Toward a Homological Poietics: Intimations

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The word ‘homology’, which I take from Heraclitus, stands here for a kind of practice, which is at once of art and of thinking. To homo-logize is to say the same (to agree), to say as another says, to speak likewise — not just to say what another says, but to speak in the same manner. What is said, the nature of this other which says it, and the manner in which it is said — all of this remains to be determined. In any case, homology is a speaking in accordance with something heard and heeded, and this in such a way as to let the latter itself speak and be heard in one’s own speech, which is thus no longer simply one’s own.

A homological poietics is thus to be clearly distinguished from the conception of art as self-expression on the part of the artist qua creative ‘genius’. In saying this, I do not seek to deny ‘creativity’ but to situate its responsive character, from a site where art might be grasped as testimony rather than self-expression. Perhaps we respond to something which addresses us even when we take our activity as self-sprung and recognize no such address and no genius in the original sense of a guiding ‘tutelary spirit’.

On the other hand, homology is also to be distinguished from mimesis, whether this be taken ‘objectively’ or ‘subjectively’. Homology is not an external duplication of something heard, which may be exact down to its subtlest modulations of tone yet without having really heard, i.e. been struck by it. What is heeded in homology attunes it in advance, so that it already speaks from an accord and does not need to produce a ‘likeness’. But nor is it a matter of imitating something in the sense of pretending to be it oneself. Rather, homology is a saying-the-same in which the difference between that which speaks and the one who hears and speaks likewise is not reduced, effaced, or dissimulated, but heightened. To homologize is to bear witness, precisely by speaking likewise, to the alterity of an other voice, to bespeak an other speech to which one’s own speech cannot do justice other than by letting it exceed. Homology does not imitate, but rather intimates this speech.

While this essay responds to a question of the status of ‘art’ in the age of technology, I cannot elaborate this rather broad question here and must restrict myself to a more modest, preliminary task. Instead of relating homology to art as such, which
Assumes we may still speak of ‘art as such’ today, I will consider two specific instances — the poetry of Hölderlin and the music of Kraftwerk — as pointers to a historical possibility: namely, the possible retrieval of a homological poetics precisely in the age of technology, which otherwise seems not merely to bring the death of ‘art’ but to leave all arts hovering in a condition of undying death, those which are co-opted no less than those marginalized by the regime of technology.¹

I

But to situate this possibility as an originary one, let us begin with Heraclitus, fragment B50:

_ouk emou, alla tou logou akousantas homologein sophon estin hen panta (einai).²_

If you have listened not to me but to the logos, then it is wise to say likewise: all (is) one.

Heraclitus directs our attention away from himself. It is a matter of listening to the logos and, on that basis, homo-logein, saying the same: namely, “all (is) one.” But what is the logos for Heraclitus? What speaks here, if it is not yet human speech?

We can see at least this much: the logos speaks, says _hen panta einai_, or at least _hen panta_, “all one,” for the _einai_ is suspect. But even if it should stand, it cannot be as a mere copula, for Heraclitus does not conceive the relation between the one and the all as a sheer identity. Fragment B10: _ek pantôn kai ex henos panta_; “out of all things one and out of one all things.” That indicates some kind of difference. It is not that all things get heaped together into one big thing. Rather, the one shows itself from out of the all, while conversely all things presence from out of the one (which obviously also cannot be another thing standing apart from all things) which allows them to appear together as an ‘all’. Thus, in and precisely through their difference, the one and the all belong to each other.

What then is the logos, if it says this in the abbreviated form: _hen panta_, “all one”? But the logos does not merely say this — it is this. Where one is attentive to this gathering of all things out from the one, and of the one to itself from all things, there one heeds the logos. It is not a matter of hearing a ‘speech’ (logos) about this. This itself ‘speaks’ insofar as it takes place. This ‘telling’ event is what Heraclitus calls the logos.

¹. Due to constraints of space this essay has been abbreviated considerably. Sections I and II presuppose more extensive expositions of Heraclitus and Hölderlin, always in conversation with Heidegger’s readings of them, than can be offered here. Section III is drawn from a larger though incomplete project which seeks to put Kraftwerk’s music into communication with Heidegger’s thought and to show that here too there occurs a questioning concerning technology which warrants philosophical consideration. But even if it sought to contain all of this material, the essay would not lose its somewhat programmatic character, for such a character is proper to its theme, taken as a historical possibility. The essay attempts to intimate or point ahead to a poetics which, no matter how well instantiated in those figures with whom it deals, itself has the character of an intimating of its ‘matter’.

². Heraclitus, _Fragments_, trans. T.M. Robinson (U of Toronto P, 1991) 36. While this is taken as a guide the translations are frequently modified.
On this basis we may now situate more clearly the character of homology. If *panta* is how the *logos* ‘speaks’ or manifests itself, and if homology is truly to ‘say the same’ as this, then it will not do just to say what the *logos* says. It must speak *in the same manner*: in such a way that the one who homologizes, himself gathered upon this gathering of the *logos*, lets this gathering *take place* in his speech. The “backturned connection” or “accord” (*palintropos harmoniê*) whereby what “differs from itself” remains in agreement (*homologeei*) with itself (B51) — this accord not only within the individual being, and not only between all beings as they contend with each other, but between this ‘all’ and the ‘one’ from out of which all emerge, must be allowed to show itself in the way speech speaks. But the stronger connections, Heraclitus tells us, are the unapparent ones (B54). Thus homology must attest to what remains concealed and bring it forth *just so* — not *from* concealment, but *as* concealed. That said, Heraclitus, known as *ho skoteinos*, “the obscure,” is no obscurantist. Heraclitus speaks obscurely in order to speak in accordance with the matter itself, to bear witness to it as it shows itself to him.

Heraclitus calls this the *logos*. He also calls it *physis*, which as Heidegger has shown does not here name ‘nature’ as one region of being among others (as in Aristotle) but the basic character of the being of beings per se, as things which “grow” (*phyein*) — in the sense of emerging into the light, coming to appearance, presencing.\(^3\) Fragment B112 indicates that a homological poetics is to be referred to *physis* as to the *logos*. Here it is a matter of *alethea legein*, saying the true or ‘unconcealed’, which is then specified as *poiein kata physin*. That means *poiesis* is not to arbitrarily invent of its own accord, but to pay heed to presencing and bring forth in accordance with it: to make presencing manifest just as it manifests itself. That sounds almost trivial, perhaps quaintly primitive, to modern ears. But its weight can be better gauged once we acknowledge what another fragment says of *physis*, and once we get clear on what Heraclitus is not saying.

*Poiein kata physin*: this seems to say nothing more than that art should imitate nature. But if we grant that ever since Plato the mimetic conception of art has always, *mutatis mutandis*, been based on a productivist\(^4\) conception of nature itself (as something produced if not by human hands), then perhaps this quaint expression ought to give us pause. Perhaps ‘nature’ is experienced differently here, and for that very reason the *poiesis* which is to follow *after physis* is irreducible to *mimesis*. What *poiesis* brings forth or ‘pro-duces’ *in accordance with* here is not an *eidos* but presencing. Granted that the *eidos*, as the look something offers of itself, is not without relation to presencing, it is only its high-water mark, as it were, albeit one which in Plato effaces its own whence and whither and arrogates the status of permanent presence. Is it an accident that the mimetic conception of art gets articulated at the same time that *eidos* gains dominance over presencing?\(^5\) Yet while this ossification of presencing may be the condition for objective *mimesis*, what about subjective *mimesis*? For one can also imitate natural events and processes, making oneself the mimetic “instrument,” as Plato said in the *Sophist* (267a). Yet if homology were an imitation of nature in this sense, and if ‘nature’ means what grows and comes to light, then the one who homologizes would have to grow, or at least make a show of growing. He would have to pretend to be a

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tree, say. That might have a place in modern dance, but it is completely foreign to Heraclitus.

But to show positively what distinguishes homology from mimesis we need to grasp more precisely the ‘nature’ it seeks to homologize. If a homological poiesis is to bring forth kata physin, in accordance with presencing, so that presencing is made manifest in the way it manifests itself, how then does it manifest itself? Fragment B123: physis kryptesthai philei — presencing inclines to self-concealment! Does that mean presencing sometimes does not show itself and ceases to be presencing? No, it means that presencing presences as concealed. Like the Delphic oracle, according to B93, physis neither simply reveals nor simply conceals itself, but rather hints, intimates itself: shows itself while simultaneously withholding itself. Thus, if poiesis is to be genuinely homological with respect to physis, it must likewise speak in the mode of intimation to bear witness to it as that which conceals itself. But precisely because homology speaks in this way, it does not pretend to be what it homologizes. It belongs to the structure of homological speech both to let the homologized take place and speak in it, yet at the same time to point beyond itself to the homologized as other.

The reading offered here is indebted to Heidegger’s and pursues a similar trajectory, while presupposing his painstaking attempts to free Heraclitus’ thought from the later interpretation of the logos as ‘statement.’ I have tried elsewhere to clarify Heidegger’s own attempt to articulate this concealment which is intrinsic to being as presencing. Briefly, it entails thinking presencing not just as emergence into the open but as the clearing of the open region within which alone beings can appear. It is this clearing which conceals itself in favour of the beings that emerge within it, so that the Greeks could think and poetise within it but not about it. This ‘unthought’ then requires the entire history of the oblivion of being, culminating in the age of technology, for its trace to be felt.

Who has felt that trace? According to Heidegger, his name is Hölderlin. It is no accident that Hölderlin also retrieved a homological poetics. If the presupposition for mimesis taking over from homologein is the oblivion of being in favour of beings, homology becomes a possibility again when the question of that which is irreducible even to the gods becomes compelling. Hölderlin’s word for this is ‘nature’, understood as ‘the holy’. However, we cannot simply assume that what Hölderlin experiences here is the same as what Heraclitus experienced as logos and physis, even if the young Hölderlin, already taken with Heraclitus, had taken hen kai pan as his motto. It may be that ultimately the ‘nature’ which ‘awakens’ in Hölderlin’s time no longer bespeaks itself to him as the all-gathering one.

6. See in particular “Logik. Heraklits Lehre vom Logos,” in his Heraklit (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1979); cf. “Logos,” Early Greek Thinking, trans. David Farrell Krell and Frank A. Capuzzi (New York: Harper and Row, 1984). It might seem that my translation of homologein as ‘speaking likewise’ contradicts Heidegger’s conception of it as a ‘saying after’ in which the Same is said in a different manner (Heraklit, 260). But as I argued earlier, this is a speaking likewise which does not efface the difference but rather intensifies it. It is in the manifestation of this difference, and thus from a certain point of view in the failure of the homological utterance, that what is to be homologized itself speaks and that, from this point view, homology succeeds. It is this paradoxical occurrence which is enacted in the work of Hölderlin and Kraftwerk.
7. Andrew Mason, “The Question of Concealment in Heidegger’s Thought.”
8. It should be said that Heidegger for his part never explicitly called Hölderlin’s work homological, even if he did recognize in it a profound debt to Heraclitus, not only thematically but in terms of the intimate character of poetic saying. Nevertheless, a homological conception of Hölderlin’s work casts considerable light not only on it but also, I believe, on Heidegger’s interpretation of it.
I will have to restrict my reading of Hölderlin to the hymn ‘Wie Wenn am Feiertage...’, and do not pretend to offer a comprehensive interpretation even of this.\(^9\) It is selected not only because it offers indispensable clues about Hölderlin’s understanding of nature as the holy, and because it explicitly addresses the issue of homologizing it and the difficulty involved in that task, but above all because it enacts that difficulty in the most exemplary way. The hymn ‘Germanien’, which is no less exemplary in this respect, cannot be treated here due to constraints of space. We will begin with the verses which open the third strophe of ‘Wie Wenn am Feiertage...’:\(^10\)

But now day breaks! I waited and saw it coming,
And what I saw, the holy be my word.

But now day breaks, “it dawns” (es tagt): i.e. now “wondrously omnipresent,” “mighty” and “divinely beautiful nature” (second strophe) awakens from its apparent sleep. That which, as “the mother of all things,” grants all beings the space and the time of their presencing, now comes to presence itself, where previously it had remained concealed.\(^11\) The poet, “brought up” by nature, has been mourning its absence, but also “divining” its coming-to. Thus it is that he “waited and saw it coming.”

And what I saw, the holy be my word.
For she, she herself, who is older than the ages,
And higher than the gods of east and west,
Nature has now with clang of arms awoken.

It is important first to underscore that here ‘nature’ does not refer to the things of nature taken in general but is, like the ‘one’ of Heraclitus, of a different order. It is prior to all the beings of nature as that which brings them to presence. Moreover, nor does it name only the being of ‘natural’ beings as a sphere distinguished from human history and ‘culture,’ or the divine realm. Rather, ‘nature’ spans all of this for Hölderlin, as physis had for Heraclitus.\(^12\) As the “all-creative” which now “feels new again,” nature spans “from high Aether down to the low abyss” (third strophe) and is itself the very opening up of this space which both relates and separates the earthly and divine realms. Mortals and immortals are only what they are in relation to each other, but it is by virtue of ‘nature’ that they come to stand in relation. Even the gods owe their presencing to nature as ‘the holy’. Accordingly nature is “higher than the gods.” However, we know that Hölderlin experienced his own time, which is also ours, as the age of the gods’ “flight” or “default.” If this is what the “now” of the poem marks, then it is precisely at

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9. I offer a more extensive reading of ‘Wie Wenn am Feiertage...’ and a critical engagement of Heidegger’s reading of it, in my essay “Philosophy and the Enigma of Hölderlin (Is Nothing Sacred?)”.
this time that what is higher than the gods awakens and can no longer conceal itself in favour of them. Similarly, if nature is older than the ages, as that which first sets ‘history’ underway, this ‘inception’ only comes to light at the end: “And what happened before, but scarcely was felt/is manifest only now” (fourth strophe). “The holy,” then, would be Hölderlin’s ‘word’ for this event, this deferred presencing of the originary.

Or would it? In fact, this chiasmatic structure characterizes not only the relation between nature and history, but Hölderlin’s very experience of nature ‘now’. For this now seems not just to mark the experience of a current event, but the experience that this event must have already happened before it. Whatever Hölderlin “saw,” it clearly cannot be the break of day itself, for “now” day breaks. Whatever he saw, he saw prior to this, while waiting for dawn and seeing it coming — as if what he saw were not day itself but “the shiver of fear out of which the day came” (Blanchot). And as if the day which now breaks could but cover this over with its very light. At any rate, it would be rash to assume that Hölderlin simply says he saw the holy.13 We should note that he speaks tentatively, in the subjunctive: “the holy be [sei] my word.” And we should ask whether the “what I saw” might be said out of the same wishfulness. I waited for dawn, I saw it coming, and now it breaks — but what did I see? A coming no doubt, but a coming which, no longer coming, remains to come — as if the “what I saw” were only a postulatory effect of the “But now day breaks!”: an “I must have seen!”

With this recourse to the subjunctive, Hölderlin already attests to the difficulty of homologizing the holy. But to see this difficulty more clearly we need to attend to another essential motif in the poem: what Hölderlin calls “the holy ray,” lightning. The hymn begins with a comparison of the poet with a countryman who goes out at morning to inspect the field, after the storm of the previous night which still rumbles in the distance, and, expecting to see destruction, finds that all has been transfigured. The poet, likewise, finds that though he has been “struck by Apollo”14 he not only lives on but stands “in favourable weather” (second strophe). Now, what makes such ‘summer lightning’ such an irresistible motif is precisely its chiasmatic temporality. It oscillates between being the trace of a receding storm and the warning of an approaching one. To this extent it itself can leave the poet still waiting for an event which must already have befallen him. Whence, perhaps, the imperative to genuinely undergo this experience (seventh strophe):

Yet us it behoves, fellow poets, bareheaded
Under god’s thunderstorms to stand,
The father’s ray itself, with our own two hands
To grasp, and offer to the people
Wrapped in song, the heavenly gift.

These verses point clearly to the homological character of the poet’s task. If, as Hölderlin says elsewhere, echoing Heraclitus, “hints are/ from time immemorial the speech of gods,”15 then poetry is the passing on of these hints, “wrapped in song.” This means first that others are to receive the “heavenly gift” while being preserved from the devastation it works on the poet. But it also implies the preservation of the lightning as a hint, in the sense that the poetic word does not make the gods directly present to the

people, but lets them become manifest “in their very hinting.”16 Thus poetic saying, as a hinting or intimating itself, ‘speaks likewise’, homologizes with the speech of the gods.

However, we said that Hölderlin’s hymnal poetry is to homologize the holy, which for him is higher even than the gods. How then is the lightning related to the holy? How can it be both ‘the father’s ray’ and “the holy ray”? Here Heidegger offers a handy hint: this ray is “redispatched” from the holy by a god which “takes upon itself what is ‘above’ it,” so that the poet may be reminded of the holy and enabled to bear witness to it. However, it can also lead the poet astray. The lightning, as a manifestation of the divine, can offer itself as originary and so facilitate the oblivion of the holy.17 While Heidegger’s insistence on the priority of the holy follows Hölderlin’s text quite faithfully, this a priori must be read as a posterior a priori. Not only can the lightning offer itself as originary, from a certain point of view it must: it first opens up the holy, but as that which came, or must have come, before. In its fading the lightning points back (‘palintropically’) toward the holy as that from which it must first have flashed forth. Not having been experienced at and as the beginning, the holy would only be ‘experienced’ in the form of a postulate of what is experienced, ‘now’. In this way, the lightning works as a reminder of the holy as of an immemorial past.

But how then to attest to such a dubious event? How is the poet to speak in accordance with this not-having-happened, and not merely concoct an event in place of it? The task is impossible. If the poet finds himself heiliggenöthiget, “compelled by the holy” itself to bear witness to it,18 he is by the same stroke compelled to get ahead of himself, for having already happened prior to the now of experience, the holy is still to come for that experience. He must wait, attest to it as coming, and resist the temptation to grasp at a sheer presence and so pervert its presence as coming, as not yet present. But ‘Wie Wenn am Feiertage…’ ends, or rather breaks down, with Hölderlin bearing witness rather to the ruination that befell him, like Semele, in succumbing to that temptation:

I approached to see the heavenly,  
And they themselves, they cast me down, deep below the living,  
The false priest that I am, into darkness, that I sing  
For those with ears to hear, the warning song.

Here we seem to meet a quite different experience of lightning: not as gift but as punishment. Yet we know that early on Hölderlin conceived of punishment as that whereby the moral law, though presupposed by the fact of punishment, first manifests itself — in a necessarily negative way.19 Given that he came later to identify the holy, as ‘The Most High’, with the law (to which gods as well as mortals are subject),20 here we find precisely that posterior a priori structure which characterizes the relation between the lightning and the holy.

But from this we also begin to see that the holy shows itself precisely in the failure of the poet to bring it to speech. The holy speaks just where speech is no longer possible, where it has been overwhelmed and broken by the very lightning flash that was to inspire it to speak, where it is the interruption of speech which speaks. Hölderlin,

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17. Heidegger, Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung 68ff., 73f.
indeed, attests not so much to the holy as to the impossibility of bringing it to speech. But thus he attests to it in the only appropriate way: as von Anfang her gegangen, “gone from the beginning.”\textsuperscript{21} Homology for Hölderlin is a matter of letting this, this very not having happened, happen in the poem. As a speaking in accordance with what has always already withdrawn in this way, Hölderlin’s poetic speech is pre-eminently homological where in an abysmal way it retracts itself. In lieu of a reading of the hymn ‘Germanien’, allow me simply to cite the passage which concludes its penultimate strophe. Having just been exhorted to reveal “the concealed” (the holy), which “may no longer remain a mystery,” Germanien is no sooner advised: Dreifach umschreibe du es, “Threefold circumscribe it.” And then:

But unspoken also, just as it is,
Innocent, must it remain.

III

We turn now to a pop-group. To be sure, the ‘radicality’ of Kraftwerk is frequently affirmed. They are said to be ahead of their time in the musical employment of electronic technologies, in the development of a new genre. No doubt that is true. But such a view, taken by itself, tends to lock Kraftwerk into the merely instrumental approach to technology of those who hold it, and remains blind to what is genuinely radical here: the fact that a profound reflection on the world of technology and on what it might mean to dwell in this world takes place.

In Kraftwerk’s 1975 LP, Radio-Activity, we are entreated to “tune into the melody” of radioactivity itself, which is “in the air” for us and sings distantly of things which “concern our future.” We seem to be a long way away from Heraclitus’ exhortation to listen to the logos and speak likewise, and from Hölderlin’s attempt to bear witness to nature as the holy. Nevertheless, Kraftwerk too exhort us to listen not to them but to an other: to the music of Kraftwerk itself, the “power-works” (be it nuclear, electric, etc.). The music of Kraftwerk the group homologizes the music of Kraftwerk the phenomenon of modern technology, which in Radio-Activity is also called “the voice of energy.” In Kraftwerk too it is a matter of heeding this other voice and attesting to it in a ‘saying the same’.

Let us name the dimension from which Kraftwerk speak, and to which they seek to attune us, the clearing of technology. The title is ambiguous. On the one hand, if read as an ‘objective genitive’, technology appears as the ‘object’ of an operation of clearing. Then the title says that something happens to technology, that technology is cleared. But read as a ‘subjective genitive’, technology appears as what is responsible for this clearing. Then the title speaks of a clearing which is itself technological. But supposing technology were both what clears and what is cleared? Is this how Kraftwerk themselves experience modern technology? Only a detailed interpretation of their work as a whole could decide this adequately. Here I can only point toward this reading by discussing one track from Radio-Activity: ‘The Voice of Energy’.

In this piece we are addressed by Kraftwerk itself. To translate from the German:

Here speaks the voice of energy. I am a gigantic electric generator. I supply you with light and power, and make it possible for you to send out speech, music, and image through the aether and to receive them. I am your servant and at the same time your master. Therefore guard me well, me, the genius of energy.

It is important to underscore the paradox in this final sentence, for the original meaning of the word *genius* — in English, German, and first of all in Latin — is “tutelary spirit.” We are called upon to guard and preserve (hütet) that which watches over us, to take good heed of what makes possible all our sending and receiving. But if this too addresses us — and not only whatever speech, music, or images we receive by virtue of it — then perhaps what we in turn send out is also ‘responsible’ to it in another sense: not just to secure our own means of communicating with each other, but to harbour this voice so that when we speak it bespeaks itself in our speech, which thereby may attest to it.

But what is this voice or “genius” of energy? The word energy derives from the Greek *energeia*, “actuality”: what stands accomplished “in the work.” Aristotle distinguishes this from *dynamis*, “potentiality”: what has not yet come to a stand in this way, but is capable of such. Modern physics, however, defines energy as capacity to do work, which seems closer to *dynamis*. It is true that ‘energy’ still retains another sense closer to *energeia*: namely “vigour of action,” power actually ‘at work’ over and above mere capability. But what distinguishes it still is the absence of reference to the work as telos of the work-process. The reasons for this presumably lie in the historical transformation of production in general from something telic to the strictly end-less process of modern industrial production. True, the latter too is concerned with producing a ‘final product’ for consumption. But consumption in turn is for the sake of increased production. It is the process in its constant operation, as the perpetually renewed possibility of still more production, which today assumes the mantle of actuality rather than the product itself.

Is an echo of this to be heard in ‘The Voice of Energy’? If ‘energy’ is used here in the modern sense, we must nevertheless recognize that this voice speaks from a place where “light and power” are produced and supplied. ‘Power’ is also used here in the sense it has for modern physics, and especially electronics: not capacity to do work but the actual work done, the energy actually transformed (e.g. into light), over a given time. Thus the place from which the voice of energy speaks is one in which energy has already been put to work and ‘actualized’ in certain ways. However, this is not actuality proper, for here power is only actual as the actual capability to do further work. Rather, it speaks from a place between possibility and actuality: from that place, de-limited by modern technology, from which production is transformed into a process without end.

What then does it say? From one point of view, it calls on us to protect this place as what makes possible our own communicating “through the aether.” Here the voice of energy is heard solely from within the horizon of the “instrumental-anthropological” definition of technology. But from another point of view, it seems to call out from this domain to another which, however kindred it might be to technology, is also other than it: namely art. Why? Presumably because art is distinguished by its capability to

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22. I refer here to Hannah Arendt’s brilliant analysis of this transformation in terms of the distinction between work and labour in *The Human Condition*.
24. Heidegger’s essay on technology ends on precisely this note (*ibid.*, pp. 34f).
transform capability into actuality proper: to give the voice of energy *articulation* in language, music, or image. But will this do? For is it not ‘actually’ the case that modern technological production swamps all earlier forms? Do we hear the voice of energy pining for an earlier form of production through which it could be transformed into a work? Or does it rather call for a transformation of the *artwork itself* so that precisely its actuality may be attested to, as the actuality of non-actuality?

We need to listen more closely. While Kraftwerk’s task of letting *Kraftwerk* itself speak in their music is perhaps nowhere more explicit than here, it can happen that such explicitness in a work detracts from its efficacy. So far we have not attended to the piece as a work itself: we have only addressed what the voice of energy says, not the way in which the piece seeks to let that voice speak. But once we consider this everything immediately becomes problematic. For the voice of energy is allowed to speak here, yet it is made to speak in the first person, is given a human voice, or at least the electronic simulation of one. Instead of preserving that ‘speech’ and that *musicality* which is proper to *Kraftwerk* itself, and measuring our speech to this, the form of human speech is imposed so that it speaks ‘on our terms’. From this point of view, the tacit complaint in its demand to be safeguarded is well-founded, and applies to the very piece which would air and meet that complaint.

But we have overlooked one detail. Prior to this questionable ‘speech’ of energy itself, and again after it concludes, there is a sound: the monotonous yet vibrating hum of, precisely, an electric generator. *Here* the voice of energy speaks *from within* its native domain of “light and power,” if only for a moment, before it cuts out and we hear the words: “Here speaks the voice of energy…” These words are not ‘supported’ by the sound but rather interrupt it and, in coming forth from it, conceal it. It clears the way for the ensuing speech, but the speech itself clears away that which had first cleared a space for it, rather than preserving this clearing and pointing back to it in coming forth from it and into the space cleared by it. This is what the piece says it is a matter of doing, but it is not what it does. It only points forward to this clearing at the end, as what has not yet been brought forth into the work and merely resumes after the words conclude.

However, what if this clearing itself were such that it had perpetually to clear itself away just to remain as the clear-*ing* it is? What if this and this alone were how the voice of energy speaks? Then the work which seeks to bear witness to it could only do so in the mode of gesturing toward something which is present only insofar as it ‘is in withdrawal’. Then the line separating a successful work from a failure to let technology itself speak would not be so clear-cut after all. It would be ‘in keeping’ if the work could do no more than point forward to that which exceeds the attempt to bespeak it and still remains to be said.

But surely an electric generator or a power-works does not have this character. It can ‘pass’ in the sense of simply cutting out, or by being interrupted by something else, a car going by for example, but insofar as it is *present* its presence has the character of monotonous constancy. It subsists, not like an actualized product but as the constant operation of production. In this way it seems to usurp the ‘space’ held by silence. When we listen out for what it is that noises interrupt, their fading seems to lead us not toward an underlying silence but toward this unearthly murmuring, this constant, distant buzz of *Kraftwerk*. At the same time, in the day of the city — a day which strives to abolish night — this background is interrupted so constantly that we scarcely ever hear it, or hear these noises as interruptions of something and thus hear that there is something else besides them, from which they emerge and into which they fade. It is as if this background noise had to be constantly ‘fed’ by new noise, constantly reproduced by its
own constant interruption, to prevent a sudden upsurge of silence. From where? From what Kraftwerk name the “aether.”

What about this aether? If Kraftwerk is what makes it possible for us to send and receive speech, music and image “through the aether,” doesn’t the latter also make this possible in its own way? For Kraftwerk does not first make possible the aether itself but presupposes this while, taking it for granted as a mere means and playground for its activity, suppressing it. But if this is how Kraftwerk itself speaks, then it seems the entire domain of modern technology would have to be cleared away for us to gain access again to this other concealed dimension. Or is it that technology itself can grant us such access, if only we learn to listen to it differently?

We said that Kraftwerk has the phenomenological character of monotonous constancy, albeit an intermittent one which (re)emerges as the constant in the wake of whatever interrupts it. It is present as that which endures permanently, but is not permanently present as such. It is, so to speak, finitely infinite. But this remains insufficient. Perhaps, if we listen still more closely, we may begin to hear its monotonous constancy not as permanence pure and simple, but rather as an endless ending. Then we would have to say rather that it is infinitely infinite, an infinite going away which itself emerges continually and, in perpetually interrupting itself, prolongs itself indefinitely.

This life of death itself, this half-life, this “constant decay” — isn’t this the “melody” to which Kraftwerk seek to attune us? Is it not “in the air” we breathe? And not just in the sense that this air is polluted with uranium fall-out and so on, but rather that this is what constitutes our milieu: the endless end, the abysmally drawn out twilight, of an essentially exhausted ‘modernity’. Is it this impossible movement beyond, merely extending the very thing it would transcend, that is intimated in the ambiguous trans of Kraftwerk’s Trans-Europe Express? How is ‘Europe, Endless’ said there? What is pointed to in the ‘Endless, Endless’ with which that album ‘ends’? And in the fading of the closing track from Radio-Activity, ‘Ohm Sweet Ohm’? I cannot pursue these questions further here.

At any rate, if this endless end is what constitutes our situation today, this does not preclude its harbouring within itself the possibility of another beginning. But if it is to clear or free up a space for such a beginning, it must be experienced and avowed that and how this endless end is in itself a ‘clearing’. Perhaps we can begin to glimpse how this clearing is only maintained by way of its own interruption, how it must continually clear itself away just to remain as the clearing it is, and how this intrinsic tendency toward self-concealment on its part facilitates its total neglect on ours, so that we only attend to what is at hand within it and do not open ourselves to dwelling into this dimension in which we already dwell.

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