

Trading in Being: Event, Capital, Art

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While the elaborations of the notion of the event in Lyotard, Foucault, and Derrida are sometimes linked to the thought of Martin Heidegger, it remains uncertain to what extent all these various articulations of the intensifying preoccupation with time and history as event are indebted to Heidegger's pioneering rethinking of the event (*Das Ereignis*), tracing back to the mid 1930s. What interests me here is not a genealogy of Heidegger's influence but the possibility that Heidegger's term *das Ereignis* may still mark the most radical signification of the event, extending beyond the force of rupture by instantiating an "alternative time-space" critical of technological operations of power and capital. The event as *Ereignis* does not signify simply a rupture of chronological time, which would produce a revision of history into a complex, singular patchwork of events, repeatedly destabilizing unities of origin and continuities of meaning. The force of the event in Heidegger lies elsewhere, as it has to do primarily with the opening of a new time-space whose organizing relationality is experienced in terms of freedom from power, i.e. freedom to be power-free.

THE EVENT

Heidegger links the possibility of another time-space with the necessary transformation of "man" away from anthropological conceptions of the rational animal and into *Da-sein*, that is, into an entity whose

being is determined primarily in terms of its serving as a placeholder for the opening up of the question of being:

...*this* more originary retrieval demands – and already gives rise to – a complete transformation of man into Da-sein, because the truth of be-ing [*Seyn*], which is to be opened up, will bring nothing other than the more originary unfolding of *be-ing itself*. And this means that everything is transformed and that the walkways that still led to be-ing must be broken off, because another time-space is enopened by be-ing itself, which time-space makes a new erecting and grounding of beings necessary.¹

For Heidegger, the *Ereignis* is less about the rupturing of the chronological span of experience – though obviously such a rupture and displacement occur within the event – than about the opening up of another time-space which makes necessary a different manner of thinking about beings and their respective ways of being. Without going into much more detail about the specific vocabulary Heidegger employs in *Contributions to Philosophy* to propose “a more originary retrieval” of the problematic of being and the ontological difference between being and beings, I would like to explore the terminology Heidegger uses to indicate the otherness of this “other time-space,” which opens up from within the *Ereignis*. For what is truly interesting about Heidegger’s notion of event is that it pivots on a radical critique of power in its modern forms of deployment: from machination, production, calculation, and control, to ordering and information. What Heidegger refers to in *Contributions to Philosophy* as “another time-space” is characterized later on in terms of a decisive release from power.

As it evolves through the late 1930s and early 1940s, Heidegger’s discourse about the *Ereignis* distances itself more and more decisively from the terms of power, production, and machination, all underpinning and regulating Western metaphysics. It describes the disclosure of being which frames European culture as *Machenschaft*, that is, as

machination, or manipulative power, which indicates that Western thought and practice hinge on the idea of an intrinsic manipulability of being: in its “essence,” being is manipulable, calculable, and, in principle, makeable. Heidegger plays on the correlation in German of *machen*, to make or to produce, with *Macht*, power, demonstrating that the metaphysics of production and making is essentially also the metaphysics of power. The term *Machenschaft* is thus deployed to illustrate this intrinsic link between making and power, which underpins both Western thought and the practices of Western culture. Improvement and intensification of the ability to make and to produce becomes a simultaneous intensification of the operations of power. Today, these operations of making and manipulation hinge on the understanding, computation, and control of being as information. One can thus talk about contemporary informational operations of power, from the micro scale of genetic manipulation to the global scale of economic activity in terms of the world market.

Heidegger develops his critique against the backdrop of Nietzsche’s will to power, as he begins to distance the thought of being as event (*Ereignis*) from the terms of power, control, and violence. He shows how being has come to be disclosed in ways that dissimulate it in terms of *Gewalt* (violence), *Herrschaft* (mastery, dominion, reign), *Machen* (making or production), and, finally, *Macht* (power). In short, in Western metaphysics “to be” means to exist in terms of power, that is, to be in essence makeable, calculable, and controllable, whether as, say, value, capital, or information. This is the reason why Heidegger’s discourse on the event sets out to evolve alternative terms for thinking being, terms divorced from the discourses of making and power, and directed toward articulating freedom as a releasement (*Gelassenheit*) from the workings of power. The whole discourse of this period in the 1930s and 40s comes to be based on the idea that being and event happen as power-free. Let me illustrate this with two quotations from the 1938/39 text *Besinnung* (*Mindfulness*).

Be-ing – the *powerless* [*das Machtlose*] – *beyond power and lack of power* – better, what is outside power and lack of power, and fundamentally unrelated to such.

The power-less [*das Macht-lose*] is not the same as what is without-power which while it is deprived of power and lacks power nevertheless and simply remains related to power. ...How to understand the *-less*? From out of *refusal*.²

The suffix *-less* (*-los*) in *machtlos* (literally, power-less) does not have, as Heidegger explains, the connotations of lack or absence: it is not powerlessness in the sense of the lack of power, impotence, or disempowerment. Rather the German suffix *-los* indicates a release and a freeing. Thus it may be best to render *das Machtlose* into English as the power-free, as Heidegger himself suggests, when at one point he supplements *machtlos* with *machtfrei*.

As event, being does not explain itself in terms of making (*Machen*) or power (*Macht*): it is not fashioned in terms of power into something that is made or makeable, as both “making” and “power” resonate in the German *Gemächtes*. Rather, event is to be thought in terms of setting-free: “Setting-free consists in the e-vent of *Dasein* in such a way that e-vent withdraws in the t/here [*Da*] (in the notground of the unprotected and unsupported) which is thus lit up. Setting-free and withdrawal belong to be-ing as event. Thus nothing occurs within the sphere of beings. Be-ing remains non-appearing; but *with* a being as such it can happen that it moves into the clearing of what is non-ordinary, casts away its ordinariness, and has put itself up for decision as to how it suffices for be-ing.”³ The event lets what exists, be, because it unfolds “the free-play of the time-space”⁴ of the possible.

The event indicates that being happens as “the quiet force of the possible.” “Be-ing is a possibility, what is never extant and yet through e-vent is always what grants and refuses in not-granting.”⁵ Rethinking being as *das Mögliche* in “Letter on Humanism,” Heidegger indicates that the force of the possible works beyond metaphysically and logically

conceived notions of possibility and actuality. “When I speak of the ‘quiet force of the possible’ I do not mean the *possible* of a merely represented *possibilitas*, nor *potentia* as the *essentia* of an *actus* of *existentia*; rather, I mean Being itself, which in its favoring [*mögen*, possibilizing] presides over thinking and hence over the essence of humanity, and that means over its relation to Being. To enable something here means to preserve it in its essence, to maintain it in its element.”⁶ The element of being is characterized by Heidegger here as *das Mögliche*: as that which both *has* the force of rendering possible and unfolds *as this possible*, which means that being is both the force which renders possible and what is thus rendered possible.

What is critical to understanding Heidegger on this point is that being, as the element which renders possible, happens as nihilation (*Nichten*, *Nichtung*), that the momentum of the force of the possible is nihilation. On many occasions, notably in *Contributions to Philosophy*, Heidegger describes the characteristic opening up of the element of being in terms of being’s refusal, its retreat or withdrawal into beings, and thus into essence, presence, objectivity, etc. He is emphatic, though, in claiming that this refusal is nothing negative, and that, in fact, it is “*the foremost and utmost gifting of be-ing, nay even its inceptual unfolding [Wesung] itself.*”⁷ The refusal is not to be thought as a lack, an absence, or a fault in being, in being which should be there, that is, be “present,” but which instead refuses itself. Rather, the refusal is the *eigen*, the own, the “proper” way for being to be: it is how being suitably gives itself as its own refusal. The term “refusal” signals the fact that being is neither lack nor fullness, but a characteristic overflow⁸ of the nothing/nihilating over what exists as beings. It also indicates the way in which nihilation as the element of being “overflows” both positivity and negativity, rendering positing and negation possible. The nothing as the momentum of being is “*the overflow of pure refusal. The richer the ‘nothing,’ the simpler the be-ing.*”⁹ As Heidegger remarks, we need to take the nihilating away from the word “nothing” (understood negatively) and give it the force (*Kraft*, not *Macht*) of pointing to the abyss (*Ab-grund*) of being.¹⁰ Nihilation, therefore, is the force that being

has as the abyss, or ab-ground: namely, the force that enables into the possible precisely by vacating, emptying, and opening up essence and presence through the futural play of time-space.

What allows beings to have possibilities is the releasing momentum of the play of time-space. Releasing and freeing beings from their representation in terms of presence, essence, objectivity, and so on, the force of the possible enables them to be: it lets them be precisely to the extent that being means the force of the possible, and not essence or presence, whether posited or negated: "...this setting-free nihilates in the originary sense, dis-engages [*ab-setzt*] beings as such. That is, nihilating is not negating but rather – if it should be interpreted at all in terms of the judgmental comportment – is an affirming of beings as such, as what is dis-engaged. However, nihilating is precisely dis-engagement itself, whereby be-ing as setting-free owns itself over to the clearing of the enowned t/here [*Da*]."¹¹ It is on the strength or force (*Kraft*) of this not-character (*Nicht-haftigkeit*) (nothinghood, not-hood) that being can assign or grant possibilities to beings: "refusal is the intimacy of an allotting."¹² Instead of negating, nihilation here has the sense of freeing, of releasing beings into their possibilities for being. "The nothing is neither something negative nor is it a 'goal'; rather it is the essential enquivering of be-ing itself and therefore is *more-being* than any beings."¹³

Power flows through beings in such a way that it renders them present, standing there as graspable and manipulable entities. It is nihilation as the quiet force of the possible that disengages beings from being "powered" into calculability and manipulation. This freeing momentum of nihilation, which Heidegger characterizes as a kind of tremor or vibration which constitutes the very force of "to be," is not negative: it is freedom, releasement, letting be. In other words, nihilation is the "force" indicated by the suffix *-los* in *machtlos* (power-less/power-free). "Less" here does not signify negation or absence but releasement and freeing characteristic of nihilation. Nihilation, as it were, "voids" machination (*Machenschaft*), that is, power, which, flowing from being, turns the event, and its free-play of the time-space, into the domain

of making and machination. It is in this sense that nihilation is not only not negative (or negation) but constitutes in fact an affirmation of beings as existing in the free-play of possibilities, in the power-free time-space granted by being itself.¹⁴ Nihilation opens up the free-play of the time-space precisely as *power-free*. “And only in the free-play of time-space of this strife is there preserving [keeping true, *be-wahren*] and loss of event and does that which is called a being enter the open of that clearing.”¹⁵

CAPITAL

At the same time that the event lets be, it also allows everything, as part of the play of possibilities, to be in force and to stand as beings. Simply put, being finds itself always already concealed in beings, and there is being only to the extent that there are beings. This other letting Heidegger describes as “*Alles-gelten-lassen*,” a letting be that allows everything to be in force as entities and thus to be valid, valid as a being, a presence, or a value. These two vectors of letting be come into tension and conflict. “[W]hat a thing is in its Being is not exhausted by its being an object, particularly when objectivity takes the form of value. Every valuing, even where it values positively, is a subjectivizing. It does not let beings: be. Rather, valuing lets beings: be valid – solely as the objects of its doing.”¹⁶ When letting be takes the form of allowing something to be in force and valid, it tends at the same time to obscure the nihilating and freeing momentum of possibility. In this way, it trades the force of the possible for the force, or the standing, of validity as beings, and, subsequently, for the value of standing presence which beings acquire. No longer thought in nearness to nihilation but instead as different from it, *Gelten* makes it possible to think beings without, as it were, thinking them as being in being, that is, as being continuously freed into the force of the possible, into the futurity of the time-space. It thus makes possible not only thinking beings as valid and having a value but also as reducible to and representable in terms of value(s). In this way, ontological difference not only makes capitalization possible,

but also facilitates and installs calculation and exchange by allowing us to think beings as though they were different from being.

The point here is that *Gelten* is only a moment, a possibility, within the nihilating vector of being. It is a moment when being comes to stand as beings, and thus appears to hold true as and to be equivalent to beingness, that is, to the being of beings, to the various ways in which beings exist. But this moment when being, as it were, comes to be in force as beings, has always already been nihilated, that is, freed and released from the capture implied by obtaining standing, validity, or value. To perhaps oversimplify the point, one could say that beings *are* not, that they do not hold true as beings, but merely happen, which means here that they are freed into their possibilities, whose force nihilates any standing, validity, or value that they are allowed to have as beings. When beings are allowed to be, they in fact never come to be in force as (present) beings, but instead happen in the manner of nihilation: their standing as beings is always already nihilated, voided, and opened up into future possibilities. And to the extent that, when let be, beings are not beings but happen in the force of nihilation, they never come to be valid or capable of having a value. Only when this vector of nihilation is forgotten, when being is no longer in force as the quiet force of the possible, can beings become primarily a matter of validity and value. When *Gelten* is allowed to stand as different from nihilation, as positivity different from negation, it at once conceals nihilation and makes being capable of having a value, which means that it makes being capitalizable.

At the moment that being is admitted as presence, objectivity, or value, nihilation becomes mis-presented as negation. Because *gelten lassen* indicates how a being is allowed to be valid and as such take a stand in being as something existing, a positivity, nihilation can only appear in this context as a negation of what “stands” as valid, effective, posited, etc. In the releasement characteristic of *Gelassenheit*, being resonates in its force of possibility, and is not about standing, presence, or validity, just as it is not about absence or negation. Rather, it is in *Gelassenheit* that all of those “possibilities” are released into

the open, into the play of time-space. In fact, only within this opening, this abyss, do they become possible to begin with. Since value or presence, and in fact the very standing of something as a being, give this being a certain constancy or positivity, such positivity covers over the freeing and enabling force of nihilation, and requires instead that a being, always already “present,” be seen in terms of negation, that is, that its constancy, its standing in being, be canceled, voided, or invalidated. But this negation becomes possible only in the aftermath of the releasement of possibilities by nihilation, that is, by being’s force of the possible. In this context, letting be valid signals a misprision of the force of the possible in terms of validity, positivity, and effectivity. And that becomes particularly evident when *gelten lassen*, letting be valid, conceals the nihilating force of possibility and does not let beings be but instead holds them to their standing as present, valid, and valuable objects or resources. Letting beings be valid, being no longer enables them to be in the force of the possible freely granted to them. In such a case, letting be valid no longer remains in tension with letting be, understood as letting nihilate.

In an age defined by the world market, global communications, and planetary capitalism nothing seems more self-evident and omnipresent than power operating in terms of value, whether in trading, marketing, or profiting. Stock market fluctuations measure the economic pulse of contemporary reality, while electronic trading brings our homes into the sphere of the global market and renders participation in the operations of capital increasingly easier. The saturation of today’s life with patterns of efficiency, productivity, and profitability keeps turning our existence into a giant and omnipresent market sphere. Yet, while economic, political, and cultural analyses or contestations of global markets and planetary capital proliferate, the obviousness and pervasiveness of this “planetary market-ability” appears to impact adversely reflection on what in fact makes being and experience predisposed toward exchange and trading, in short, what makes being market-able, and in turn also marketable. What is it in being that makes trading in it possible, in spite of the uncontainable,

futural play of the time-space? And, especially, what is it, in being and of being, that comes to be traded, in making room for exchange and trading? To put it differently, what kind of “ontological” trade-offs have to take place to make the contemporary planetary-technological revealing of being as a “global market” possible?

While it might seem initially a bit of a stretch to propose that one could look at Heidegger as a thinker of the world market, in fact his rethinking of the essence of technology as planetary technicity provides probably the most sustained contemporary reflection on the ontological transformations which render the time-space of being market-able. Heidegger’s repeated meditations on the pervasively technicist character of being in modernity, from the analysis of *Machenschaft* in the mid-1930s, to the reflections on the essence of technology, technological revealing, and the *Gestell*, keep engaging with the historical-ontological positioning of being, and especially with its broadly conceived modern enframing (*Gestell*), which has made capital and capitalism possible. Though Heidegger does not discuss at length economic or social relations, and does not involve himself in cultural critique, his thinking is motivated and energized by the need to lay bare the ways in which being, revealing itself as modern planetary technicity, not only opens itself to but in fact calls forth what in another context I referred to as the “capitalization” of being. Being’s intrinsic tendency to be effective through beings, that is, to be in force only to the extent that there *are* beings at all, or that beings are insofar as they are *in being*, enframes being metaphysically and technicistically into essences, ideas, values, or, more recently, into resources and information. It is precisely this tendency of being to reveal itself through beings and to stand as beings, and in this way to gain the standing and the validity of essence or presence, that makes room for capitalization of being. This proclivity allows for capitalizing being just in this specific sense that it lets being, and its time-space, stand as something of worth, as a value, and thus as something that can become capital.

I am not alone in seeing in Heidegger’s ontological difference the “origin” of capitalization. Addressing what she calls the originary

exchange of being and essence in Heidegger, that is, the change of being into beingness (*Sein* as *Seiendheit*), Catherine Malabou in her book *Le change Heidegger* writes about “le capitalisme ontologique,” or ontological capitalism, in Heidegger’s thought: “Ontological capitalism names the economic system opened up by the originary exchange of presence as itself. A being against being via the currency of essence.”¹⁷ Essence, beingness, and presence become the currency in which being gives itself both to be and to be thought. They become the ontological money, the metaphysical gold standard, which makes thought, representation, and the philosophical trading in being possible. The exchange of being for a being and the substitution of presence or essence for that being’s being clear the room for capitalization. Being’s specific way of revealing itself in modernity as standing reserve, reserve of resources and capital, marks the intrinsic technicity of being. It also makes clear that capitalization is never an arbitrary or external imposition but an inclination of being itself, which intensifies in proportion to the characteristic heightening of being’s technicity into the modern *Gestell* or enframing.

Heidegger only hints at this line of questioning in “What Are Poets For?,” the 1946 lecture on Rilke’s poetry published in *Holzwege*:

In place of that, which the once heeded world-content used to give freely of itself, the object-character of technological dominion spreads itself over the earth ever more quickly, ruthlessly, and completely. Not only does it establish [*stellt....auf*] all things as producible [*Herstellbares*] in the process of production; it also delivers [*stellt...zu*] the products of production by means of the market. In self-assertive production [*des sich durchsetzendes Herstellens*], the humanness of man and the thingness of things dissolve into the calculated market value of a market which not only spans the whole earth as a world market, but also, as the will to will, trades in the essence of Being [*im Wesen des Seins markt*] and thus subjects all beings to the trade of a calculation

[*in das Handel eines Rechnens*] that dominates most tenaciously in those areas where there is no need of numbers.¹⁸

While human beings live “essentially by risking [their] nature in the vibration of money and the currency of values [*der Vibration des Geldes und des Geltens der Werte*],”¹⁹ being risks itself in the vibration of technicity as the *Gestell*, the risk which Heidegger deliberately makes resonate throughout the essay in the multiple and complex plays on *stellen*. The technological dominion (*Herrschaft*) spreads all over the earth because technicity discloses being into and as the objective or the object-like (*das Gegenständige*). Revealing being, technicity changes being into entities and thus exchanges it for objects, installing in this specific way all beings as essentially producible. “To be” thus comes to indicate being “placeable” and “positionable” (*stellbar*) as producible and makeable (*herstellbar* and *machbar*). This general putting in place of being as production and producibility also effects a dissolution of thingness and of the being of humans into calculable market values: as resources, capital, information, etc. In this specific sense, technicity as enframing reveals the modern world to be a world market. The phrase “reveals to be” signals here that technicity does not simply reveal what is already there, present and waiting to be displayed, but rather that technicity reveals the world in such a way *that it be* a “world market.” In revealing being as the (modern) world, technicity renders it into and enframes it as a world market. Technicity thus comes to play a disclosive and a decisive role, so that the world no longer happens as world, but instead is put in place as world market, in which what takes place is a trading in being, a trade where being is brought to the market, assigned value, marketed, and exchanged.

Speaking of this trade in being, Heidegger indicates that it is the will to will, the will to power, that comes to trade in being through the opening up and the installation of the world as world market [*Weltmarkt*]. To characterize this trade, Heidegger employs in the phrase describing the operations of the world market, “*im Wesen des Seins marketet*,” (“[it] trades in the essence of Being”) a rarely used, and somewhat archaic

verb *markten*. If used at all, the verb *markten* appears mostly in writing. Contemporary dictionaries explain its meaning through the verbs *handeln* and *feilschen*: to trade, in the sense of to bargain or to haggle. The Grimm dictionary, however, lists *feilschen*, together with *handeln*, to trade, only as the fourth entry in a six-entry explanation of the meaning of *markten*.²⁰ The first entry explains *markten* as going to the market as a trader and trading, selling, etc., there (“*als händler den markt beziehen, handelschaft auf dem markte betreiben: markten, kaufen, kramen, nundinari*”). The second entry refers to gaining or earning money through trading (“*durch solchen handel einnehmen, in der formel geld markten; viel, wenig markten.*”). The third meaning is that of *kaufen*, and is explained in terms of buying, selling, or acquiring. In the fourth entry, *markten* is explained as bargaining or haggling with someone. Entry number five concerns finding fault with a bought article, while the last entry has *markten* as negotiating a lower price, bartering, carping, quibbling, and nitpicking to depress the market value of an object.

In a characteristic gesture, Heidegger uses the verb *markten* as the verbal form of the noun “market,” to indicate the manner in which the world market ‘markets,’ or trades in, the essence of being. It is the market itself that ‘markets’ and ‘trades,’ and this trading is not something that simply takes place on the market, but, instead, it is precisely what makes the world into a world market. Just as elsewhere Heidegger is fond of writing that “world worlds,” verbalizing the noun *welt* into the invented *welten*, here he uses the archaic *markten* as the verb form of the noun *Markt* (market). One could therefore say, literalizing the translation of Heidegger’s phrase “*der Weltmarkt markt*,” that the “world market markets.” This sense of “marketing” obviously does not refer to the common meaning of preparing something for the market and advertising it, but to the manner in which, through technicity as enframing, the world is revealed to be a market, revealed to be in the sense of being rendered into a world market. Revealing the world to be a world market, technicity reveals beings as commodities, whether real or potential. To be in the world revealed as the world market means to be in essence a commodity. Existence becomes tantamount

to capitalization and commodification. In technicity, *markten* belongs characteristically to the “essence” of being, that is, to the way in which being unfolds and comes to be. When the passage from “What Are Poets For?” is read this way, it becomes possible to say that the verb *markten* describes the manner in which the world no longer “worlds,” that is, is no longer revealed as world, but instead, “markets,” that is, comes to be a world market.

The somewhat archaic use of *markten* even at the time of writing “What Are Poets For?” in 1946 may be read as indicative of the manner in which this trading in being tends to easily erase itself, obscuring the essence of technicity, and allowing capital to appear primarily in economic and social terms rather than as rendered possible through a historico-ontological trade-off in the very essence of being. Just as the verb *markten* is rarely used, the very movement of the world’s becoming market-able rarely registers in thinking. And when it does, it forces the question of what specifically it is in being that makes the world capable of being a market.

In the *Gestell*, instead of enabling and making possible, being reveals itself to be that which frames, posits, and sets up everything so that beings obtain a certain currency or value: as objects, resources, information, capital, commodity, etc. Such currency or worth is intrinsically calculable, and thus beings can obtain their value in gold or money, and become ready to enter the capitalist mechanism of exchange. Rather than letting be (*sein lassen*), technicity gives being the momentum of *gelten*, so that “to be” now means to be effective or in force as a being, to have the currency or worth of a being, a being whose being can be determined in terms of its value. In technicity, “to be” is no longer to be in the quiet force of the possible but rather to be value-able. As a consequence, beings exist not in the force of their futurally oriented possibilities but obtain in terms of their present and calculable value: they become value-able, capable of having a value and of being calculable in terms of values. When being admits of a value, when it becomes “valid” as a present being, this present being comes to stand as something intrinsically open to being set up and posited in a manner

not simply allowing but in fact calling for calculation. Letting be valid thus renders beings into resources, or into the standing reserve, as Heidegger calls it in “The Question Concerning Technology”: “Everywhere everything is ordered [*bestellt*] to stand by, to be immediately on hand, indeed to stand there just so that it may be on call for a further ordering. Whatever is ordered about in this way has its own standing. We call it the standing-reserve [*Bestand*].”²¹

A distinctive trait of this standing is the ability to be calculated in terms of value. When something has a standing that is estimable in terms of value, this value can also be translated into and ordered in mathematical or monetary terms. It can be measured by means of gold, money, or capacity as capital. The capitalization of being, to which I referred in the beginning of my essay, is that moment when letting be becomes letting be valid, and the validity gives being a standing which covers over the nihilating momentum of its force of the possible. In this sense, such a capitalization is the prelude to the acquisition by being of the standing of capital, when what exists, or even what can potentially exist, has its being determined in terms of its value and validity as capital. Capitalization can be thus understood as the “validation” of being into the standing-reserve, where being obtains the standing of calculable and measurable beings. The German term *Geltung* reflects this sense of capitalization as “validation,” that is, the sense of obtaining validity, of gaining the standing of value and worth. As being valid through *gelten lassen*, beings *are* to the extent that their being is a value, or has worth and validity. This means that beings are in being, and thus are actual or real, only as having the standing of value, as being something of worth. As a consequence, their being, now their validity=value=worth, becomes capable of being capitalized and calculated as capital. To put it differently, the being of beings comes to reside in their validity or standing *as* capital.

This moment of capitalization, when being acquires the standing which renders it intrinsically capitalizable, is also the moment when the world becomes able to be a market. Capitalization makes the world market-able, which means that what exists in the world has been

admitted into the standing of validity as capital. Having as the key component of its standing this ability to be capital, beings become calculable and exchangeable. This capacity to have one's value calculated and exchanged means that beings become market-able, that they can be brought onto the market, marketed, and traded. Thus trading and marketability associated with the operations of capitalism become possible and valid as a consequence of this characteristic tradeoff in being: a tradeoff between letting be and letting be valid, between *sein/nichten lassen* and *gelten lassen*. This tradeoff makes possible production, capital, technology, and so on.

As capitalization, however, this tradeoff is intrinsic to how being lets be, both letting be and letting be valid. The issue, therefore, is not capitalization itself, or technicity as enframing, or even the world's market-ability, but the disappearance and forgetting of letting be and of its nihilating force of the possible. Capitalization becomes a problem only when the letting be valid, necessary to the capitalization of being, ends up "invalidating" letting be, and with it, being as the quiet force of the possible. Yet, part of the problem is that, because being gives itself through its refusal, such an invalidation of letting be has always already happened. The difficulty here is discerning and letting being have its 'proper' force of nihilation, which means not allowing this force to be rendered "invalid" in relation to the validity and value which beings gain by virtue of being, that is, being present.

THE OTHER TIME-SPACE OF THE ARTWORK

The passage in which Heidegger discusses world market and trading in being, and which has provided the impetus for my discussion, comes from the lecture "What Are Poets For?" which reflects on the role of poetry in the technological world of global capital. Philosophically and poetically the issue, at least as it emerges from Heidegger's essay and in the context of the trajectory of his thinking from mid-1930s onward, is not the world market or global economy, but rather the world's market-ability, that is, the way in which the world no longer comes to be world in its futurally oriented time-space of nihilation but unfolds instead as

a world market. In such a world market everything happens not in the event of the nihilating time-space but in real time and in virtual space, so that instead of the play of time-space, there is the play of market and economic indicators, and the global flow of information, of ones and zeros as the indicators, or informational indexes, of the success of the calculation of time and space, of the accomplishment of the valuation and capitalization of beings. What then are poets, and poetry, and even more generally, art, for in the age of world market? Not for presenting a committed, or socially minded, critique of capital in its economic, political, and cultural operations, but, more radically, certainly from the point of view of philosophical thinking, for providing a critique of the capitalization of being and of the “marketing” of being in terms of value, capital, and money contingent upon it. The poetic in poetry and art is there for the critique of the trading (*Marktung*) of being and its “validation” (*Geltung*), which bring being onto the market, both trading in the event and trading the event in, that is, exchanging it for beingness, with its capitalizable standing of a value. This trading intrinsic to technicity, to the technical revealing of being, makes possible the rise of capital. What can be developed in this manner out of Heidegger’s thought is the necessity of a critique of the capitalization of being on the ontological level, a critique of the capitalization that, trading letting be for letting be valid, opens the door to capital and to its economic, social, and cultural expansions and expenditures.

If Plato wanted to banish all poetry that could potentially upset the philosophical, rational, and, ultimately, technicist running of the polis, today’s world market banishes poetry even more effectively, and does so without any need of political decrees. It is enough to point out the essential market-disability of anything poetic, whether in poetry, literature, art, or thinking. And the only way that poetry can be rendered marketable is to show that it can acquire a value of some sort, that, for instance, it exemplifies or teaches values: moral, cultural, political, religious, ecological, human, that is, values which could be used “productively,” for example, to evaluate and guide us in our use of technology. But, as Heidegger already remarked, values are precisely the indicators of the

effectiveness with which technicity pervades modern society and assigns a technicistically prescribed value to poetry, literature, and, more generally, art. For to make poetry a value, whether literary, cultural, or moral, is precisely to technicize it. “The inherent natural power of technicity shows itself further in the attempts that are being made...to master technicity with the help of traditional values.”²²

What puts poetry, and thus art, in a critical tension with technicity is that poetry does not trade the poetic saying for what is said; that is, poetry does not exchange its saying, its ways of engaging with and letting us experience language, for the validity and value of communication, representation, or expression. Poetry, if it merits that name, does not allow language to obtain the value of representation or expression but instead lets language “nihilate.” In other words, poetry resonates, through and within what it says, the nihilating and emptying manner in which being, as the force of the possible, lets be. This is why poets dare meaning, endanger sense, even venture into non-sense, risking communicability and comprehension for the sake of being, that is, for the sake of allowing being to nihilate in its force of the possible. They endanger and challenge the cultural and political “value” of poetry, and not only when that value is traditional and regressive but also critical and progressive. And in a more fundamental manner, poets risk the market-ability of art and literature, in order to dare to disrupt the capitalization of being, and the exchange of being into capital it enables. In their poetic wager with language, poets dare to disallow capitalization—in German, one could say “*nicht gelten lassen*”—in order to challenge its disregard for the nothing and for nihilation and to inscribe the freeing nihilation back into being.

Yet this critique can happen only when artworks become divorced from being misrecognized as aesthetic experiences or cultural objects. Heidegger suggests that the question of the work of art is bound with “the task of overcoming aesthetics and that means simultaneously with overcoming a certain conception of beings as what is objectively representable. Overcoming of aesthetics again results necessarily from the historical encounter with metaphysics as such....Overcoming of

metaphysics means freeing the priority of the question of the truth of being in the face of any 'ideal,' 'causal,' and 'transcendental' and 'dialectical' explanations of being."²³ To be framed and represented aesthetically and culturally, the work of art has to be posited as an object, an object capable of being represented, for instance, in terms of aesthetic experience or as a culturally produced and exchanged object of art. Culture and art business result in the proliferation of art objects, but they do not necessarily foster the artwork as event. In fact, as Heidegger indicates, our age, though abundant in art objects, is characterized by a certain *Kunst-losigkeit*, not simply by a lack of art, that is, of art as event, but by a release, or a setting free from the aesthetic and cultural conceptions of artwork as art object. Aesthetic and cultural framing of art necessarily grasps the artwork in metaphysical terms, and it is these terms that Heidegger wants to leave behind in the gesture of the overcoming of aesthetics and aiming for a different knowledge of art: "In the horizon of this knowing, art has lost its relation to culture; it reveals itself here only as an event of be-ing."²⁴ It is only when experienced in its *Kunst-losigkeit*, in its freedom from art, that is, from aesthetic and cultural ideas of art, that the artwork can reveal itself as an event and thus discover "an originary necessity of what is ownmost to art, namely putting the truth of be-ing to a decision. . ."²⁵ What Heidegger is looking for is another origin of art, not an aesthetic or a cultural one, but one intimately linked to being as event and to its opening up of the nihilating free-play of another time-space.

When freed from artfulness and aestheticization, from its historical categorization as belonging to a sector of culture, the artwork reveals its ability to put being to a decision. But what kind of a decision, that is, of a scission, which illuminates a difference and brings it into the open, is at work in art when it succeeds in happening as event? It seems to me that the decision at work in art is precisely the one between two senses of time-space. On the one hand, it is the metaphysical time-space, regulated and pervaded by the operations of power, by *Machenschaft*, where all becomes accessible and available in terms of current calculability and manipulability; for us, this means information, instant and global

telematic facility, digitization, in short, experience as data-bank, available in its informational articulations and susceptible to instant machination, transformation, calculation, and thus profit. On the other hand, it is the time-space of the possible, unfolding as power-free, beyond power and powerlessness, essentially unrelated to power as such. It is the play, the de-cision between these two valencies of time-space that may be enacted in the event of art.

Artwork as an event stages the scission between the time-space of the operations of power – the tele-informational global time-space of contemporary capital – and the time-space of the power-free, where beings are allowed to dis-engage from their capture into standing presence, into idea, value, or information. It is this decision between the time-space of power as capital and the time-space of the power-free that gives the outline to the event at play in the artwork. One of the most forceful characteristics of the time-space of capital is its increasing insistence on the non-existence and impossibility of another paradigm of being, experience, or social relations. What power does not want to admit within its time-space is the possibility of another time-space, one based on the gentleness of the power-free, on the release from power into the mildness of being. For this time-space released from the operations of power would precisely disallow capitalization, free relations from the productive and effective reach of power and its proclivity to articulate all relations into power differentials within the spectrum spanning the extremes of global powerfulness and local powerlessness. Power presents being as always already decided into the terms of power, as effectuated into the degrees of powerfulness, entangled into relations of power, and thus as calculable somewhere along the extending vector of power. The only decision that power admits of is the decision which assigns the degree of power, deciding all that exists into the terms of the presence or absence of power. To the extent that as event, the artwork manages to bring being again to a decision, that is, into the scission between the capitalization into power, on the one hand, and the power-free, on the other, art becomes of pivotal and of critical importance to contemporary operations of power. When disengaged from

its misrepresentations as aesthetic and cultural objects, artworks can become paramount events of the power-free, showing being as in essence unrelated to power and powerlessness, as a matter of a power-free play of the time-space of the possible. The work at stake in art shows itself as intimately related to capital, yet precisely by way of its radical dis-capitalization of being into the relationality of the power-free. Playing the power games of capital, art in its force of event disengages from power, indicating how being is never really calculable or producible into value. Art as event is value-free, and this renders it much more precious and worthy than any imaginable value, as well as intrinsically incommunicable as information. Art as event cannot be translated or forced into aesthetic or cultural terms, always already operating in sync with and on the same terms as power and capitalization. If an artwork can succeed in refusing these terms, it is precisely by bringing them to a decision, which opens being all over again as the play of power and freedom from power, and marks the event as the beginning of another time-space.

Notes

- 1 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 334; tm.
 2 *Mindfulness*, 166.
 3 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 339; tm.
 4 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 335.
 5 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 335; tm.
 6 *Basic Writings*, 220; tm.
 7 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 170.
 8 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 176.
 9 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 173.
 10 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 173.
 11 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 340.
 12 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 170.
 13 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 187-188.
 14 The difference between negation and nihilation can perhaps be thought in the following way. Nihilation is neither positive nor negative, and refers instead to the force of *das Mögliche*, of that which has the force, or the ability, to open, always futurally, the play of possibilities. Negation comes into play, so to speak, within this already opened realm of the possible, specifically at the moment when what is possible is allowed to be valid. Negation “becomes possible” when being comes to stand as a being, and thus to have a value of presence (or absence) and the validity of being present.
 15 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 336; tm.
 16 *Basic Writings*, 251.
 17 “Le capitalisme ontologique désigne le système économique ouvert par l’échange originaire de la présence come elle-même. L’étant contre l’être via la monnaie de l’essance.” Catherine Malabou, *Le change Heidegger: Du fantastique en philosophie* (Paris: Léo Scherer, 2004), 98.
 18 *Holzwege 270 = Off the Beaten Track*, 219; tm. “An die Stelle dessen, was der einst gewahrte Weltgehalt aus sich verschenkte,

schiebt sich immer schneller, rücksichtsloser und vollständiger das Gegenständige der technischen Herrschaft über die Erde. Sie stellt nicht nur alles Seiende als ein Herstellbares im Prozess der Produktion auf, sondern sie stellt die Produkte der Produktion durch den Markt zu. Das Menschliche des Menschen und das Dinghafte der Dinge löst sich innerhalb des sich durchsetzenden Herstellens in der gerechneten Marktwert eines Marktes auf, der nicht nur als Weltmarkt die Erde umspannt, sondern der als der Wille zum Willen im Wesen des Seins marktet und so alles Seiende in das Handeln eines Rechnens bringt, das dort am zähesten herrscht, wo es der Zählen nicht bedarf.”

- 19 *Holzwege*, 289 = *Off the Beaten Track*, 235.
- 20 “MARKTEN, verb. des marktes pflegen, mit der nebenform *marken*, die nach *mark* für *markt* (sp. 1644) sich gebildet hat und in der ältern schriftsprache, jetzt noch mundartlich, öfters auftritt; schweizerisch auch *märten*, vgl. unten 4.” Cited from *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm* on the Internet. The web address: <http://germazope.uni-trier.de/Projects/WBB/woerterbuecher/dwb> (accessed 2/13/2012).
- 21 *Basic Writings*, 322.
- 22 *Holzwege*, 267 = *Off the Beaten Track*, 217; tm.
- 23 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 354.
- 24 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 355; tm.
- 25 *Contributions to Philosophy*, 355.