When Things Impoverish: An approach to Marx's analysis of capitalism in conjunction with Heidegger's concern over technology.

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Abstract

In an attempt to reconstruct a "dialogue" between Marx and Heidegger, I propose a reading of the first volume of *Capital* together with the latter's writings on technology. I contend there is a common concern over the impoverishment of things, more precisely of their qualitative consistency, which occurs under the sway of capitalism or modern technology. Regarding Marx, I first argue for reading *Capital* in an ontological key, thereby placing it in the same philosophical register as Heidegger, and conceiving it as a description of the impoverishment of beings, the reduction of their being to value. Then, in the case of Heidegger, I take his writings on technology as corresponding to *Capital*, and argue that modern technology also leads to the same ontological *Dürftigkeit*. Finally, I succinctly sketch what might be Heidegger's poietic way out to this situation; one that, in essence, coincides with Marx's position.

Keywords

Capital. Commodification. Technology. Ontology. Heideggerian Marxism.

Not only must any commentary gather the substance from the text, it must also, imperceptibly and without being too insistent, add something of its own to it, from its substance. This supplement is what the layman, regarding what he takes to be the content of the text, always feels as an interpolation; it is what he, with the right he arrogates to himself, criticizes as arbitrary. A proper commentary, however, never understands the text better than its author understood it, though it certainly understands it differently. Only this difference in understanding must be such that it encounters the same thing which the explicated text is meditating.

Heidegger, "Nietzsche's Word: 'God is Dead'."

Introduction

To this day, associating the work of Marx and Heidegger with each another still seems somewhat strange. The one, widely regarded as a master of social thinking, a major figure in political economy, and certainly a philosopher too, but mainly in his early years and for the most part subsidiary to Hegel's "dialectical method." The other, an ontologist, ever concerned with the so-called history of being and its destinies, although not so much with

"actual" history—that which could be said to be at the center of Marx's analyses. And despite the well-known, yet brief and certainly rare allusion in the "Letter on Humanism" to "a productive dialogue with Marxism" (Heidegger 1998, 259), this possibility remained notoriously unexplored in Heidegger's thinking, at least thematically.[i] So at first glance, there seems to be little to say about some kind of compatibility between the two.

But this does not paint the whole picture. A number of reputed scholars have contributed to such a "dialogue," either topically or tangentially while developing their own philosophical views, thereby shaping what has sometimes been called Heideggerian Marxism.[ii] This paper aims to take part in such a tradition of thinking.

My intention is to show a connection between these two thinkers by looking into the first volume of *Capital* (especially Part I, its "hermeneutical dimension" in the words of Fredric Jameson [2011, 12]) alongside the Heidegger's concern over technology, famously presented in the lecture bearing that title, but not limited to it. I contend that in both Marx and Heidegger there is a common concern over the impoverishment of things, more precisely of their qualitative consistency, which occurs under the sway of capitalism or modern technology. Faced with either of these, things turn into a remnant, an irrelevant by-product of the functioning of those two. What I hope to show is that reading these authors side by side can not only demonstrate an often unacknowledged intellectual kinship, but also complement each of their arguments which, in my view, are meant to exhibit the same historical situation of—as it were—ontological *Dürftigkeit*, scantiness of being.

The paper is divided into two sections, each of which follows a parallel structure. Both open with some brief but necessary remarks on how I approach each thinker. For Marx this means to read *Capital* in an ontological key; for Heidegger, to take his writings on technology as corresponding to *Capital*. Then, in both sections, I take as a starting point the recognition of the qualitative consistency of things and move towards showing the

impoverishment of this very aspect. In Marx this is ciphered in the contradiction that exists in any commodity between its qualitatively determined contents and its quantitative rendering as a value, while in Heidegger this is found in the notion of things as delimited and technology as that which does away with limits—as the unbounded production that results in the production of the boundless. At the end of the second section, on Heidegger, I succinctly sketch what could be a *poietic* way out of this situation; one that, in essence, coincides with Marx's position.

I. Marx (through Heidegger)

To introduce Marx *as a philosopher* requires little or no justification; his decisive influence in the philosophical tradition speaks for itself. But the claim that his philosophy is to be found in *Capital* might in fact require some explanation. Although there is a wide consensus that *Capital* is Marx's masterpiece, there is less so in terms of its theoretical nature. Often regarded as a treatise of (dated) political economy, its philosophical implications are frequently understated, when not simply overlooked. But notwithstanding the interdisciplinary character of the text, important voices still claim it as a business for philosophers. Althusser, to name one of the exemplary *readers* of *Capital*, notably committed to such a view and even proclaimed it the book by which Marx ought to be judged (1971, 71).

Yet I would like to further determine this position by contending that the philosophy of *Capital* bears the character of an *ontology*; a claim that, while certainly not novel,[iii] calls for more precisions. To begin, where is the advantage in such contending? Above all, it allows us to situate this work in the same dimension as Heidegger's, thus breaking with the prejudice that the two authors operate on incompatible registers (such as metaphysics and first philosophy on the one hand, and social critique and political economy on the other). By

ontology we mean, in the phenomenological sense it takes on after Heidegger, a "laying bare and exhibiting" (1996, 6) the way in which all that is presences. This is certainly not to say that in revisiting *Capital* we find some sort of equivalent to the *existenzialen Analytik des Daseins*,[iv] but rather that *Capital* is marked, at least in hindsight, by the same kind of questioning to which the *Analytik* was auxiliary anyway: a discussion over *das Sein der Seiende*, or in this case an ontology of commodities.

But wouldn't this be a mere regional ontology, something that might hold for a particular kind of being, that of commodities, but not for all the others? Surely. But this distinction matters little when behind such a regional ontology a certain totalizing tendency operates. If one assumes—as seems reasonable in our day and age—that everything *can* be commodified, even when not every thing is *de facto* a commodity, then what is clearly a regional ontology, the description of a particular mode of being, asserts itself as a fundamental ontology, as a *possibility* for all beings. Now, this is not to say that such is an atemporal or ahistorical ontology. The Marx of *Capital* never intended, despite what Engels may have believed, to go beyond the bounds within which his discourse comes to be meaningful. Ever more concerned with the capitalist age, Marx was aware that his analyses comport irremediable limitations. But this is only to say that their validity is limited (in fact, expressly limited) to that particular historical configuration whose nature they intend to display. As it matures, Marx's work looks more and more like the delineation of a singular field, yet for us still inescapable: that to which everything that is said to be, belongs; the mode of production to which pertains the commodity-character of its products.

Let us now turn to *Capital*'s very opening lines: "The wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears as 'an immense collection of commodities'; the individual commodity appears as its elementary form. Our investigation therefore begins with the analysis of the commodity" (Marx 1976, 125). If I bring up such well-known lines,

which already introduced us to *Capital*'s published predecessor, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, it is just to show how Marx secures a starting point in the fact that (in the *Faktum* of understanding that) there are things like commodities (although only within the sphere of "the capitalist mode of production"), to then inquire into this *mundane* being, as well as in the historical *world* to which it belongs (and out of which, let us emphasize, he *does not posit it*). For the philosopher must deal with what appears or presents itself, if I may be allowed the anachronism, "*only within the limits in which it is presented*" (Husserl 1983, 44; emphasis in the original). After all—but this time let's say it with Althusser (2009, 26)—any "sighting" (for instance, that which *sees* the commodity) "is the act of its structural conditions," conditions whose expounding constitutes the philosophical enterprise of *Capital*.

From the outset, Marx notes the twofold aspect of any given commodity: "every useful thing, for example, iron, paper, etc., may be looked at from the two points of view of *quality* and *quantity*" (1976, 125). Through its qualities, a commodity may satisfy some need—thus defining its use value—while in relation to its quantity it can be exchanged for something else, provided a certain proportion is met—thus endowing it with exchange value. All this means is commodities are qualitatively and quantitatively determined; they always consist of an *amount* of *something*. But as it happens, the analysis will show that the commodity harbors an internal contradiction, for its exchange value (a quantitative abstraction) entails the negation of its use value (a qualitative concreteness), meaning that the former can only occur at the expense of the latter somehow not occurring. Let us be witness to the necessary making of this non-occurrence.

Commodities are exchanged for other commodities according to a certain proportion. Such a point of departure presupposes an equation of this sort: $x\mathrm{A} = y\mathrm{B}$, where the uppercase variables stand for two things—*different* from each other—and the lowercase variables for

the amount necessary to *equate* the two expressions. Though a somewhat convoluted interpretation of a rather ordinary activity, this helps to render the contradiction in appropriate terms: *how can different things be equated*? The question, moreover, reads "how" and not "if" because it takes the equation as possible, a presumption nonetheless *de facto* justified, for the philosopher—a hermeneutist of *facticity*—is in this case both a witness and a subject to "the capitalist mode of production." Therefore, insofar as political economy factically deals with commodity exchange, which in turn somehow presupposes the equation of the different, *Capital*'s undertaking may well be understood, as Jameson suggests, "as a fundamental *critique*" (i.e., a discernment of the conditions of possibility) "of the concept of exchange and, indeed, of the very equation of identity as such" (2011, 17; emphasis added).

The first thing to observe is that any *valid* exchange (i.e., *proportional*) presupposes a common element by which to assert the equality of the things in question, much like in arithmetic a numerator can relate to another provided that both share (even if only implicitly) a same denominator, which means that 2 = 2 always is $\frac{2=2}{1}$. However, the equation of *commodities* (and not simply of *numbers*) bears a difficulty unknown to arithmetic (whose objects are strictly quantitative), for the objects of political economy are of a "twofold nature," quantitative as much as qualitative, each of which was noted in the equation *x*A = *y*B. The difficulty is that quality, unlike quantity, cannot be reduced to something it is not already in and of itself, meaning that it doesn't allow itself to be reduced at all, for such a reduction is a reduction of contents, which is to say of quality as such. And still, the exchange of commodities—or the (quantitative) equation of (qualitatively) different things—somehow *does* take place.

The possibility for *x*A = *y*B can therefore not lie in the nature of either of its expressions, precisely because it is that very nature which impedes the assertion of equality. Hence Marx says "this common element cannot be a geometrical, physical, chemical or [any]

other natural property of commodities" (1976, 127). It follows that such a common denominator—for there has to be one—must be distinct from nature as such, independent from any particular content, any irreducible definition. In a certain sense, it must be beyond nature, boundless and indefinite, almost metaphysical, as it were. Marx calls this *value*, whose character is certainly not metaphysical but "social" (although he does refer to it as "a phantom-like objectivity").

But the type of sociality Marx has in mind is none other than the *civil society* Hegel had already conceived of: the kind of human grouping exclusively made up of socially equal individuals (*abstract* subjects considered irrespective of their needs, that is, of their determined contents) who maintain with each other mercantile relations as *private* owners of commodities (Hegel 1991, §189). But then they must be individuals *abstracted* from (*deprived* of) their communal embedment, bound to one another in the "relationship of reciprocal isolation and foreignness" the order of private ownership and self-interest entails (Marx 1976, 182). Civil society therefore deploys the conditions of *virtuality* within which value—a phantom-like objectivity—becomes operative. It is thus that value can only be *seen* within the element of civil society, and so that Marx's *theory* of value, globally presented in *Capital*'s Part I, must be more than just a coquetry with "the mode of expression peculiar to" Hegel—"that mighty thinker" of whom Marx openly avowed himself a "pupil" (1976, 103). For Marx is building such a theory upon Hegel's very philosophical legacy, one that the "pupil," by virtue of a hermeneutic labor, prevented from stagnating.

So value, a substance of "social" (not of "natural") character, is the common element underlying the commodity exchange. It is thus that commodity A may find in commodity B "a splendid kindred soul, the soul of value," as Marx ludically says (1976, 143). Or in his own more technical formulation: "The magnitudes of different things [or the *x* in *x*A and the *y* in *y*B] only become comparable in quantitative terms when they have been reduced to the

same unit [i.e., value]. Only as expressions of the same unit do they have a common denominator, and therefore are commensurable magnitudes" (140–141). As magnitudes of value, he concludes, commodities "are expressions of the same unit, *things of the same nature*" (141; emphasis added).

This means commensurability comes at the cost of heterogeneous natures, a reduction of the otherwise irreducible by means of an act of omission. To be sure, it is nothing more than the use value that yields to the exchange value. But what is thus compromised is not just the mere usefulness or consumability of things. For the use value stands for all in things which makes them *matter*. Things as concrete, delimited presences before which not just anything goes: it is this *critical* feature (in the double sense of importance and discernibility) that must be overlooked, "fall out of [the] frame [of the quantitative], remain undetected on its screens of measurement," to borrow a formulation from Jameson (2011, 25). And still, what it is thus omitted—call it use value, quality, nature, etc.—must in a certain sense be preserved, for only by virtue of their particular contents can things confront each other as commodities. "Coats cannot be exchanged for coats," Marx himself mentions, "one use-value cannot be exchanged for another of the same kind" (1976, 132). Hence the indispensable qualitative disparity between A and B noted in our equation, a difference that is necessarily presupposed, even if just for the sake of (precisely *just* for the sake of) its own eventual dedifferentiation in the exchange process of equivalents.

After undergoing this "metamorphosis," all that remains in things is their being *a mere quantum of value,* whose magnitude is determined by the amount of work expended in their production. This opens up the way for the analysis of productive labor. However, this does not mean that Marx has simply abandoned the field of commodity exchange to thematize a different one. He does not just move away from the "noisy sphere" of the market, "where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone, [...] into the

hidden abode of production" (Marx 1976, 279), as read some of his last words before moving onto the analysis of labor in Part III. For labor is looked at by this theory insofar as it itself is a commodity, although certainly peculiar: the commodity of labor power—the consumption of which results in the increase of the quantum of value initially advanced by its buyer, the capitalist. We therefore remain in the sphere within which things may appear as commodities.

Now, to say labor is commodified means it has become an instance of the aforementioned contradiction that traverses *Capital* and fuels it throughout—what Jameson has called "the great opposition between Quality and Quantity" (2011, 19). For if it is to partake in the exchange process, to join the labor market, commodified labor must undergo the same act of omission: we thus move from the perspective of the myriad of its concrete, definite forms (e.g., the working of the soil, the forging of the metals, the writing of the poem) to one "in which the individual characteristics of the worker [and of the work] are obliterated," says Marx in the *Contribution* (1970, 29).

Labor itself becomes leveled by the homologizing gaze of Quantity. It turns into "human labor in the abstract," a dedifferentiated activity that can only be distinguished by the amount of value it produces, therefore not by the kind of things it brings into existence. And this amount can only be given, Marx claims, by the necessary *labor time* spent in production. This makes commodities nothing but "crystallized" or "congealed" amounts of abstract, homogeneous labor; mere "material shells" whose kernel is a substance—the value substance—of an exclusively quantitative nature, which is to say (in the sense already specified) of no nature at all. For while the concrete forms of labor denote "a matter of the 'how' and the 'what'," abstract labor simply consists "of the 'how much', of [its] temporal duration" (Marx 1976, 136); "it amounts," says Marx at some point, "to so many hours, or days, etc." (303).

This implies that not just any conception of time will be consistent with *Capital*, even if for the most part this question is kept at the background of the exposition.[v] But one thing is certain: the claim that the products of labor "are merely definite quantities of *congealed labour-time*" (Marx 1976, 130), and the effacing of Quality thereby implicated, can only make sense when the notion of a likewise *de-qualified* time is assumed to be operative—a time whose pace is constant and indifferent, limitless addition of uniform moments. Certainly, nothing precludes other interpretations of temporality from being possible, nor that some of them may even be more basic and primary, perhaps also diametrically opposed to this one. This is to say that the possibility that time (and the beings it conditions) may fundamentally be an irreducible heterogeneous phenomenon is not of itself inconsistent. But the fact remains that the time of *Capital* cannot be other than what Althusser has called "the ideological conception of a continuous-homogeneous time" (2009, 110); a model of temporality relative to the basic tenets of the system in which it is placed and to which it marks specific "rhythms and punctuations" (112). In the same vein, Martínez Marzoa (who records *Lire le Capital* in the bibliography of his own book on Marx) keenly points out the following:

> When, in speaking of equal labor, it is said that the quantities of it are quantities of time, it could perhaps be thought that the dimension we call "time" is understood with complete independence of the historical character of the modern world or of any other. But this is not the case. Certainly, what we call "time" is a condition pertaining to the being of things. But the notion of a unique and equal time, as a disqualified continuum and, therefore, "infinite," in which there is nothing but abstract points (cuts) and of which there are only quantities, is constituted *by the same reason that* things are constituted in "abstract" and "equal labor." (Martínez Marzoa 2018, 150)

To be sure, the matter here at stake is not of the order of foundation. The question is not whether such a conception of time ultimately makes things and human activity homogeneous; nor, on the contrary, if it is either the thing-as-commodity or the activity-as-labor that renders time a disqualified continuum. Rather, the point here is that all these things are *systemically* ordered, hearing in such a word its archaic intention: to be positioned together, set up in relation to one another. As figures of the same *composition*, all this stands mutually implicated, and every part calls for the next insofar as each comes to be the case.

The presence of the commodity-thing therefore involves the description not just of a market but of a whole universe—more precisely, one defined by the effective and constant *alienation* of things (a term often used in *Capital* as synonym for exchange), and thus by *the absence of essential bonds*. But this, the *bürgerliche Gesellschaft* at which Marx directs his critical analyses, this bourgeois world "in fact is not a world"—as Axelos points out, hyperbolically of course—since the empty formalism presupposed in the exchange of values (the *equity* among different subjects and among different things) has "seized human social reality" and "become [its] very content" (Axelos 1976, 103). Contentless, the world is tendentially impoverished—deprived of worldliness, Heidegger would say (1996, 104)—and there things, *as things*, increasingly become indistinguishable from each other.

> Circulation becomes the great social retort into which everything is thrown, to come out again as the money crystal [money: what Axelos has identified as "the *res* par excellence" (1976, 72)]. Nothing is immune from this alchemy, the bones of the saints cannot withstand it, let alone more delicate *res sacrosanctae, extra commercium hominum*. Just as in money every qualitative difference between commodities is

extinguished, so too for its part, as a radical leveller, it extinguishes all distinctions. (Marx 1976, 229)

In a sense, this means that the system requires (or perhaps produces) a world from which *the gods have fled*, to use an expression with which Heidegger evokes a poem by Hölderlin (Heidegger 2002, 200). For much like with the madman that heralds the death of God, the word of Hölderlin about "God's default" points above all to the desacralization, or the annulment of *hier*archies, that comes with the image of a world described by alienability (exchangeability), wherein nothing remains *extra commercium hominum*. No doubt why Heidegger would say that "with Marx the position of the most extreme nihilism is reached" (2003, 77), that is, of course, regardless of whether Marx himself would have expressed his findings in the jargon of his contemporary, Nietzsche. At any rate, we see from the quote above that he did in fact suggest the link between the tendential universalization of the commodity-character and the flattening out of ranks Heidegger, later on, would come to discuss.

It is one striking and paradoxical conclusion the reader finds at the final stages of *Capital*—namely, that "the same causes which develop the expansive power of capital, also develop the labour-power at its disposal" (Marx 1976, 798), and so that "the accumulation of misery" (in the mode of a pauperized proletariat) corresponds to "the accumulation of wealth" (799). This is a corollary Marx presents by the name of "the general law of capitalist accumulation," and is thus one of the explicit conclusions of the book, perhaps also one of a rather "empirical" character. But there is yet another paradoxical conclusion, a decidedly *ontological* one, that is nonetheless implicit—though barely so. It is that capitalism, by virtue of its own inner requisites, *in the massive production of things in turn produces the very loss of them*; for it generates their dedifferentiation, as well as the human activity bringing them

about and the figures of temporality whereby that occurs. One of Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe's last remarks in his long (and resolutely Marxian) *Présentation* to Heidegger's *La pauvreté (die Armut)* is that "'wealth' is the very experience of 'poverty'" (Lacoue-Labarthe 2004, 51). With this remark he spells out a fundamental insight of that text. I believe it could do the same for *Capital*, although more in the vein of its implicit, *ontological* conclusion—*the impoverishment of beings, the reduction of their being to value*—than in the evident symmetry with its explicit conclusion.

II. Heidegger (through Marx)

We have just come to the conclusion of our reading of *Capital* by reference to the *Présentation* by Lacoue-Labarthe. I believe that that same text offers another lead for thinking about the correspondence of the previous section with a certain reading of Heidegger's philosophy. But is it not shallow—one might object—to suggest the connection between the two philosophers via a commentator (a *présentateur*), rather than basing it on their own actual texts? It's true: eventually the correspondence must be demonstrated in the latter way. But turning once more (albeit provisionally) to the *Présentation* should prove expedient, especially when one considers the scarce (though not null) attention Heidegger—so learned as he was in the history of philosophy—paid to the anything but little figure of Marx. Not to mention his stubborn reticence to use the terms *Kapital* or *Kapitalismus*, neither of which is mentioned once in the entire the *Gesamtausgabe*.[vi] So let us attend to the following excerpt by Lacoue-Labarthe:

> Would Heidegger have read *Capital*? We can reasonably doubt it [...]. On the other hand, we see very clearly that Heidegger read, and read well, since their publication in

> 1932 by Landshut and Mayer, the *Frühschriften* of Marx, to which he will refer regularly until in his last seminars. [...] It is true that Heidegger's "position" vis-à-vis Marx is always, or almost always, "critical." Marx is generally defined by his fundamental "thesis": being is production, the essence of man is work. Moreover, this is what can make him the "thinker of technique," to use Kostas Axelos' expression, if at least one accepts this concept ("technique"), which is well known to be, in the lexicon of the European extreme right, the noble (and Greek) euphemism not to call "capital" by its name. But this assignment of Marx—and *a fortiori* this delimitation of "Marxism"—is not constant. It happened, in particular, that Heidegger "brought" Marx closer to Hölderlin. In its own *way*, of course. (Lacoue-Labarthe 2004, 39)

After determining what Heidegger did read and might not have read, and thus defining *a* way into Heidegger's relation to the *early* Marx (that of the *Frühschriften*), an almost incidental observation appears on the "name" and "euphemism" of a same phenomenon. By following such an observation, we may try to consider Heidegger's writings on technology as somehow corresponding to capital—or better, to *Capital*. Furthermore, since it is no coincidence that those are also texts in which the thingness of the thing comes *into play* as what is *at stake* (texts wherein the thing is "*enjeu*," to borrow a word from Axelos [2006, 643]), then, this incidental observation leads us to nothing less than two thematic axes by which to access Heidegger's thinking in its connection to Marx's: the technology and the thing.[vii] I will begin by discussing the latter and then move onto the former.

Despite the many terms by which Heidegger alludes to things, the matter as such holds a central place in his philosophy as a whole. These multiple terms are consistent with the stage of his thinking and the circumstance of their reference (Biemel 1980), be this the

general domain of all that is, *Seiende*, or *Sache*, which unequivocally conveys a phenomenological overtone. *Gegenstand* and *Objekt* for discussions of (modern) theoretical nature, or *Zeug* for the more pragmatic contexts. And even *Ding*, as it is simply called in his later philosophy. Yet perhaps all these variations can be made to coincide with a singular notion, which I find in the thing as *delimited*. It is my view that Heidegger is generally battling on several fronts to maintain or recover the determined presence of things, the experience of their irreducible and distinctive actuality.

When inquiring into the nature of things, something simple but significant comes to the fore: to be a thing means to be *this* and not *that*; to be what it itself is (identity) and not to be—or to be other than—what it itself is not (difference). Since being a thing means being *some*thing, identified and differentiated, there is the recognition of a determination, a definition, of a marking out of boundaries, ὁρισμός. There is an experience of finitude, ending, an inherent limitation beyond which something no longer is, πέρας. And this not only in the sense of coming to an end, ceasing to be, but primarily in that, insofar as something is and while it is, bounds still grant it beingness: "the limit is always what limits, defines, gives footing and stability, that by which and in which something begins and is" (Heidegger 1998, 206).

This fundamental intuition informs Heidegger's later writings (which is not to say it is absent from the earlier ones[viii]), and comes time and again in his interpretations of the Greek thinkers. For instance, when reading Plato's allegory of the cave. "Here someone who has been unshackled is at the same time conveyed outside the cave 'into the open.' [...] The things themselves stand there in the binding force and validity of their own visible form. The open into which the freed prisoner has now been placed does not mean the unboundedness of some wide-open space; rather, the open sets boundaries to things" (Heidegger 1998, 169). To which he adds further down: "Liberation does not come about by the simple removal of the

chains and it does not consist in unbridled license; rather, it first begins as the continuous effort at accustoming one's gaze to be fixed on the firm limits of things that stand fast in their visible form" (170).

It is precisely by being bounded (delimited and definite) that a thing can be *what* it is, come to presence in its distinctive *whatness*. This is to say, in the vocabulary of Marx, that only then can it appear as a qualitatively determined content (content: what is contained, held together, by boundaries). Everywhere we find things in their whatness, "making [their] claim on us," says Heidegger, for "if this claim were not made, beings could never appear in their Being" (1969, 26). The definite character of things calls upon us mortals—a name for what was once *Dasein*—and interpellates us, making us the *Be-Dingten*, the conditioned ones, concerned by things (2012, 19).

This is why, to come back to Heidegger's interpretation of the allegory, the unshackled man does not attain freedom by the "simple removal of chains," nor can such a thing consist in "unbridled license." On the contrary, we are told freedom must correspond to the things' appeal by letting itself be "fixed" on their "firm limits." And this is because freedom does not originally mean to be free *from*, but rather to be free *for*—the disclosedness of beings. It is therefore not the notion, as that presupposed in the context of civil society, of free subjects in the abstract but uprooted in the concrete, as it were, free *from* embedment, *unbedingte*. Conversely, to be free *for* things occurs "when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its being, [...] [to the] sphere that safeguards each thing" (Heidegger 1971, 147); the qualitative consistency of the lifeworld, as Bolívar Echeverría would call it (2016, 94).[ix]

The "thinging" of things (a verbal form by which Heidegger alludes to their appeal) thus requires some sort of care and attending. This is why there is such a repeated emphasis, going back as far as *Being and Time* §18 but becoming definitive in "On the Essence of

Truth," on the necessity of *letting beings be*, the importance of guarding or preserving them. To let a thing be means, in the language Heidegger thinks and writes, to preserve it (*bewahren*) in its truth (*Wahrheit*); to allow for its hearing and to admit it as the standard for what is real (Heidegger 1971, 168).

It follows from the foregoing that the notion of thing must oppose by its very definition (this being *definition* as such) what Martínez Marzoa (1999, 12) has described as "the figure (or rather absence of figure) of an inert and unlimited quantitative continuum" to which everything can be reduced or at least made compatible—be this the concept of value, as it is in the case of Marx, or any other, so long it reduces beings to mere quantums (Heidegger, for instance, explicitly gave such a role to the notion of magnitude that operates in the physical-mathematical sciences; I am building up to show this also applies to his notion of technology). The opposition stems from the fact that such a reduction would make "any boundary, stretch, or distance (therefore any content, any thing) [...] a delimitation exerted upon the basis of a continuum, unlimited in itself" (Martínez Marzoa 1999, 12), entailing in turn a basic indifference as to any given content. For every boundary could then in principle be marked elsewhere, and consequently any thing be *replaced* (*ersetzt*)—be otherwise delimited, though no less (nor more) validly. But this, we have seen, is incompatible with the very notion of thing insofar as it is inseparable from a specific (i.e., not just any) boundary: "that from which something *begins its presencing*" (Heidegger 1971, 152).

And yet such an unlimited continuum should not simply be discarded as a mere "falsification" or "misrepresentation" of reality. It rather *remains* as that which the thing negates, what cannot be as long as there is thing. And more importantly, it actually plays the part of that which negates things and *does not let them be*, what turns them into *remains*. Indeed, if Heidegger so recurrently emphasizes the safeguarding of beings, it is only because unguarding them (*ungewahrt*) might leave them truthless (*wahrlos*), place them "outside of

[their] essential provenance, outside of Ἀλήθεια," as he says in *Die Gefahr* (2012, 49). Things should be preserved precisely because they might escape us—that is, because of the pervasive *danger* that their appeal to mortals will become "stifled in the sound and fury of the production process," should this were to be expressed in the terms of Marx (1976, 342).

Now, we know that in accounting for this "danger" Heidegger avoided (persistently and almost deliberately) "calling by its name" that which lends a title to Marx's most decisive work. But if "the 'doctrine' of a thinker is that which, within what is said, remains unsaid," as he himself taught (Heidegger 1998, 155), then we might also be allowed to bring Heidegger out of his own silence. After all, he cannot prevent one from doing to him what he himself did to his predecessors, as Rorty once put it (1991, 2). Thus, let us now turn to his inquiries into technology (and the constellation of problems thereby implicated) as a sort of correlate of our reading of *Capital*.

According to Heidegger (2002, 57), with the advent of modernity comes a specific mode of presencing—that of the technological—that he readily identifies with the essence of our age. Though its roots stretch back to the archaic word τέχνη, art or craft, and is thus a manner of bringing forth, *producere*, modern technology is understood in a more narrow sense than its ancient counterpart. On the one hand, and insofar as the two are ways of producing, it is maintained that τέχνη and modern technology are both modes of revealing, that is, of ἀληθεύειν (Heidegger 1977, 13). Yet, on the other hand, Heidegger argues that the latter has been stripped from the complex of perspectives that once determined it in a complete manner. While still *causing* something to appear, the character of such *causation* (i.e., of such *production*, if one admits the synonymy for a moment) is reduced to a mere effecting, with indifference as to its intended purpose. Early on in "The Question Concerning Technology" he says: "For a long time we have been accustomed to representing cause as that which brings something about. In this connection, to bring about means to obtain results,

effects. The *causa efficiens*, but one among the four causes [*causa materialis*, *causa formalis*, and *causa finalis*], sets the standard for all causality. This goes so far that we no longer even count the *causa finalis*, telic finality, as causality" (Heidegger 1977, 7).

This last remark is by no means inconsequential, for the *causa finalis* is ultimately responsible for allocating something to the domain where it belongs. Or, as in Heidegger's example, "It is that which in advance confines the chalice within the realm of consecration and bestowal. Through this the chalice is circumscribed as sacrificial vessel. Circumscribing gives bounds to the thing. With the bounds the thing does not stop; rather, from out of them it begins to be what, after production, it will be. That which gives bounds, that which completes, in this sense is called in Greek τέλος" (Heidegger 1977, 8). Hence the significance of the observation that telic finality no longer counts as causality. For by reducing causation to the perspective of the *causa efficiens*, that is, to the mere act of producing without regard—among other things—to a possible τέλος, production becomes aimless. In a way, this is no different from Marx's concept of simple labor, the technical or productive activity considered irrespective of its "aim, mode of operation, object, means and result" (Marx 1976, 132), where neither its "how" nor its "what" truly comes into play. In no case *what is* done matters, but only the fact *that it is* done.

As an aimless activity that seeks the increase of its productivity (the self-valorization of value, one might say), modern technology discloses beings as mere resources, stockpiles of raw material held in reserve for possible usage—the what-for of it, in any case, being immaterial. This character of standing-reserve (*Bestand*) designates the way everything comes to presence (or rather is forced or "challenged" to it) in the age of technology, and it originates from what Heidegger deems but one possible destining of revealing, *Ge-stell*.[x] It is at this point that he begins to spell out the opposition between *Ge-stell* and things.

> As a destining, it [i.e., *Ge-stell*] banishes man into that kind of revealing which is an ordering. Where this ordering holds sway, it drives out every other possibility of revealing. Above all, *Ge-stell* conceals that revealing which, in the sense of ποίησις, lets what presences come forth into appearance. As compared with that other revealing [which I am ever more tempted to equate to Marx's concept of *qualitatively determined production*], the setting-upon that challenges forth thrusts man into a relation to that which is, that is at once antithetical and rigorously ordered. Where *Ge-stell* holds sway, regulating and securing of the standing-reserve mark all revealing. (Heidegger 1977, 27)

Therein lies the threat of technology, in "the possibility that all revealing will be consumed in ordering and that everything will present itself only in the unconcealedness of standing-reserve" (Heidegger 1977, 33). But how should this be understood? I claim, precisely in connection to the process we saw taking place behind Marx's discourse; namely, that *with the unbounded production occurs in turn the production of the boundless*. For in such producing, the qualitative consistency of the world yields to the perspective of Quantity, thereby effacing what Jameson has called (the choice of words is no accident) the "*existential* or *phenomenological experience* [...] of physical products, but also [of] the very texture of physical work and physical time" (2011, 19–20; emphasis added). Indeed, as we have seen, all this gets emptied out and becomes devoid of content; and to that extent, we may uphold, it provides a new range of meaning to Heidegger's assertion (when not simply exposing its original intention) that "technology is the organization of a lack" (1993, 87).

Modern technology thus presupposes (or perhaps produces) a world governed by the "metaphysical determination according to which every being appears as a material of labor" (Heidegger 1998, 259), as we find Heidegger saying soon after the noted allusion to "a

productive dialogue with Marxism." In such a world, things "expand in a lack of differentiation," a homogeneity he attributes—hard to say whether by following Marx or the consequences of his own discourse—to "the principle of production" (Heidegger 1993, 88). But if one no longer gets to experience a thing as *this* thing, but rather as a mere *exemplar* (indefinitely reproducible) of something *like* this (Martínez Marzoa 2018, 150), which is to say that all we have are "ersatz," "substitutes," things meant to be replaced or exchanged, then, the situation being described is one pervaded by alienation, that is, by the absence of essential bonds—or better, *bounds*. For Heidegger, this means the world has become an "unworld" (1993, 87). Axelos expands on this by saying that such thinking (he is actually speaking of Marx, but this holds as much for Heidegger) "is inscribed in [a] world that has ceased to be a homeland or to contain homelands for modern man" (Axelos 1976, 48). A subject free from communal embedment, *unbedingt*.

So, in the rule of technology, the thingly character of things gets "obliterated," to use Marx's expression. Now, such obliteration, here more akin to oblivion (a kinship some philologists trace back to a common etymology), is to be understood as a covering up (λήθη) of those "other possibilities of revealing" *Ge-stell* "drives out," that is, conceals. And yet this cannot be an entirely consummate concealment. For much like in Marx's position—whereby the negation of things still in a sense preserves their distinctive actuality, even if only to allow their exchange as equivalents, *x*A = *y*B (not the same as an exchange of identicals, *x*A = *x*A)—Heidegger too acknowledges that things *as* things, albeit languidly, somehow still endure: "In the age [...] of the unconditional pressing of beings toward being used up in consumption, the world has become an unworld in that Being does presence, but without really reigning. As what is real, beings are real. There are effects everywhere, and nowhere is there a worldling of the world and yet, although forgotten, there is still Being" (Heidegger 1993, 84).[xi] And yet, although obliterated, there is still Quality—even if *impoverished*.

Now, if the experience of productive wealth entails the very impoverishment of experience, one might begin to wonder: Is there a way to counteract this, a way to enrich experience once again, if it ever was? I don't know, but no facile answers should be trusted. Here I shall be content to just comment on what Heidegger seems to be gesturing. The text to which Lacoue-Labarthe writes the *Présentation*, Heidegger's *Poverty,* begins with a reference to one of Hölderlin's guiding *dictums*: "For us everything is concentrated upon the spiritual, we have become poor in order to become rich." Does this mean that Heidegger is betting on an *ascetic* way out? Perhaps. Alternatively, as we come closer to the end of "The Question Concerning Technology" we find another *dictum* by Hölderlin: "But where danger lies, also grows the saving power." In regards to this, Heidegger outlines his final remarks, thus suggesting a more convincing *aesthetic* way out:

> There was a time when it was not technology alone that bore the name τέχνη. Once that revealing that brings forth truth into the splendor of radiant appearing also was called τέχνη. Once there was a time when the bringing-forth of the true into the beautiful was called τέχνη. And the ποίησις of the fine arts also was called τέχνη. [...] Essential reflection upon technology and decisive confrontation with it must happen in a realm that is, on the one hand, akin to the essence of technology and, on the other, fundamentally different from it. Such realm is art. (Heidegger 1977, 34–35)

Ars, the Latin for τέχνη, is thus akin to technology, even if it is also at odds with it in significant respects—while one can only beget ersatz, the other produces the irreproducible; while on the one hand there are "the amorphous formations of technical production" (Heidegger 2002, 218), on the other occurs a revealing of the forms to a higher degree. But we are told both the danger and the saving power grow from the same site. Perhaps

Heidegger's poietic alternative is not so different from that of Marx: for the overthrow of the bourgeoisie, or the capitalists, amounts to the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production as a whole. Though this might seem far-fetched, the truth is that for both thinkers the current (and *dangerous*) situation is only maintained by a certain way of producing, of technicity. And if one is to follow Hölderlin, only a different way of producing, another kind of technicity, can bring about change to this situation, *save us* from it. But this on condition that the world comes to be wholly other—perhaps starting by letting it be *a* world, that is, one that is allowed *to world*.[xii]

Conclusions

A certain epigraph presides over this study. It says that any commentary must not only gather the substance from a text, but also add something of its own to it, from its substance; yet this supplement must be such that it encounters the same thing which the explicated text is meditating on, although not exactly in the same way. In writing this paper, I have tried to comply with that hermeneutical maxim, with the difference that here such a "supplement" has not been provided by me, but rather by each of the discursive sets in question: Marx's *Capital* has been such to Heidegger's writings on technology, and vice versa.

My general argument has been that there is a common concern over the impoverishment of the qualitative consistency of things that occurs under the sway of capitalism or modern technology. This first led us to read *Capital* through an ontological framework so as to situate it in the same philosophical register as Heidegger. We thus found in it the process by which things are reduced to value, losing in turn their thingly character. Where the commodity is, the thing is not—not at least *as thing*. I then approached Heidegger's concern over technology and things as a possible correlate to our reading of

Capital. The same kind of losing was thus attested, that is, so far as the thing is conceived as delimited and technology as that which does away with limits—as the unbounded production that results in the production of the boundless.

Overall it seems to me that Marx does a better job at describing the intricacies of the system whereby things are dissolved, while Heidegger shows a more acute awareness about the extent and consequences of such dissolution. But precisely here lies the advantage of reading them side by side: not only in that it demonstrates their intellectual kinship, but also in that it complements and expands each of their arguments.

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[i] Dominic Griffiths (2017, 487) even argues that such an allusion might actually have been a calculated gesture, a way to play it safe at a time when its author faced accusations of Nazism in a Germany over which the Soviet army loomed.

[ii] Such is the title to a collection of essays by Herbert Marcuse (2005) put together by Wolin and Abromeit. To name just a few other influential “Heideggerian Marxists” (at least the ones I know better): Louis Althusser, Kostas Axelos and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe in the French (and for Axelos even German) scholarship; Felipe Martínez Marzoa and Bolívar Echeverría in the Spanish and Latin-American one; and Fredric Jamson in the English-speaking literature, to which Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala have also contributed their part. For an overview of some of the different strands of the Heideggerian reception of Marx, see Pawling (2010) and Royo (2018)─of the latter author’s paper, especially the first section.

[iii] Such is the stance taken by Lotz (2013), Martínez Matías (2014) and Wainwright (2015). A more thorough account of this is to be found in Martínez Marzoa ([1983] 2018), esp. chapter VII.

[iv] Still, Wainwright (2015) has recently offered a suggestive comparative interpretation of *Capital* and *Being and Time*.

[v] For an expounding of Marx’s often-implicit theory of time, see Artemy Magun (2010).

[vi] Indeed, none of these terms are registered in *The Heidegger Concordance* (Jaran and Perrin 2013). It was Professor Thomas Sheehan who in an interview pointed to such an omission (Harrison 2013, 55:05).

[vii] I would argue that such twofold thematization is no coincidence, not only in view of the content of some of his lectures (e.g. “*Bauen Wohnen Denken*” or “*Die Frage nach der Technik*”), but also because of the no less significant fact of their original joint publication

within the same volumes (*Vorträge und Aufsätze* for the examples mentioned; but this also holds for the *Bremer und Freiburger Vorträge*, which comprise lectures such as "*Das Ding*" and "*Das Ge-Stell*," among others). An English-speaking reader might be more prone to overlook this mutual—and structural—belonging, as these works became accessible for the first time (and in some significant cases still to date) in a fragmented fashion, collected in "thematically oriented" editions (in any case responsibility of the editors and translators, not of the author himself) around topics such as art and poetry in some instances, and technology in others. Yet this introduces a division in what originally was intended as a unity. For the technology and the thing are, I believe, two sides of the same coin. For a discussion of the problems with the fragmented and partial publication of the *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, see Frank Schalow (2002).

[viii] For a study on how this idea informs Heidegger's philosophy in general, not only the texts from the later period but also those of the "fundamental ontology," see my Martínez Zarazúa (2020).

[ix] Echeverría even identifies "mundo de la vida," the lifeworld, with "mundo de los valores de uso," the world of use values (2016, 112), thus acknowledging the full scope of that which comes to be denied, as already seen in relation to Marx, and soon to be seen in relation to Heidegger.

[x] Since "*Ge-stell*" has been rendered into English in many ways—sometimes with an equivalent word, such as "Enframing" or "Framework," and others with terms that emphasize its German etymological components, as in "Positionality"—I prefer to leave the term untranslated so as to facilitate some degree of compatibility among the various existing translations.

[xi] In a similar vein, Günter Figal argues—rightly, I believe, although he intends this as a critical remark against Heidegger—that one should "disengage oneself from the simple

alternatives: *technology or world* [...]. Even if technology is universal, there is *not only* technology. [...] Only in contrast to the non-technological can the technological be recognized as such. [...] Something that is non-technological in this way is a thing. Things, *as things*, are non-technological" (Figal 2015, 365–366). I just find it strange that Figal believes to be saying this "in opposition to Heidegger," when it is Heidegger himself who specifies that technology, though totalizing, is not total; meaning that it concurs with other possibilities of revealing, even if it tends to conceal them. In addition to the excerpt from Heidegger just quoted, consider what he writes in the Epilogue to "The Thing" (1971, 183): "In the destiny of Being there is never a mere sequence of things one after another: now *Gestell*, then world and thing; rather, there is always a passing by and simultaneity of the early and the late."

[xii] I wonder if some of the reflections in the context of current debates about the disenchantment and reenchantment of the world, such as those of Charles Taylor (2011) and Akeel Bilgrami (2010), as well as, in the conjuncture of Marxism and feminism, Silvia Federici's *Re-Enchanting The World: Feminism and the Politics of the Commons* (2019), might better illuminate this point.