

Heidegger, Wordsworth, and the Anecological Nature of Technology

György Fogarasi

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2676-8777>

HJEAS

ABSTRACT

Heidegger's essays about technology ("The Age of the World Picture" and "The Question Concerning Technology") seem radical in the way they push the notion of technics not only beyond mere instrumentality but also beyond human agency and civilization. But they also seem to harbor a certain nostalgia when it comes to a historical division between premodern and modern paradigms. In a similar fashion, Wordsworth's late sonnets on the impact of the railway ("On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway" and "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways") seem to show signs of a thought-provoking ambivalence between an escapist attitude and a more radical thought of technology, conceived uncannily as an "offspring" of nature. The minute reading of these texts (both *with* and *against* their authors) might have far-reaching implications for the conceptualization of an "anecological" notion of both nature and technology, one which no longer relies on, and even precedes, the received notion of the "household" (*oikos*) as an economy based on balance, but allows for asymmetry, irreversibility, or incalculable mutation. (GYF)

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One might feel tempted to reduce the question of *techné*, technology or technics, with all its pros and cons, to that of a historical period, as if it were an era of human history, or an evolutionary epoch, or, on an even larger scale, a period in the history of our planet that one could call the "technocene" (a notion patterned after, though in no way synonymous with, the anthropocene or the capitalocene, or any of the other "-cenes" that have recently emerged in critical discourse).¹ Within the literary and philosophical tradition of romanticism, that periodization often appears in the customary form of an opposition between nature and technics, with an emphasis falling either on the bright future to be brought by technological innovations, or on the anxiety about the potentially dire consequences of

modern technology. The uncritical hailing of technological development (the cult of Prometheus) is just as much part of the romantic legacy as the critique of the “modern Prometheus” and the nostalgic longing for, or the elegiac mourning over, an intact (or almost-intact) natural state. A respect for the laws of nature, as well as the effort to preserve nature’s treasures and sustain some kind of idyllic balance, are part of a romantic ambition that in many ways prefigures later nature conservation efforts, or the current discourse of “sustainability” and “renewables.” It foreshadows the modern longing for a balance that would guarantee stability.

The notion of such a balance was imported from economic thought (with its ideal of a fiscal balance of income and expenditure) into the postromantic science of “ecology,” founded by the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel in 1866, to become part and parcel of the recent critical tendency that has come to be called “ecocriticism.” According to Haeckel’s original definition, ecology means “the body of knowledge of the economy, of the household of animal organisms [*die Lehre von der Oeconomie, von dem Haushalt der thierischen Organismen*]” (Haeckel 365).² In that specifically zoological perspective, ecology encompasses all the relations of the animal to its organic and inorganic environment (involving both friendly and inimical relations), all the “complex interrelations” that make up “the conditions of the struggle for existence” (365). This definition is quoted, indirectly via multiple mediating sources, by Jonathan Bate in *Romantic Ecology* (1991) (Bate 36), a book that can be considered as one of the early milestones of ecocriticism in literary studies, which remarkably picks romanticism and, more specifically, the works of Wordsworth as the prime predecessors of ecocritical thinking.

When it comes to “the nature of technology,” one might all too quickly subscribe to the above dichotomic scheme of nature versus technology. However, the phrase offers at least three readings: 1) One might conveniently take it as a figurative expression referring to the specifics of technology, its operational logic, its mode of existence or its *essence* (that is, its “nature” in a metaphorical sense). 2) Attached to that, but with a slight modification, one could also take the possessive structure literally, as if the phrase referred to nature as something actually *possessed* (dominated or expropriated) by technology. 3) A wholly different direction of thought emerges, however, if one understands the phrase in a less usual manner, as a reference to the natural origin, natural character, or even *naturalness*, of technics, as if the expression defined technology *as* nature. Each of these three senses will appear in the commentary I am about to

provide on two of Martin Heidegger's essays and two of William Wordsworth's sonnets.

Apart from their obvious differences (in terms of history, culture, or language), the works of both Heidegger and Wordsworth can serve as outstanding vantage points for a reconsideration of the question of technology, the relation between technics and the world, technics and nature, or technics and life (human, animal, plant, or other). Their joint reading has, in fact, become a familiar gesture at least since Geoffrey Hartman's famous essay, "Wordsworth Before Heidegger" (1987). Nor is an ecocritical parallelism between Heidegger and Wordsworth utterly without precedent. Recently, Louise Economides has taken steps in that direction in her book *The Ecology of Wonder in Romantic and Postmodern Literature* (2016).³ But although her work attempts to provide a fresh and critical reading of both authors, she seems to give too much credit to certain Heideggerian binarisms (to be discussed below), wherefore neither her reading of Wordsworth, nor the ethical standpoint she builds around the notion of "wonder" seems well-established (Economides 33, 154–55, 161).⁴

Heidegger's discussion of the *essence* of technology (most importantly, in his essay on "The Question Concerning Technology," but also in the preceding Bremen Lectures, or in the earlier essay on "The Age of the World Picture") seems radical in the way it pushes the workings of technics beyond human agency. But, as we shall see, it also seems to harbor a certain nostalgia when it comes to a historical division between the premodern (ancient or medieval) paradigm of technics (associated with romantic landscape poetry) and its modern counterpart, which aims to *possess* or dominate nature, turning its resources into a standing-reserve positioned to be at the service of humans. In a similar fashion, Wordsworth's late sonnets on the impact of modern technology seem to show signs of a thought-provoking ambivalence between critical reconsideration and nostalgic longing. But they can also perhaps take us a step further. While his poetic response to the technological invasion of the Lake District (his sonnet "On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway") seems all too romantic in its longing for premodern homeliness, in another piece (on "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways"), he takes a different stand and becomes the advocate of technics, conceived this time uncannily, in the face of poetic accusations, as an "offspring" of nature, and to that extent, accepted both with its hoped-for inventions and its horrendous aspects as something embarrassingly *natural*.

A minute reading of these texts (both with and against their authors) might have far-reaching implications for the conceptualization of an “anecological” notion of both nature and technology, one which no longer relies on, rather precedes, the received notion of the “household” (*oikos*) as an “economy” based on balance, and allows for asymmetry, irreversibility, and incalculable mutation. Conceived along the Derridean rethinking of the gift as something radically beyond economic exchange and therefore deeply “aneconomic” (Derrida 7), an “anecological” conception of nature (or of technology) would not just precede ecology as an established discipline but would also precede eco-logy as the very logic of the “eco-.”⁵

Technology as “Positioning” (Heidegger)

The question of technology is present throughout Heidegger’s oeuvre, from his multiple translations and interpretations of the first stasimon of *Antigone*, to the recurrent readings of Hölderlin’s poems “The Rhine” (“Der Rhein”) and “The Ister” (“Der Ister”), to the *Black Notebooks* (*Schwarze Hefte*), or to the late interviews given to *Spiegel* or ZDF. One of the most significant discussions of the topic takes place in the mid-career essay “The Age of the World Picture” (“Die Zeit des Weltbildes,” 1938), where Heidegger claims that the age of modernity did not start with the industrial revolution but had started already with the emergence of scientific thought (in the works of Descartes and Newton) in the seventeenth century, and that the most important trait of that mode of thinking is its observant or spectatorial relation to the world as “picture” (*Bild*). In earlier ages, “man is the one who is looked upon by beings” (Heidegger, “The Age” 68; “Die Zeit” 90): during the Middle Ages, this meant God’s panoptic gaze, while in antiquity, it meant the gaze of the gods of Greek mythology. With the advent of renaissance humanism, however, an anthropocentric attitude emerges, accompanied with an anthropological interest as well as a scientific research interest in the world, due to which the world becomes a stage, a scene of events, while man himself becomes the spectator of all that happens around and within him. The world is subordinated to a monitoring human gaze: “The fundamental event of modernity is the conquest of the world as picture” (“The Age” 71; “Die Zeit” 94). A sign of this is the pressing forward of “the gigantic” (*das Riesige*) either in the field of atomic physics, or in the form of new means of transportation or communication. “The gigantic presses forward in a form which seemingly makes it disappear: in the annihilation of great distances by the airplane, in the setting before us of foreign and remote worlds in their everydayness

produced at will by the flick of a switch through the radio” (“The Age” 71, translation modified; “Die Zeit” 95). In sum, modern science as “research” (*Forschung*) is, for Heidegger, “the unlimited violence [*Gewalt*] of calculating, planning, and breeding all things” (“The Age” 71, translation modified; “Die Zeit” 94).

Another essay by Heidegger, “The Question Concerning Technology” (“Die Frage nach der Technik”), discusses the problem of technology even more openly. It is directly based upon a lecture given in Munich in 1953, but it goes back to a lecture series delivered in Bremen a few years earlier, in 1949. The Bremen Lectures, titled *Insight Into That Which Is* (*Einblick in das was ist*) originally consisted of four lectures (“The Thing,” “Positioning,” “The Danger,” “The Turn”), the second and third of which came to be combined later into the essay titled “The Question Concerning Technology,” generally considered as Heidegger’s most famous engagement with the problem of technology.⁶ For our present purposes, only the first half of the essay is relevant, the portion that was developed from the lecture on “Positioning” (*Das Ge-Stell*, translated by Adrew J. Mitchell as “Positionality”), for that is where the question of technology is under minute scrutiny. Right at the start, Heidegger formulates the popular conception of technology: on the one hand, it is a means to an end, on the other, it is a human activity. He therefore calls that customary view “the instrumental and anthropological definition of technology” (“The Question” 5; “Die Frage” 8) and sets out to examine the tenability of that conception. He considers the two components one by one, starting with the instrumental side and then examining the anthropological aspect.

Although Heidegger’s stance is obviously critical, he does not engage in a confrontational polemic. In the discussion of instrumentality, he prefers a rhetoric of gentle displacements. These displacements (associative leaps, in fact) start out from the notion of technology as a means to an end, leading first to technology as the cause of an effect, then to technology as *aition*, i.e., “indebting” (*Verschulden*) and “occasioning” (*Ver-an-lassen*), to technology as *poiēsis*, i.e., “bringing-forth” (*Her-vor-bringen*), and ultimately to technology as *alētheia*, i.e. truth in the sense of “revealing” (*Entbergen*). That is how Heidegger comes to the partial conclusion that “[t]echnology is therefore no mere means. Technology is a way of revealing” (“The Question” 12; “Die Frage” 15). The implication here is that technological production (*poiēsis* or making) is a process of bringing-forth or bringing-to-light (revealing) the hidden potentials of nature, of certain forms and

materials, for the purpose of attaining specific ends. That is how technology as a means to an end is also a way of revealing.

For us here, however, it is the second part of the discussion that is of real importance. That is where Heidegger examines the anthropological element, the notion that technology is a human activity. This time he prefers a different rhetorical procedure. He does not develop an argument based on classical philosophic idioms but provides a loose series of premodern and modern examples to elaborate his point. These examples almost exclusively come from the world of energetics, from the so-called energy sector, including the power of the wind, the sun, and the water, as well as the utilization of coal and uranium, but he also includes agriculture and the food industry, as they too serve feeding or energizing purposes. All these examples are meant to support the Heideggerian thesis that modern technology can be clearly demarcated from premodern (rural, handicraft) technology both in its mentality and in its practices. His fundamental claim is that premodern and modern technologies can be differentiated based on the two different versions of revealing. While the premodern paradigm follows the logic of *poiēsis* or bringing-forth (which was discussed in the earlier portion of the essay), modern technology is essentially different in its relation to nature: it forces nature to provide energy that can in turn be transformed, transported, accumulated, distributed, and (later, elsewhere) consumed according to human needs. For Heidegger, none of these efforts are present in premodern cultures. For lack of space, I will confine myself to just two examples involving renewable energy resources (as we would call them today): the utilization of wind and water power.

Right at the beginning of his presentation of modern technology in contrast to its premodern counterpart, Heidegger brings the example of the windmill:

And yet the revealing that holds sway throughout modern technology does not unfold into a bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*] in the sense of *poiēsis*. The revealing that rules in modern technology is a challenging [*Herausfordern*], which puts to nature the unreasonable demand that it supply energy that can be extracted and stored *as such* [*als solche*]. But does this not hold true for the old windmill as well? No. Its sails do indeed turn in the wind; they are left entirely to the wind's blowing. But the windmill does not unlock energy from the air currents in order to store it. ("The Question" 14, translation slightly modified; "Die Frage" 15)

Although the image of the wind turbine as the modern counterpart of the windmill remains implicit, the passage is clearly based upon a harsh contrast between the two. Or rather, the stake of the passage is exactly to produce a contrast between them. Obviously, in calm weather, neither windmills, nor wind turbines rotate. Since, however, turbines are able to transform kinetic energy into electric energy, which appears to Heidegger as a pure form of energy⁷—it is energy “as such” (*als solche* being emphasized by italics in the German original)—modern man is able to transport and accumulate it, postponing its consumption to later times and distant places. Thus, a wind turbine is able to produce energy that can be used at any time and any place, regardless of the actual blowing (or not blowing) of the wind. Modern technology creates energy security: it accumulates energy so as to ensure its availability under any circumstances, that is, to make it disposable, or orderable. That is what the windmill is incapable of. All of this results in a radical change in the relation to nature: modern man no longer just asks, or hopes, for energy, relying on it when and where nature provides it, but demands energy service from nature, as if by command.

But there are at least two aspects Heidegger does not consider here. On the one hand, he does not seem to be bothered by the fact that the accumulation of electric energy (and to a certain extent, of all kinds of energy) is extremely problematic, given the low efficiency of charged batteries (even today, in the years of a bumpy transition to electric vehicles). That is why large amounts of electric energy are normally stored in the form of gravitational energy by the pumping up of water levels in reservoirs, which is, ironically, equivalent to the reverse use of hydroelectric plants. And since the stock of such stored-up energy is always finite, it can actually run short (if the wind does not blow for a longer while), so it does not guarantee absolute energy security.⁸ Nor does Heidegger seem to notice, on the other hand, that in the case of the windmill, although the power of the wind is consumed immediately on the spot, what it is used for is, in most cases, the grinding of grains into flour, which is both a process of energy transformation and concentration, by which energy cells that condense the powers of the sun, the rain, and the soil are being turned into powder. And this has been done, in ancient cultures as well, with the purpose of transportation and accumulation: the flour is later taken to bakeries or homes, where it gets stored in pantries, until it takes the form of some bakery product that is itself transportable and storable, and indeed lasts for long, according to folk tales at least. Nor is this tendency of food (or energy) accumulation limited to human civilization (whether archaic or

modern), as apparently other life forms (animals and plants alike) also store up nutrients in their homes or in their own bodies. Thus, accumulation is not an exclusively human activity, let alone a late achievement of human civilization. It can also be an instinctual animal behavior, or even a vegetative process, the origin of which fades into the nonliving world.

The other, more frequently quoted but surprisingly little interpreted example is that of the modern hydroelectric plant. This example resembles the previous one in that Heidegger again suggests a contrast between premodern and modern practices and he again provides us only one of the two poles. This time it is the modern side. In fact, there is something that appears on the premodern side as well, but it is by no means a watermill, as one would expect, but something totally different, an “old wooden bridge” (*alte Holzbrücke*):

The hydroelectric plant [*Wasserkraftwerk*] is set into the current of the Rhine. It sets the Rhine to supplying its hydraulic pressure, which then sets the turbines turning. This turning sets those machines in motion whose thrust sets going the electric current for which the long-distance power station and its network of cables are set up to dispatch electricity. In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely, a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station. (Heidegger, “The Question” 16; “Die Frage” 16)

The long interlocking process that unravels from this description (provided by the second and third sentences, which themselves form a single interlocking sentence in the German original) presents us the river as the source of a chain of energy production and as something of an energy supplier itself. But the description also involves a reversal: it is not the hydroelectric plant that is “built” (*gebaut*) into the river, rather it is the river that is “dammed up” (*verbaut*) into the hydroelectric plant. To understand the logic of this reversal, we need to trace the role played here by the old wooden bridge, which enters the scene instead of the watermill. We can do so by finding the basis of the comparison, that minimal similarity which allows for the poles (the bridge and the power plant) to be opposed to each other. The description refers to the placement of these infrastructures: they both cross the river from bank to bank. This specific placement produces

the difference between these two and the watermill, since the watermill is located on one side of the river only. That is why it might seem practical for Heidegger to compare the hydroelectric plant with the old wooden bridge, as both are built across the river.⁹ Their difference lies in the fact that the latter does not want anything from the river (since its purpose is not energy-related but transportation), while the hydroelectric plant indeed wants, or even demands, something from the current: energy supply. And since it formulates this demand by use of force, by imposing itself upon the river, obstructing its flow, just like a bandit or highwayman (Heidegger will shortly speak of its “monstrousness”),¹⁰ the passage can rightly claim that it is the river that is built into the power plant, rather than the reverse.

But while the image of the bridge might elucidate the violent character of the power plant, it does not explain why that bridge needs to be an “old” and “wooden” structure. Any bridge could in fact play the same role, since even the newest bridges that are made of the most modern materials want nothing from the rivers they overarch, even if they are standing in them with their pillars. But if that is the case, then the historical contrast suggested by Heidegger between premodern and modern technology becomes unfounded. And not only because, if we take the example of bridges, even the most modern ones commit no violence against rivers, but because, if we think of the diverse forms of the utilization of waterpower, an element of violence might very well be present in quite early solutions. Take the example of the watermill of the tiny village of Torockó (Rimetea) in Transylvania: it is a so-called “overshot” type, whose wheel the creek that has been channeled into a flume is forced to drive in its entirety, so, in that sense, the current is built into the mill, just as the Rhine is built into the modern hydroelectric plant. The difference between them is merely one of degree: it is not due to a different mindset, but to the smaller size of the creek and the specific raw materials and construction technologies available in a particular culture. The watermill of Torockó is a bandit, just like the hydroelectric plant on the Rhine. Their opposite is the usual type of watermill that lives in the public mind, one that does not formulate demands but stands on one bank of the river only, as a beggar on the roadside. The river is not forced in its entirety to give donations but can also pass without giving. And that is exactly how the wind turbine in Heidegger’s previous example keeps begging, for nor is the wind current forced in its entirety to pass through it. And if one also considers the example of ship mills, which used to be anchored, in several rows, in the middle of rivers, where the current was strongest (on the river Tisza at

Szeged, 80 or 90 ship mills were operating around the mid-nineteenth century), it becomes clear that we do not have two poles, in fact. Ship mills represent a peculiar halfway type between watermills placed on one bank and hydroelectric plants connecting both banks. Therefore, the opposition of premodern and modern technology is undermined in multiple ways by Heidegger's own examples. No wonder he does not spend too much time with them. By speaking of an "old" and "wooden" bridge, he attempts, perhaps unconsciously, to conceal precisely these historical entanglements, thereby making readers overlook any complications that might jeopardize his historicizing scheme.¹¹ As we have just seen, however, Heidegger's examples work against his dichotomic historical periodization and uncover the nostalgic tendency in his recurrent effort to contrast the premodern paradigm (modeled after ancient Greece) with the monsters of modernity, even though elsewhere, in other essays or various interviews, Heidegger keeps denying the accusation of maintaining an anti-technological mentality and he might indeed mean it when he repeatedly claims to be open toward contemporary innovations and to strictly avoid all forms of nostalgia.¹²

The essay itself tries to grasp technology in its modern form by spelling out its non-technological essence. For Heidegger, modern technology turns the world (including both natural and human resources) into "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*). He calls that transformation "positioning" (*Ge-stell*) in the sense of installation or emplacement and considers it as "the essence of modern technology" ("The Question" 20; "Die Frage" 21).¹³ Technology is not simply a means to an end, but a revealing, as far as it aims to utilize the hidden potentials of nature. In its modern form, this revealing becomes violent, it becomes a positioning that forcefully exploits those natural powers. Although humans actively participate in the process of positioning and even appear to initiate and dominate the whole process, technology, according to Heidegger, is never simply a human activity, either. Humans only act reactively, in response to *Geschichte* [a historical call] or *Geschick* [sending], as if they were completing a historical mission. Thus, their actions always take place within that larger historical mechanism, over which they have no control, and by which they themselves are devoured or infinitely overwhelmed.

The paragraph of the hydroelectric plant culminates precisely in that superhuman dimension of technology, as its focus finally shifts to the theme of modern tourism. By way of an allusion to Hölderlin (which is a habitual gesture in Heidegger), this time it is romantic landscape poetry that appears as modern technology's archaic counterpart.¹⁴

In order that we may even remotely consider the monstrousness that reigns here, let us ponder for a moment the contrast that speaks out of the two titles, “The Rhine” as dammed up into the *power works* [*verbaut in das Kraftwerk*], and “The Rhine” as uttered out of the *artwork* [*gesagt aus dem Kunstwerk*], in Hölderlin’s hymn by that name. But, it will be replied, the Rhine is still a river in the landscape, is it not? Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by a vacation industry [*bestellbares Objekt der Besichtigung durch eine Reisegesellschaft, die eine Urlaubsindustrie dorthin bestellt hat*]. (Heidegger, “The Question” 16–17, translation slightly modified; “Die Frage” 16–17)

What is of utmost importance here is that, according to Heidegger, the one who orders is himself being ordered. For, while the customer of a touristic service (the tour group) orders a visual experience (the landscape as spectacle) from the service provider (a travel agency), that same customer turns out to have been ordered by the very vacation industry that seemed to be at his service. Thus, through what seems like a text-book example of a master/slave dialectical inversion, the one ordering becomes the one ordered (say, in the service of the capital that operates the vacation industry).¹⁵ Heidegger intends to counterbalance this multidirectional network of positionings by an example of romantic landscape poetry, alluding to a poem by Hölderlin, which features the Rhine both as a boy wandering blindly and as a father taking care of gardens and children alike (*Vater Rhein*). But modern landscape tourism (the so-called “nature industry”) has developed precisely from the literary and artistic practices of romanticism.¹⁶ Therefore, romanticism and its art are not so much a destroyed past or a counterpole of the modern industrial effort to position nature as a spectacle. Romanticism is much rather the germ of the modern vacation industry. To investigate this more closely and to consider the ensuing complications, we need to switch at this point to the writings of William Wordsworth. As we shall see, his poetry and prose does not only prefigure the dialectical inversion implied in Heidegger’s view of the leisure industry (and the network of positionings at work in modern technology), it also prefigures the Heideggerian claim for the sustainment of a premodern natural stability, while at the same time it undercuts that claim by a radical vision of technology as a descendant of nature.

Technology as nature's "lawful offspring" (Wordsworth)

Wordsworth is an exemplary representative of both romantic touring and tour guiding. According to the estimation of one of his contemporaries, by the 1830s (that is, by the time he turned sixty) the poet might have probably wandered some 175 to 180,000 miles (Bate 10). The intensity of his tours is well indicated by the parameters of his 1790 journey to France, Switzerland, Italy, and Germany, made in the company of his Cambridge fellow student Robert Jones. Setting off from Calais on the day before the first anniversary of the French revolution (13 June 1790) and relying on minimal financial support, they covered several thousand kilometers on the Continent during three months, mostly on foot, occasionally on hard mountainous terrain, carrying a 10kg backpack and walking some 50 to 60 kilometers a day, of which more than 10 kilometers they covered still before breakfast (Simons 98; Meyenberg and Vincent). Their tour did not attain the classical form of a *Grand Tour*, which in the eighteenth century served as a customary mode of education for the youngsters of wealthy families from the aristocracy or bourgeoisie. Wordsworth and Jones did not travel by coach or on horseback, nor was the journey itself aimed at the study of the excavated ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, or of any of the other spectacles of the ancient Roman Empire. (For Wordsworth, that type of discovery came much later, in 1837.) Their aim was the act of hiking itself, the discovery of the immense scenery of the snowy ranges of the Alps so eloquently described in the travelogues of earlier visitors like Anthony Ashley Cooper (the third Earl of Shaftesbury), John Dennis, Thomas Gray, or Horace Walpole. That is why it was mostly a walking tour. What Wordsworth saw in faster modes of travel (by coach, or, later, by train) was not so much the advantages of speed, but rather the impossibility of immersing himself in the landscape and minutely observing the rushing spectacles and momentary impulses (Simons 106). In a sonnet written on occasion of a coach ride on the banks of the Rhine in 1820 ("In a Carriage, upon the Banks of the Rhine"), he expresses his wish to "muse," to "creep," to "halt at will," and simply to "gaze" at the scene.

Wordsworth's travels on the continent or in his home country (England, Wales, and Scotland) left a mark on his poetry through the years. As for his more personal home in the Lake District (in the North-Western part of England, at the intersection of Cumberland, Westmoreland, and Lancashire), he did not only depict it in his poems, but also gave descriptions in a popular travel guide, first published anonymously, then

with his name, initially attached to his sonnets, but later published as a separate volume. Continually extended and elaborated, this work was able to invite an ever-growing number of readers to visit the region segmented by lakes and mountains. It attained a final form in 1835, when its fifth edition, titled *A Guide through the District of the Lakes*, was published. Due to the diverse editions under various titles, however, it is usually referred to as the *Guide to the Lakes*. Wordsworth's tour guide was under constant improvement through the years, with its "directions and information for the tourist" ("A Guide" 221) always adjusted to the changing needs of the audience, involving more and more alternative routes, practical hints, estimated distances, and details both about the area's flora and fauna, and about the culture of its residents. In 1842, it came to be included in a larger travel book (*A Complete Guide*), which bore Wordsworth's name on the title page and reached five more editions by 1859, so even after Wordsworth's death in 1850, his guide intensively participated in arousing and serving touristic interest in the region.¹⁷ Since Wordsworth inserted portions of his own poetry into his descriptions, readers of the *Guide* would later look for the sources and settings of his poems in the landscape. After a while, such "literary tourists" began to call the district "Wordsworth country" (Yoshikawa, *William Wordsworth and the Invention of Tourism*, 13 and 77–95), and their touristic activity was gradually elevated to the religious solemnity of a pilgrimage (9). Initially, only Wordsworth's homes at Dove Cottage (in Grasmere) or at Rydal Mount (near Rydal) appeared as cultivated targets for visitors. His birthplace (Cockermouth) in the North and the site of his school years (Hawkshead) beyond Windermere Lake gained touristic attention only much later (7 and 99–146).

Yet, the popularity of the place and of the poet had its downside. Since the desirable seclusion of the Lake District also meant that it wasn't easily accessible, it soon became the target of railway improvements. Ironically, the same fuel (coal) that had saved the region's streams from installations of hydropower during Wordsworth's youth (much to his satisfaction, cf. Scott, *Fuel* 127) appeared now as the major energy resource for the steam engines that drove mass transportation closer and closer to his abode. The railway had earlier reached the South-Eastern border of the region at Kendal. Wordsworth himself used that line in his journeys to London. He first took a train in 1839 but considered purchasing shares in railway companies as early as 1825 (Yoshikawa, *William Wordsworth and Modern Travel* 40). However, he was strongly against the extension of the line from Kendal to Windermere. He was against the plan of the construction

and expressed his objections in a sonnet “On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway,” published in the *Morning Post* on 16 October 1844. In the wake of the poem, a heated debate ensued, with a clash between economic and social arguments, moral and natural, or regional and national aspects, or the interests of workers and those of manufacturers. Also, elitism packaged as nature conservation, or money hunting disguised as egalitarianism, were accusations entangling into each other in diverse ways.¹⁸ Still in the same year, Wordsworth attempted to spell out his arguments in two open letters, also published in the *Morning Post* on 11 and 20 December. In these letters, he included another new sonnet (beginning “Proud were ye, Mountains . . .”) to make his objections to the project better understood. But he also included an earlier piece, written some ten years before, in 1833, and published in 1835, in order to refute the accusation of nursing an anti-technological bias. The sonnet in question, “Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways,” had pictured the inventions in transportation with amazement and wonder. This earlier piece was repeatedly invoked by many of his readers during the debate. Back in August, before the eruption of the debate, it was even cited in its entirety by a news correspondent of the *Morning Post* in support of the construction, aiming to prevent the potential resistance of locals. Wordsworth’s two letters (including the sonnets) were revised and extended into a pamphlet in early 1845,¹⁹ but in the end, his protest proved unsuccessful. The Kendal and Windermere railway was opened in 1847. Ironically, one of the speakers at the opening ceremony quoted Wordsworth’s *Guide*, in support of the improvement, pointing to the idea that the Lake District was “a sort of national property,” in which everybody had a “right and interest” who had “an eye to perceive” and “a heart to enjoy” (“A Guide” 286; cf. Yoshikawa, *William Wordsworth and Modern Travel* 45).

The speaker of “On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway,” the sonnet which triggered the debate, poses a series of questions in the first eight lines of the poem, voicing his astonishment at the threat of “rash assault,” and then, in the remaining six lines, reacts (or responds) to the imminent danger of “ruthless change,” by addressing the Lake District and encouraging it to resist:

Is then no nook of English ground secure
 From rash assault? Schemes of retirement sown
 In youth, and ’mid the busy world kept pure
 As when their earliest flowers of hope were blown,

Must perish; – how can they this blight endure?
 And must he too the ruthless change bemoan
 Who scorns a false utilitarian lure
 'Mid his paternal fields at random thrown?
 Baffle the threat, bright Scene, from Orrest-head
 Given to the pausing traveller's rapturous glance:
 Plead for thy peace, thou beautiful romance
 Of nature; and, if human hearts be dead,
 Speak, passing winds; ye torrents, with your strong
 And constant voice, protest against the wrong.
 (Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* 224; cf. *Prose Works* 2: 323)

Modern technology appears here as an intrusive force that endangers peace and security. It presents a threat to the possibility of hiding or to the fulfillment of the youngster's secret desire for future "retirement." The text recalls this by way of a reference to the childhood custom of making a secret wish and blowing the dandelion seeds. The speaker (presenting himself in third person) looks at the false lure of utilitarianism with disdain and rejects the passive toleration ("bemoaning") of technological aggression. Then, turning to the landscape, he urges it (first the "bright Scene," "the beautiful romance / Of nature," then the stormy winds and rushing torrents) to protest.

Basically, two accusations were formulated against the poet based on the sonnet: the charge of anti-poor elitism and the charge of anti-technological conservatism. In the two letters, Wordsworth tried to defend himself against these accusations: in the first one, he reacted mostly to the charge of neglecting the poor, while in the second letter, he also addressed the charge of hindering technological innovation. Those who accused him of an anti-poor mentality read the sonnet as an expression of despicability, and exclusion of, city workers who would love to go for an excursion in the countryside. For them, the sonnet was a clear indication of Wordsworth's wish to protect his privilege of having access to the Lake District. In his first letter, Wordsworth responded to this reading in multiple ways: firstly, by claiming that the Lake District was already easily accessible to anyone: to Kendal, by train, and from there, by coach (*Prose Works* 2: 326); secondly, by pointing out that the railway improvers and the manufacturers who supported the improvement were in fact not representing the interests of the working class but were just trying to make more profit by exploiting and dehumanizing those whom they seemed to patronize; thirdly, by claiming that the poorer or less-educated classes would

need different opportunities for leisure, namely, outdoor resorts closer to their homes, which they could therefore visit more frequently; and fourthly, by warning that the appearance of large crowds would destroy the Lake District, which could thus no longer provide what tourists are looking for when they visit the area.²⁰

Among those who accused him of neglecting the poor, Wordsworth mentions speculators in first place (before mentioning technocratic scientists insensitive to environmental effects, or benevolent but misguided representatives of workers' interests), because all they do is a trickery: they disguise their "mischief" (their selfish profit-oriented intent) as a philanthropic gesture, an act of practical helpfulness (*Prose Works* 2: 332). That is what the sonnet calls a "false utilitarian lure." Wordsworth assumes that the directors and shareholders of railway companies, just like the local innkeepers, would try to attract the lower classes from distant cities with a variety of entertainments, such as wrestling matches, horse or boat races, pot-houses, and beer-shops (2: 332). In fact, the aim of all these attractive services is not to be of practical use to workers, but to put workers in service on a heightened level. That is why Wordsworth considers the principle of utility as a lure and that is also why he speaks of utilitarianism as "a mask for cupidity and gambling speculations" (2: 338). He identifies this trickery in the devious logic of organizing massive excursions. For, according to Wordsworth's knowledge, manufacturers entertain the thought of "sending, at their own expense, large bodies of their workmen, by railway, to the banks of Windermere" (2: 335). By being transported *en masse* according to a strict timetable, itself part of a time grid made available by the shift to fossil fuel (Scott, *Fuel* 121 and 153), people are turned into mere cargo that can be offloaded at the destination for leisure. Such a process degrades or dehumanizes workers, depriving them of their dignity, since in situations like these, individuals do not act freely but unconsciously succumb to the directions of a higher power. What Wordsworth calls "true dignity" resides in the free decision of the individual, his "personal independence," his free movement, his ability to tour alone (or in the company of his family or friends), which, for Wordsworth, would only be granted if working hours were reduced and workers had enough income to afford trips for themselves, to visit destinations of their own choice, such as natural resorts that need not be far away from their homes, for the emphasis should not fall on distance but on the frequency of such excursions and on the duration of their stay (*Prose Works* 2: 329). With the planned and massive taking of workers as

manageable human resources for excursions, leisure itself becomes programmed into the production process, almost as in Disney's anti-Nazi satire a hundred years later (*The Fuehrer's Face*, 1943), where the holiday vacation that is supposed to provide relaxation from the monotonous work by the production line is itself "produced" on the spot, condensed into a single moment, with a landscape painting of the Alps rolling down instantaneously and leaving just a few seconds of rest for the worker—a scene reminiscent of the factory experiment of mechanized feeding in Charlie Chaplin's 1936 classic, *Modern Times*. Wordsworth performs a dialectical inversion that prefigures Heidegger's brief but poignant remark on the vacation industry by showing tourists (city workers) as slaves of their vacation service-providers (manufacturers) who themselves act according to the laws of a higher power (capital).

But, for Wordsworth, the mass tourism fostered by railway improvements also has another drawback: it destroys the resort it targets. The "molestation of cheap trains pouring out their hundreds" annihilates precisely the beauty and tranquility that makes the Lake District so attractive, a feature that Wordsworth himself considers, thereby partially succumbing to the logic of the market, the "staple" of the region (*Prose Works* 2: 331, 326). If "swarms of pleasure-hunters" or "pilgrims of fashion" flooded the Lake District, the landscape would be destroyed much like the drum was destroyed by the child who tried to find the source of the sound (2: 338, 340, 331). The massive hunt for spectacles destroys the scene. No wonder Wordsworth has reservations using the very word "scenery," as he speaks about the recent relish for "choice and picturesque natural scenery (a poor and mean word. . .)." In that passage of the letter, he provides a little history of culture, or indeed, of taste, to account for the emergence of a demand for picturesque views (2: 326–28). He shows how, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, the relation to nature was gradually transformed, how the terrifying scenes of nature became amazingly attractive, and how, as a consequence, the prime criterion of security, among the many aspects of home building, was supplanted by that of a view onto the picturesque beauties of the natural environment.²¹ Wordsworth writes of all this in a positive tone, as a cultural progression, for that is how his own favored practices of living in the proximity of nature and touring the country could come into being. But the reduction of nature to a mere spectacle brings with it the danger that the spectacle will later become an object of both production and commerce, it will become a commodity, and with the industrialization of these processes, it will soon

undergo immense massification. No matter how much Wordsworth emphasizes the importance of attentiveness and slowness in a true tour, along with his own contention that “the very word [‘tourist’] precludes the notion of a railway” (2: 326), all this is in vain, if that tourist is fundamentally a person seeking picturesque views, spectacles which, in turn, are circulated as mass commodities.

For Wordsworth, nature should not be reduced to a spectacle for consumption. Ironically, however, he himself has played and is playing a role in that massive commodification. The title of his *Guide* had already presented the Lake District to his readers as an object for inspection, a landscape, or “scenery.” The sonnet that erupted the debate also strengthens that spectatorial attitude, when it addresses the endangered surroundings of Windermere Lake as a “bright Scene,” which is “from Orrest-head / Given to the pausing traveller’s rapturous glance.” Thus, as some scholars have already noted (Yoshikawa, *William Wordsworth and Modern Travel* 58; Economides 96), there is much irony in Wordsworth’s protest against the technological satisfaction of a massive touristic demand, to the emergence of which he himself contributed hugely, both in his poetry and his travelogues.²²

Wordsworth’s stance, which for some critics appears as a precursor of ecological thought (Bate 45 and 57; cf. Economides 93–96), is ironic also in its ambivalent relation to economic thinking. He does not reject economic or fiscal perspectives but is against efforts that try to make them exclusive. In the second letter, he writes: “as we do ‘not live by bread alone,’ so neither do we live by political economy alone” (Wordsworth, *Prose Works* 2: 336). For him, placing the production of profit above everything else is destructive. In the newly written sonnet “Proud were ye, Mountains. . .,” published within the second letter, he speaks of the “Thirst for Gold,” which leaves shameful scars in the landscape, unlike the patriotism of previous centuries, which only left defensive trenches in the country. The “triumphal car” that arrives with the railway construction is associated with wartime invasion and thus can also recall the chariots of ancient victory parades. The whistle and the sight of the rushing train disrupt the calmness of the countryside.²³ And yet, the sonnet is not completely against the technology of the modern era. To foreclose any economic one-sidedness, the closure of the poem calls for a sober weighing of technological interventions. It presents a fair equilibrium (“balance true”) of social and environmental advantages (“gain”) and disadvantages (“mischief”), with the result of a “just disdain.” But that balance paradoxically also means the

living-on of an economic logic within ecology, based on income and expenditure. The logic of the “eco-” (the homology of ecology with economy) promises the restoration, if not the eternal sustainment, of a pretechnological balance, one that prefigures Heidegger’s nostalgic vision of a premodern state.

A similar opposition and weighing of pros and cons, of hope and destruction, could in principle also dominate Wordsworth’s earlier sonnet from 1833, titled “Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways.” This was a piece that occurred to many readers during the debate, because many of them recalled that Wordsworth’s earlier poem took a techno-optimist stand. Therefore, in his second letter, as he was trying to free himself of the charge of being biased against technology (a charge that emerged in the wake of his recent sonnet), Wordsworth saw it fit to quote his earlier piece himself, just to indicate that he had no overall aversion to technological innovations and that he just wanted to urge a wise weighing of their use and abuse: “it is not against Railways but against the abuse of them that I am contending” (*Prose Works* 2: 340). Here is the sonnet:

Motions and Means, on land and sea at war
With old poetic feeling, not for this,
Shall ye, by Poets even, be judged amiss!
Nor shall your presence, howsoe’er it mar
The loveliness of Nature, prove a bar
To the Mind’s gaining that prophetic sense
Of future change, that point of vision, whence
May be discovered what in soul ye are.
In spite of all that beauty may disown
In your harsh features, Nature doth embrace
Her lawful offspring in Man’s art; and Time,
Pleased with your triumphs o’er his brother Space,
Accepts from your bold hands the proffered crown
Of hope, and smiles on you with cheer sublime.
(Wordsworth, *Poetical Works* 374; cf. *Prose Works* 2: 340)

In contrast to the opening and closing poems of the pamphlet from 1844, this sonnet addresses not the countryside but the new forms of movement (“Motions”) and the new transportation devices (“Means”), thus speaking to an inhuman and inorganic world in the language of human organisms. As a side note: in the first letter, Wordsworth refers to the railway as a “mode of intercommunication” to emphasize its ability to connect cities, a

formulation that calls attention to the close resemblance between communication and transportation, their shared operational logic, the physicality of communication just as much as the material semiosis at work in transportation. This is all the more remarkable, since it astutely conflates the two media (airplane and radio) mentioned by Heidegger, in a passage of “The Age of the World Picture” quoted above, where they appeared separately as transportation and communication devices.

The poem takes a stand for these new “intercommunicational” forms. It breaks away from traditional sentiments of beauty (“poetic feeling”), with which technology is said to be “at war,” brutally “marring” the intact softness of the landscape with its implants (also underlined by the rhyming of “war” and “mar”). In order to mitigate the aversion to the railway among the populace, contemporary designers of bridges, viaducts, and tunnels were at pains to lend their structures a nice outlook. They tried to use delicate forms or revived the familiar styles of earlier ages (Siddall 8–9). Wordsworth’s poem, however, seems to show no interest in the creation or restoration of a harmony. It does not deny the aesthetically destructive effect of railway implants. Instead of expressing regret or outrage, it opts for a forward look, intending to judge the surgical intervention into the living texture of nature from the perspective of foreseeable gains (which in the pamphlet version appears not as “future change”, but as “future good”). That temporal leap forward becomes emphatic in the closing image of the poem, where the technology that defeats distances offers the “crown / Of hope” to Time as a sign of time’s victory over space. Time casts a forward look on future innovations and “smiles” on them (in the pamphlet version “welcomes” them) with a “cheer sublime.” The sublimity of this cheer, while signaling an element of fear (Scott, *Fuel* 158), might have to do with Time’s ability to occupy a future perspective by rising above the present destruction of space (both as landscape and distance).

This openness to the future is prefigured a few lines earlier by a double scene of parental rejection and acknowledgment, in which beauty “disowns” technology for its “harsh features,” while nature acknowledges it as its rightful descendant. Instead of rejecting “Man’s art” and thereby denying it any inheritance, nature looks on it as a “lawful offspring.”²⁴ The word “art,” itself a descendent of the Latin *ars* and Greek *technē*, is to be understood here as technology in general, and is thus not confined to art as fiction. It encompasses all kinds of human works and inventions, without the least influence of modern aestheticism. In a Wordsworthian sense, art

disrupts the narrow category of the aesthetic, referred to in the poem as the “loveliness” or “beauty” of “poetic feeling.”

This openness of nature, its unconditional acknowledgment of its descendant’s (man’s) descendant (technology) as her own “lawful offspring” differs fundamentally from Time’s aforementioned openness to the future, because, while the latter awaits the future with hopefulness (expecting future benefits), no such sublime expectation appears on nature’s part. It is the unconditionality of nature’s openness to the future that gives a radical sense to the phrase “lawful offspring.” For as long as technology as a descendant of man is virtually also a descendant of nature (and, furthermore, a “lawful” one, that is, neither an extramarital, nor a degenerate progeny), nature must take it as her own outlook and effect, no matter what man’s art may look like and what it may cause. Nature cannot reject technology with reference to its unlawful or bastard, monstrous or degenerate character (as is the case, for instance, in Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, with the hybrid flowers referred to as “nature’s bastards” [IV, iv, 83] to which a commentator of Wordsworth’s sonnet rightly alluded; see Hollander 1264, cf. Wilson par. 22).

Not even the traditional distinction, so minutely discussed by Heidegger in his reading of Aristotle (“On the Essence” 183–230),²⁵ is formulated by nature as an objection, one that would distinguish giving birth from making, keeping the former in the conceptual field of organic *physis* (or rather, of the Latin *natura* as “giving birth”), while understanding the latter in the context of mechanical *technē*, a distinction that could perhaps justify the denial of inheritance rights (mistakenly, in fact, since *technē* itself derives from *tiktein* meaning “to beget” or “to give birth”).²⁶ From the perspective of the nature that appears in the sonnet, no such distinction exists, thus not the slightest idea emerges according to which humans would qualify as lawful, while their works as unlawful, descendants. Nature and technology form a single continuum which has consequences to the concept of nature itself, or rather, to whether the world (“that which is,” *das was ist*) can still be conceived as “nature” in the sense of *natura*, of “giving birth,” privileging a kind of organic or vegetative *bios* in opposition to non-organic, non-vegetative, non-animal, non-biological forms of inheritance and transmission. Thus, by declaring the naturalness of technology (the *nature* of technology), nature would ultimately also declare her own insufficiency as a concept for the world, as the world itself could no longer be reduced to nature. With the naturalization of technology, nature becomes technologized, and the world becomes a denaturalized

space reigned by the nature of technics. This is no idyllic space, but it is not a space to be elegized either. Rather, it is prosaic: a space of things.²⁷

Wordsworth's 1833 sonnet is either naively optimistic concerning technology, failing to face the hazards of exploitation and ecological destruction that the 1844 sonnets would later take into account, or it is prosaically radical in the way it thinks of the relation between nature and technology within a single historical continuum. By taking technology as a part of nature, it rewrites the concept of nature itself. From that perspective, it is the later sonnets that might seem rather nostalgic by representing an economic model under the banner of an emerging ecological attitude.

Conclusion and further thoughts

Coming back to Heidegger's discussions of modernity and technology, their critical merit lies in the subtle revision of a widespread instrumental and anthropological notion. Technology is no mere means, it is rather a mode of revealing, and it is not simply a human activity but a historical mechanism, of which man is a part and parcel, rather than controlling it from the outside. For Heidegger, as we have seen, both natural forces and humans themselves are turned into "standing-reserve" (*Bestand*). The "positioning" (*Ge-stell*) of these natural and human resources that orders them to provide service appears sharply in the momentary example of the landscape and the tourist group, in which both are compelled to accomplish a task imposed on them by an unknown historical power: the task of supplying spectacles and the task of supplying attention. Nature must produce spectacular scenes, while humans must produce a spectating gaze. In this paradigm, which Heidegger deems modern, it is not only nature that is reduced to a "gasoline station" (*Tankstelle*), as he has it in a talk given in 1955 (*Discourse on Thinking* 50; "Gelassenheit" 523), but so is man, whose free will or "tourist agency" (his agency as a tourist),²⁸ and therefore his humanity, is completely shaken. It is not only man who is compelled here to go for a vacation, as part of his work, but nature itself is forced to work, churned like an engine, made to operate on maximum speed, in the service of maximized exploitation, for energizing purposes (including leisure). Yet, the binary periodization offered by Heidegger in the form of a contrast between premodern and modern technologies seems to set a serious nostalgic limit both to his conceptual scheme and to his views regarding technology (its essence, as well as its expropriation of nature and

the world). A closer investigation of his examples provided substantial proof of this.

In some ways, Wordsworth's sonnets and letters have similar things to say. They describe both the way nature is turned into a spectacle and the way people are taken for holiday trips. They amount to an early critique of capitalism, decades before the publication of the first volume of *Capital*. No wonder that Wordsworth's discussions have recently been connected to the question of tourist agency and Wordsworth himself is now considered to be among the first who have formulated that question.²⁹ Wordsworth's personal example, however, ironically tells us something more: it demonstrates how the world of romantic landscape poems and travelogues (also including Hölderlin's poetry) are not quite innocent in all this. Romanticism as the cradle of mass tourism can hardly be taken as the opposite pole of a modern paradigm. Wordsworth too is nourishing such a nostalgic view (one which inevitably couples with elitism and narcissistic egoism).³⁰ But if we rethink his texts, images, and figurative expression, even against the assumable intentions of their author (as I have done with the sonnet "Steamboats, Viaducts, and Railways," but also with Heidegger's examples above), the technological positioning of landscapes and tourists will not remain a mere modern degeneration. It can then be traced back not only to romanticism, or to preromantic aesthetics (the eighteenth-century discourse on the sublime and the picturesque), but much further, opening the way to an entirely different history, different nature, or different natural history, of technology. For as soon as technology is seen as a "lawful offspring" of nature, we can think of technology *as* nature, which does not only mean the naturalization of technology, but also entails the denaturalization of the world, and thus suspends that "natural" point of reference, in which nostalgia could anchor itself. We will be unable to identify a point of rupture, where a moment of degeneration (or adultery) could be located, since the process of degeneration will itself qualify as something deeply natural. There are no authentic or thoroughbred forms in this Wordsworthian nature, there is no primitive state that would be devoid, or purified, of technology, and certainly there is no "pure" technology in contrast to a "degenerate" modern paradigm.

If we considered technology along the ecological notion of a "technocene" (and were captivated by the historicizing suggestiveness of the phrase), the above nostalgia would likely live on. In the ecological idea of relative stability, an idea that is problematic but fully understandable in its motivations, the economic dream of a balance would remain operative.

Ecology follows a scheme that is all too economic. The question is whether it will ever be able to think the aneconomy that Wordsworth's text makes us conceive. The romantics may very well have been the first ecologists, but what does that mean? Were they the first natural economists? What idyll of a balance is at work here? Or, what romantic intimation of an unbalance casts its half-menacing shadow on history forward (and backward)?

György Fogarasi is Associate Professor of comparative literature at the University of Szeged, Hungary. His research interests include the history of rhetoric, eighteenth-century aesthetics, romanticism, and critical theory. His books *Necromanticism and Critical Theory* (*Nekromantika és kritikai elmélet*, 2015) and *Teletrauma* (2025) contain readings of Burke, Gray, Blake, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Shelley, Marx, and Benjamin. His current book project, *Targets of Attention*, investigates the idiomatic entanglement of "attention" with notions of tension, payment, and turning, as well as its relation to questions of technics, propaganda, theatricality, and terrorism.

Notes

1. For a short list and brief discussion of other "-cenes" like the plantationocene, chthulucene, symbiocene, and ploutocene, see Rigby 8–12.

2. Coupled with the Enlightenment's demand for a systematic conception of nature (as exemplified by Holbach's *System of Nature*, 1770), ecological thought would later produce the notion of the "ecosystem," coined in the early 1930s (Morton 102).

3. Although I am focusing here on joint discussions of Wordsworth and Heidegger, the broader circle of ecocritical studies in romanticism (by authors like Timothy Morton, Ashton Nichols, Kate Rigby, or Heidi M. C. Scott) is also relevant and will be utilized along the way. As much of ecocritical discourse critiques romanticism for its idealized notion of nature as a permanent and independent entity in contrast to a "properly ecological" idea (Morton 1 and 19–20), or as a primordial state of balance, rather than a chaotic state in a postmodern vision (Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos* 1–2 and 82), a critical response to such an ecocritical dismissal of romanticism seems highly in place (Rigby 2), for it may help us explore lines of thought that provide a less homogeneous picture (like the idea of the "urbanature," Nichols xiii and 17) and which do not, therefore, allow for easy polarizations.

4. Economides does not heed the specifically Heideggerian mode of writing *Ge-stell* (with an inserted hyphen), nor does she consider the important criticisms of William Lovitt's translation of it as "enframing." For a few instances of criticism and alternative translations suggested by Samuel Weber ("installation," "emplacement"), Daniel O. Dahlstrom ("im-position"), and Bret W. Davis ("com-positioning"), or by Andrew J. Mitchell in his translation of the Bremen Lectures ("positionality"), see Weber, *Mass Mediauras* 71 and *Theatricality as Medium* 59, Dahlstrom 55, Davis 140, and Mitchell xi. For

the sake of an emphasis on its event-like character, I prefer to translate *Ge-stell* as “positioning.”

5. Although most works in ecocriticism are aware of the implication of a balanced “household” (*oikos*) in the “eco-” of “economy” or “ecology” (Morton 23, 54, 177; Nichols xv, 17, 31; Marder 141; Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos* 42), they do not seem to be bothered by having that implication inscribed in their ecological or ecocritical stance. That is the case even with Michael Marder’s thought-provoking proposal concerning ecology as an “aneconomic” event which interrupts economic circuitry (Marder 142 and 144) and is patterned after the Derridean notions of the gift, the specter, and unconditional hospitality.

6. For a brief overview of the Bremen Lectures, see Pöggeler 101–02. For the unavoidable political aspects of Heidegger’s philosophy of technology, which are beyond the scope of the present analysis, see Garrard 251–71; a broader context is provided by Luc Ferry 91–107.

7. Electricity plays a pivotal role in the increasing abstraction of the idea of energy (Scott, *Fuel* 5). Part of that process of abstraction is the measuring of all forms of energy (whether deriving from food, biomass, fossil fuels, or renewables) in calories (124), which makes them mathematically convertible and economically exchangeable.

8. The “non-dispatchability” of renewable energy sources (the insufficiency of their permanent and immediate accessibility) and the difficulty of energy storage together produce the need for a balance, at any given moment, between the amount of energy produced and the amount of energy consumed. See Kashar 301–02.

9. While the history of water wheels goes back to 300 BCE (Scott, *Fuel* 9), the first dams appeared much earlier, in 3000 BCE in Jordan. Their original function was the assurance of constant water supply for agricultural purposes (257).

10. More recently, the “monstrous” character of hydroelectric dams has been related to their ability to turn any river into “a machine servile to humans” (Scott, *Fuel* 249 and 258). From an ecological point of view, hydroelectric plants are highly ambivalent installations, exciting “bipolar emotions” (258), for while they distort the landscape with their massive concrete infrastructures, they also represent a major instance for the use of renewable resources.

11. As a typical example for how even some of Heidegger’s most professional readers overlook the complications inherent in his examples, let me point to a specified monograph that, in the context of the Heideggerian examples for the utilization of wind and water power, speaks of the “fundamental difference” (*fundamentale[r] Unterschied*) between premodern and modern technology without any hesitation (Luckner 104).

12. See, for instance, the following remark during the ZDF interview: “First and foremost, I have to say that I am not against technology. I have never spoken against technology, nor against the so-called ‘demonic’ in technology. I simply try to understand the essence of technology” (Heidegger, “Martin Heidegger im Gespräch” 706).

13. As for the English translation of these terms: *Bestand* relatively smoothly translates into “standing-reserve,” as the latter phrase, just like its German original, builds upon the notion of standing (the German noun *Stand* comes from the verb *stehen*, “to stand”). The word *Ge-stell* (which William Lovitt’s translation renders as “enframing,” while Andrew J. Mitchell translates it as “positionality”) needs a more extensive commentary. By inserting a hyphen into *Gestell*, which in everyday speech indeed means “frame” or “rack” (for instance, bed frame or book rack), Heidegger lays emphasis on the components of the

term and thereby lends it a meaning that differs from its ordinary sense: “We dare to use this word in a sense that has been thoroughly unfamiliar up to now” (“The Question” 19; “Die Frage” 20). Most importantly, he underlines that the word derives from the verb *stellen* (“to make stand”, “to position,” “to place”) and as such it names the moment of positioning (of making something stand somewhere). With the prefix *Ge-*, on the other hand, he intends to refer to the numerosity, multiplicity, or sum total of all acts or events of positioning (rather than referring to their completeness or result, as would be the case in the German formation of a past participle or a present perfect tense, where the prefix *ge-* is also in use). Thus, instead of naming the result, *Ge-stell* names the process itself, the historical mechanism in its entirety, the totality of all positionings. Therefore, it could be rendered as “positioning,” “installation,” or “emplacement” (rather than “enframing,” or even “positionality”), even though one might at certain points risk sheer tautology (since Heidegger also uses *Stellen* at some points in his explanation): “Positioning [*Das Ge-stell*] is the gathering together of that positioning [*Stellens*] which positions [*stellt*] man, making him reveal the real, in the mode of ordering [*Bestellens*] [it] as standing-reserve [*Bestand*]” (“The Question” 24, translation modified; “Die Frage” 24–25). One more note: in the relevant part of the Bremen Lectures, one of Heidegger’s examples, *Gestellung*, refers to the process of conscription (recruitment, enlistment, or drafting), which itself is a process by which individuals are positioned (put into service) to be available for military service and wartime operations (“Positionality” 26; “Das Ge-Stell” 27).

14. Hölderlin was already mentioned in the first version of the lecture next to the example of the hydroelectric plant, but neither the theme of tourism, nor the image the “old wooden bridge” came up (Heidegger, “Positionality” 27; “Das Ge-Stell” 28–29).

15. As for Heidegger’s own touristic practice (his multiple journeys to Greece, for instance), he himself was committed to “lingering” or “staying” (*Aufenthalt*) as an act of thinking in the mode of “recollection” (*Andenken*). He was trying to resist the touristic opportunities provided by the modern vacation industry.

16. On the “nature industry,” see Fogarasi 35–48. On the discursive organization of the tourist gaze, see Urry and Larsen 17–18.

17. On the “textual morphology” of the *Guide*, see Bate 42. The growing critical interest toward this text is clearly signaled by the recent scholarly editions: *Wordsworth’s Guide to the Lakes* (ed. Mason et al., 2020); or Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes* (ed. Yoshikawa, 2022).

18. Some counterpoems were also published as part of the debate: a sonnet by a poet called “HNRCH” (“Another Sonnet on the Same Subject”) and a longer poetic response, much later, by George Heald (“Reply to Wordsworth’s sonnet on the Kendal & Windermere railway”).

19. It was in this form that the whole group of texts was later included in the posthumous edition of Wordsworth’s collected prose works: Wordsworth, “Kendal and Windermere Railway: Two Letters Reprinted from the *Morning Post* (Revised, with Additions)” (*Prose Works* 2: 321–41).

20. With the emergence of cars, buses, and airplanes, the environmental status of the railway went through a tremendous change. However, it was not only the status of mass transportation that changed, but the status of the railway in comparison to other forms of mass transportation.

21. On the 18th-century British theories of the “picturesque,” in the context of the evolving tradition of landscape gardening, see Fogarasi 35–48. In Book 11 of the 1805 version of his *Prelude*, Wordsworth alludes to the growing vogue of picturesque views as “a strong infection of the age,” mentioning how the “rules of mimic art [are] transferred” to natural scenery, and how this gives way to an obsessive “comparison of scene with scene” (*The Prelude* 1805, 424, ll. 111–15).

22. As other critics have pointed out, Wordsworth’s own work (especially his *Guide*) contributed largely to the escalation of the vogue of picturesque tourism (Scott, *Chaos and Cosmos* 97, and *Fuel* 157) and to the establishment of the Lake District as a national park (Morton 89).

23. In his analysis of the disruptive effects of modern technology in the American pastoral scene, Leo Marx also singles out the locomotive whistle. Bringing examples from writings by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne (produced in 1842 and 1844, respectively), he draws a parallel with Wordsworth’s sonnet “On the Projected Kendal and Windermere Railway” (Marx 18) but, interestingly, does not mention Wordsworth’s other piece (“Proud were ye, Mountains . . .”), where the whistle is explicitly foregrounded: “Heard ye that Whistle?”

24. In her Heideggerian interpretation, Louise Economides reads this acceptance as a fake pastoral idyll of nature and technology (92–95). For her, technology appears here as a sublime masculine force, since it is the product of “Man,” while mother nature is submissive to the violence of technology only because she is forced to do so. According to Economides, the destructive power of technology can seem sublime in this poem only because it is sufficiently far away from Wordsworth, unlike in the 1844 sonnets, where the railway is intruding the Lake District and thus—in absence of a safe distance—can only have a terrifying effect. While this is a lucid and critical reading of the 1833 sonnet, it is not fully convincing: firstly, it neglects the fact that the poem centers around a future perspective, rather than spatial distance; secondly, the relationship between the sexes is not dichotomic: nature is feminine all right, but the sex of technology, if it has any, remains unclear, while time and space are both males (brothers), although the former is victorious, while the latter is defeated; and thirdly, this approach is not critical enough toward the binary and nostalgic Heideggerian model upon which it is based, even though Wordsworth’s text opens up a possibility that forecloses any reductive binarization of history and idealization of the past. A more nuanced reading of the 1833/1844 sonnets is given by Heidi C. M. Scott, who acknowledges Wordsworth’s ambivalence about technology, and formulates the culmination of the 1833 piece as a naturalization of the arts of man: “man is a child of nature, so the arts of man can be naturalized by the self-excusing logic that has enabled so much of industrial development to proceed unfettered”; thus, “Everything a child of nature does must be ‘natural’” (Scott, *Fuel* 158).

25. See, for example, the distinction between regaining health and (self-)treatment (Heidegger “On the Essence” 196–97). The delineation of natural *autopoiesis* and technological *allopoiesis*, in the essay on technology, follows the same logic (Heidegger “The Question” 10–11; “Die Frage” 12–13).

26. Actually, Heidegger seems to deny this etymological resemblance; see Inwood 209.

27. As for things, or “the thing” as such (which is not to be confused with objecthood), ecocritical investigations have long indicated the need for a deeper

understanding. See Morton and Rigby's Heideggerian reference to the thing as a "meeting place" (141 and 43, respectively), Scott's mention of thing theory (*Fuel* 10), or Rigby's Levinasian call for an ethics of things (42). No serious engagement with this huge topic, which is way beyond the scope of the present paper, can evade the works of Kant, Heidegger, Levinas, or Derrida, to mention but a few of a number of thinkers to be consulted.

28. Specifically on the question of tourist agency, see MacCannell 196–210.

29. For a discussion of Wordsworth as an early critic of the package tour, whose critique prefigures later debates about human agency and the vacation industry, see Lewis 64–65.

30. A narcissistic fantasy appears, for instance, when he rejects the accusation of egoistic elitism by reference to his old age but then envisions future youngsters who will resemble and follow him (*Prose Works* 2: 340–41). This structure dominates the closure of "Tintern Abbey," a poem that might have been on Keats's mind, when in a letter he famously mentioned Wordsworth's "egotistical sublime." For a critical re-evaluation of this Keatsian phrase from an ecocritical perspective, see Rigby 16 and 45.

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