSTROM

Backman on presence's complications: Backman skillfully charts how Heidegger conceives the complications of presence, originally by time and later by the fourfold, in each case a "meaning-constituting process" that is never in itself immediately present. In contrast to the tradition, "Heidegger's contextual models" are said to "render presence…self-transcending." Among the many questions raised by Backman's powerful interpretation are the following: How does presence transcend itself without becoming absence? What is the *ad quem* of the transcending? Does it remain itself in self-transcending?

 Carman on being's meaning and truth: Carman's elegant essay artfully brings the sweep and central stages of Heidegger's thinking together in terms of the difference between the meaning and the truth of being. The essay raises at least two issues. First, his reading privileges the first two stages that Heidegger notes as demarcating his thinking, but does it leave "place" (pardon the pun) for the third stage, the place of being (GA 15: 335, 344)? Second, "presence" is said to be a word designed to evoke "the truth or unconcealment of *being as such*, in contrast to that whose meaning makes *entities as such* manifest." This gloss faithfully reproduces a crucial differentiation in Heidegger's thinking, but how viable is the differentiation? What is the unconcealment of being as such if not that which makes beings *manifest*? How else would we *know* it, as opposed to merely thinking it (i.e., without recourse to "things")?

Harman's revisions of Heideggerian presence: Harman's delightfully provocative and revisionary interpretation raises several questions, both exegetical and systematic. For example, on the exegetical front, does Heidegger consider all examples of what counts as present-at-hand "as a false sort of independence or autonomy of individual elements"? How does this claim square with his contention that the mathematical projection of nature uncovers "something constantly present-at-hand (matter)" (GA 2: 479/SZ 362) or his talk of "being alongside something innerwordly present-at-hand" (GA 2: 480/SZ 363)? In these contexts and others (see GA 2: 95, 192, 481/SZ 70, 144, 364), he hardly seems to be imputing something false to what counts as present-at-hand. On a more systematic front (simply asking for clarification), how does "the claim to consider the things prior to *any* contact with them" cohere with the requirement to renew attention to "indirect access" to them? How can the meaning of "consideration of things prior to any contact with them" avoid piggybacking on that contact (or "indirect access" on a sense of *direct* access)?

Marder on the limits of presence: Marder's illuminating ruminations aptly explain the accent on finitude entailed by presence in its Greek (*ousia, parousia*) and Heideggerian formulations ("presence beyond itself," "presence at…"). This very accent, together with the reminder of the Second Coming and the remark that "being perpetually passes into time," invites the question of whether – and if so, in what sense – the explanation countenances infinity. So, too, it invites the question (formulated here with a greater ring of paradox than it probably deserves): is being at a limit limitless?

RESPONSE: GRAHAM HARMAN

If this were a group discussion in a tavern, I would stress agreement with the statements of my colleagues as a way of building friendly rapport. But since we are doing this primarily for readers of the symposium, it will be more valuable to emphasize points of friction.

Whereas I defend the radical non-contextuality of objects, Backman calls for "radical contextuality" in interpreting the world. Part

of his reason for doing so is that he holds Heidegger's hidden background to be "dynamic," though this sounds to me more like Bergson or Deleuze. The Heideggerian model of time pertains to the complex threefold structure of any instant, but that is not the same thing as to reject isolated instants in favor of some sort of continuous becoming – the signature move of the Bergsonian.

There are two points of disagreement with Carman, both of them important. First, he sees an important shift happening in Heidegger's thought around 1936, whereas I have a deflationary view of the *Kehre*, and hold that it happened – if at all – in the 1949 Bremen lectures. Second, and on a related note, Carman sees an important difference between the "being of beings" and being itself, while I do not. This may prevent him from properly weighting the importance of *Ding* and *Geviert* in the later works, while leading to an overestimation of the 1930s – my own least favorite period of Heidegger, and not just for political reasons.

The main difference from Dahlstrom is, again, that I think he ascribes too much philosophical blame to beings in the plural. He links Heidegger with Quine on this point by noting the latter's remark that we focus too much on "middle-sized objects," forgetting that the Heidegger of 1949 does something marvelous with the middle-sized jug, without farming it out to the natural sciences as Quine would do. Dahlstrom also links Husserl and Heidegger on the topic of presence and absence in a way that I would not. Although we can speak correctly of "Husserl's insight that nothing is perceived adequately through the senses," he does think we can grasp things adequately through the intellect. Thus Husserl is openly hostile to anything like a *Ding an sich*, whereas Heidegger praises that widely discredited notion near the close of *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*.

With Marder the main source of dispute no doubt stems from his acceptance and my rejection of Derrida as Heidegger's legitimate philosophical heir. Where this plays out is in Marder's clear suspicion towards any classical notion of identity. For him, "being passes perpetually into time," so that "presence is invariably beyond itself," and hence

no alternative to presence is needed. For me, however, the fact that presence is always beyond itself — its inherent relationality — is precisely the problem. A relational cosmos would be perfectly sterile in its actualism, rather than some sort of liberating escape from what Marder terms "the unique, idiosyncratic, idiotic, hermetically and hermeneutically sealed first *ousia*, translatable as a pure *this*."

RESPONSE: MICHAEL MARDER

It has become evident to me, following this intellectual exercise and other participants' responses, that the main challenge we face is to think presence outside the dialectic of presences and absences, *and* outside its independently posited, substantive, nonrelational sense. (The ambiguities of nonrelational relationality may be sensed already in Aristotle's *ousia*, particularly in its redoubling into the first and the second.) There is neither purity nor contamination in it: these categories simply do not apply. Presence, then, is neither origin nor trace, and the metaphysics of presence becomes as futile an approach as the deconstruction of that very metaphysics.

    I realize, of course, that some among the contributors to this forum hold a different view. Taylor Carman's identification of presence with "the truth or unconcealment of *being as such*," taken together with his efforts at isolating it from the names or misnomers of being — *phusis, ousia, creation, representation*, etc. — moves in the direction of presence's nonrelationality. Dan Dahlstrom, on the other hand, notes that "presences are always correlative with absences, and not just in thought." Not surprisingly, he ends his reflection with "the traces of being." Graham Harman gives an even stronger expression to this strand of thought when he writes that "to avoid presence, in any case, inevitably means to avoid relationality." Jussi Backman, in his turn, dismantles large portions of the origin-trace infrastructure for thinking presence. His notion of complication accomplishes much of the work, even if it partially transposes the dialectics of presence and absence onto the dynamic relation of the background and the foreground.

The virtue of "complication" is that it is rid of the seemingly end-less negative determinations of presence in terms of *neither this nor that*. While Backman calls it self-transcending, it is worth specifying that the folds of complication have been a staple figure in philosophies of immanence, from Spinoza to Bergson and Deleuze. We might say that the immanence of presence to itself is the immanence of its self-transcendence. But this sort of formulation, accurate as it may be, also holds for Husserl's intentionality as consciousness of…and risks sound-ing too detached from everyday experience and the world. The context thematized is a context abstracted from itself, from its own concrete-ness irreducible to contextuality. That's why we should never lose sight of the phenomenological perspective that situates presence not in an abstract context but in the experiential configurations of space-time.

My shorthand for the phenomenology of presence, which is cer-tainly not limited to a human mode of being in the world, is *presence-at*. Seen through this lens, being is being-in-attendance, which is insepa-rable from attending to the site, at which presence is situated. There are as many modes of attendance as there are kinds of being, or, better, the different kinds of being (inanimate objects, plants, animals, mi-crobes…) are defined by what they attend at/to and how. It is impossible to capture presence-at either through the logic of origins (a constant effectiveness of principles) or that of traces (an-archic withdrawal). In close proximity to itself beside itself, the elusive edges of presence-at are most conspicuous in plant life, where, for example, a tree is present at the site of its growth, which grows and decays with it. These edges are doubly mobile, first, because they expand and contract space and time in tandem with the growing/decaying being and its world, and, second, because the distance of at-ness between presence and its existential *wherein* (harkening back to the context) is highly variable. So, a mark of the human, whether metaphysically or historically constituted, is the valorization of presence irrespective of at-ness, triggering simultane-ously the collapse of distance and its exponential increase.

Although it seems that my reflections have wandered far away from Heidegger, they are keeping very close to him. For what is this "gather-ing," if not a certain shared presence at his thinking?

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS: RICHARD POLT

I am grateful to the five participants in this symposium for their rich, thoughtful contributions. My summary would be inadequate and redundant. I will say only that we should learn from our contributors that "presence" is said in many ways, and that some senses of presence are relational; what is present may be essentially related to other present entities, and even to what is absent.

For my part, I propose that our times call for renewed attention to the question of the relation between presence and temporality. As in my introduction, I use "presence" as a name for the founding Western understanding of what it means for entities to be something instead of nothing. This sense of "presence" is broad and vague, but not utterly without content. For Heidegger, it includes presence-at-hand as the dominant, traditionally privileged form of presence, but also readiness-to-hand. It does *not* include Dasein's own way of being – and Heidegger saw this as an urgently important point. I believe it remains important in our age of ever-accelerating technoscientific progress.

There is an unmistakable polemical edge in *Being and Time*: Heidegger is fighting against the reduction of Dasein's "who" to a "what." Such a reduction fails to see that "a *what* (presence-at-hand in the broadest sense)" (GA 2: 60/SZ 45) can be revealed only to an entity who is far more than present-at-hand, and even escapes the confines of presence in general. Presence itself must be critiqued – traced back to temporality as its condition of possibility.

Heidegger's later thought pushes farther. As we are reminded elsewhere in this issue (21), he writes that "the ecstatic-horizonal temporality delineated in *Being and Time* is not by any means already the most proper attribute of time that must be sought in answer to the Being-question." But well after abandoning the project of *Being and Time*, he continues to resist the narrowness of presence, or at least of the dominant conception of presence, and he seeks a deeper origin of time and the present – an origin that he now understands as *Ereignis*. In the late forties, he writes:

> Maybe appropriation will hold itself back in the midst
> of the suddenness of its turning, so that everything will

freeze in machination, and this frozenness will make itself out to be life. Then there will be no more inauthentic oblivion, nor will authentic oblivion arrive; neither would having-been unfold, nor would usage's arrival into releasement take place [*weder das Gewesen weste, noch ereignete sich die Ankunft des Brauchs in die Gelassenheit*]. Humanity would then have attained what it has clamored for for centuries: the "present" ["*Gegenwart*"] that it takes as being. Humanity would operate, un-conditioned by any thing or condition, in the technical administration of itself and its brain. The preparation and steering of this organ by electric currents, immobilizing some centers and mobilizing others, which would always seem useful, would offer itself as the culmination of all organization. Not by the mass killing of human beings, but by the fact that *homo americanus* will absolutely objectify life = the world, by organizing this organ: this is how humanity will be thrust into the uttermost abjectness of the frozen oblivion of being. (GA 97: 308–9)

Isn't this a vision of the twenty-first century, when "big data" about our brains is constantly being compiled, analyzed, and put to use? When a picture of present-at-hand neural occurrences is so often mistaken for a sufficient understanding of some aspect of our own existence? When our lives are increasingly guided by psychopharmaceuticals and the "artificial intelligence" of digital "neural networks"?

In 2019, doesn't Heidegger's pronouncement from 1935 ring a bell? "Time is nothing but speed, instantaneity, and simultaneity, and time as history has vanished from all Dasein of all peoples" (GA 40: 41/42).

The disturbing political contexts of Heidegger's statements do not eliminate, but only intensify, the need to think through his critique of presence. Are we, today, in touch with time as history? Are we capable of asking *who* we are, not just *what* we are? Are we open to the arrival of what is our own? Or do we continue to be absorbed in representing, producing, and reproducing what is present?