



EXCURSIONS and RECURSIONS: KITTLER'S HOMERIC WAKE

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ABSTRACT This article is a commentary on Friedrich Kittler's "In the Wake of the Odyssey." Kittler reads Homer as a cultural-technological program for later historical development and finds later authors such as Virgil and Dante inferior to Homer. Kittler's "Wake" rehearses on a smaller scale arguments made in his late work *Music and Mathematics*. His work is seen as determined by two movements of excursion, going out to the exotic, whether North American or Mediterranean, and recursion, meaning the closure of mathematical or logical systems. Yet recursion, in Kittler, turns out to be more a rhetorical figure than a function.

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I



“In the Wake of the *Odyssey*,” a rhapsodic pendant to the two volumes of *Musik und Mathematik* (*Music and Mathematics*) (Kittler 2006, 2009), is at once excursive and recursive. Mimicking its subject, it offers its own miniature historical odyssey of odysseys from Homer to Stanley Kubrick. As the author notes at the outset, its narrative is one not of progress but of recursions, set forth in Friedrich Kittler’s quirkily comic variant of Friedrich Nietzsche’s monumental history: an anecdotal series of four snapshots or moments, namely, the *Odyssey* itself, Dante Alighieri’s *Comedia* (*Comedy*), Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le mépris* (*Compromise*; 1963), and Kubrick’s *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). These monuments are, however, also intercut with digressions on Virgil’s *Aeneid*, Gottfried von Strassburg’s *Tristan*, William Burroughs, and American censorship and thoughts on computer technology. The episodic qualities of Kittler’s lecture thus go beyond those of his Homeric model to a specifically digressive form whose ancestors might be Miguel de Cervantes and François Rabelais, Denis Diderot or Laurence Sterne. If there is no progress, but only recursion, the distinction itself between excursion and principal subject is loosened; a digression may be as relevant to the question as a more consequential argument. While Theodor W. Adorno’s paratactic constructions were in the severely constructive high modernist tradition of Stéphane Mallarmé’s constellation, Kittler’s digressiveness has something of the rollicking humor of the picaresque and betrays its author’s extroverted pleasure in lecturing. It is not the least of the ironies or paradoxes of Kittler’s late work that a thinker so centrally concerned with technological media should have reverted to orality. Kittler’s wake is as oral as James Joyce’s, and he too takes the protagonist of the *Odyssey* as his model in spinning what Germans call a *Seemannsgarn* (sailor’s yarn). Moreover, his lecture is packed full of allusions and mercurial leaps of argumentation that do not always make for easy reading. Yet the difficulty of filling in the gaps Kittler has deliberately left us is an essential part of his enduring fascination. Nietzsche once famously wrote that his ideal reader should know, like a cow, to rechew his work—implying that everything was not there on the surface and that rereading was required for fuller comprehension; the same is true for Kittler, who like Nietzsche has wagered on a longer posterity that will have time to digest him.

Beneath the entertaining one-liners, poker-faced ironies, and eccentricities, however, larger claims are made here. The first is that the *Odyssey* itself may be a model for understanding history—the latter understood not only in a media-theoretical sense but also in that of its extension into *Kulturgeschichte* (cultural history). (*Kulturgeschichte*, as Kittler polemically insisted, is not at all the same as Anglo-American culture studies.) Poetry and history are run together in a manner reminiscent of Giambattista Vico, to whom Kittler had devoted a section of his own *Eine Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissen-*

schaften (*A Cultural History of the Cultural Sciences*). In his use of the *Odyssey*, Kittler continues an idea developed not only by Adorno and Max Horkheimer but also by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. But if Schelling (1860: 57) saw the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as respectively excursive and recursive, as complements to each other, Kittler finds both moments in one poem. (He thereby sidelines the military heroism, social organization, and ultimate tragedy of the *Iliad* in favor of the *Odyssey*'s more romantic-individualistic thematics of exploration, adventure, fantasy, and love.) The excursive quality might be the laying out of the geography of the Mediterranean, the recursive one the invention of the Greek alphabet. For Kittler's second claim (worked out at greater length in *Musik und Mathematik*) is that the *Odyssey* not only refers to but rather determines history. This reference is at once to the presumed unique invention of the alphabet, which Kittler, following Barry B. Powell (1991), sees as having happened on Euboea between 800 and 750 BCE, and also to the specific sites or locations of Homer's epic. Kittler's insistence on the literal locations of Homer's poem may remind readers of Freud's odd obsession with Francis Bacon as the presumed real author of Shakespeare's plays¹—or with the historical novel of *Moses and Monotheism*, also based on an idiosyncratic reading of scholarly texts (like Ernst Sellin). Kittler's late work might then be "Homer and Polytheism," a historical epic and not a novel. Just as in Freud, the methods of philology are here used to promote a thesis ultimately beyond empirically documentable history. Yet Kittler's history is driven not by the Name of the Father but by the pleasure principle, or perhaps rather jouissance. (His vision of copulating apes infected by Burroughs's virus of language is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan's discussion of the primeval horde in *Seminar XVII* [1991: 131, 135]).² The old trend of demythologizing criticism of authoritative texts that began with the biblical philology of Richard Simon in the seventeenth century and continued through David Friedrich Strauss and Rudolf Karl Bultmann has been replaced with a reenchantment of the world, where myth and history are one. The relation of this to technomysticism and the connection between religion and rock music will need to be pursued by future Kittler exegetes.

Kittler's peculiar mode of presentation—a series of episodic or excursive nodes all related to their central figure of recursion, somewhat along the lines of a musical theme and variations—suggests a reading similarly divided in two. If Kittler's model of cultural history couples selective renarration and biography with a running commentary (a medieval or even Hellenistic genre), what follows will then comment on that gloss, before returning to an analytic look at the narrative's underlying structure.

II

The brief reading of the *Odyssey* offered in Kittler's lecture may confuse those not already familiar with his thinking. For Kittler is inter-

ested not in what traditional philology or aesthetics have found in Homer's poem—its content as an artwork—but rather in what media theory calls its address (in German, *Anschrift* or *Adresse*).³ The medial concept of address might be seen as kin to Louis Althusser's notion of subjects' being called to or perhaps to Jacques Derrida's claim that the address of a message (such as a postcard) determines the latter's content and is not extraneous to it. It is thus through being medially addressed that we are subjectified. Although it was only with the advent of computer technology that the informational structure of data, command, and address could be formalized, Kittler already finds this structure in earlier writing as well. The *Odyssey* is, in the largest sense, a program; in Kittler's view, it could be seen to have programmed the Greeks to explore the Mediterranean. The "wake" of the *Odyssey* thus becomes the medial (after)effect of Homer's (and his transcriber's) epochal recursive invention of the Greek alphabet. *Einschreiben* (inscription into a symbolic network) conditions *Anschreiben*, and recursion thus excursion. "The Greeks discovered lower Italy in the wake of Homer, who consequently must have been available in written form." This discovery is moreover a form of *Entbergung* (Martin Heidegger's translation of the Greek *aletheia* ["truth"]), a moment in Kittler's mediated version of *Seinsgeschichte* (the history of Being). The *Odyssey*—itself already a "recursion" of the *Iliad*—is the program not only for the Greeks but also for subsequent occidental history, which can only repeat it in a series of further recursions.

Predictably, Virgil and Rome in general receive low marks here; in his aversion to Cicero, Kittler has arguably himself been programmed by a long German tradition of Rome-phobia that would include G. W. F. Hegel, Heidegger, and Friedrich Schlegel and goes back to the Reformation. This lack of originality is evident in Kittler's choice of the most banally well-worn schoolchild's quote from the *Aeneid* ("Tu regere imperio populus, Romane, memento"—"But you, Roman, remember to rule the peoples with power," beloved of English Latin teachers in the colonial age) (Edwards 1999). Not only is Roman literature merely derivative (*abkünftig*, Heidegger might have said), but Roman military technology is borrowed from Kittler's hero Archytas, the "last Pythagorean," who had himself developed weaponry from musical proportions. The Romans, however, only abused this technology "until all the beauty of the old world disappeared"; it is not hard to imagine this as a retrospective projection of globalizing Americanism. Worse still, Virgil hypocritically hides the technological background of Roman military power in his poem; war machines only occur there as "audacious new metaphors, while all of Virgil's similes are stolen from Homer."

Kittler follows this up with one of his characteristic *saltos* (leaps): "Ever since then, this clandestine takeover—according to Ernst Robert Curtius—has been called 'European literature.'" He might as easily have written "medieval Christendom," which was the other

half of Curtius's famous title. (In *Vom Griechenland* [*Of Greece*] [Kittler and Vismann 2001: 19], Kittler had linked Augustus's imperial principate to the Roman military postal service; he might have added that that same communications network would also serve as vehicle for the dissemination of Christianity.) For Curtius as for T. S. Eliot, "European literature" as a unity was unthinkable without the *Aeneid*. Kittler, however, follows Heidegger's preference for primal *Dichtung* (poetry) and *Denken* (thinking) over merely derivative "literature" or "philosophy"; he thus wants neither half of Novalis's (2001) famous alternative of Christendom or a secularized Europe. If we follow Claudia Breger's (2006) suggestion that Kittler's Greek project is to be understood relative to current European and German political preoccupations, Kittler would have no part of the European Union's (EU) implicit self-identification as Christian (thereby excluding Turkey); his position cannot be reduced to that of conventional cultural conservatism. Given that he linked the death of Greek song to Greece's EU membership in *Musik und Mathematik*, one wonders if he might not welcome the current depression-conditioned return of many Greeks to farming as a chance to remember the event of Being.

With such disinterest in European literature, it is perhaps not unsurprising that Dante, the most Christian of epic poets, should receive cursory treatment here. Kittler has little interest in the *Comedia* itself, but more in the shift of versification from Greek quantitative to modern qualitative meter. That Dante's entire poem itself represents a form of odyssey, a *descensus ad inferos* (descent into hell) related to that of Aeneas (*Aeneid*, bk. 6) and Odysseus (*Odyssey*, bk. 11), is not even mentioned. Instead, Kittler concentrates on the poet's encounter with Ulysses in book 26 of the *Inferno*. This is one of the most heavily commented passages of the poem, but Kittler does not engage with it in much depth. He notes, as have many other scholars, the connection to the state of seafaring in Dante's time (the Vivaldi brothers had set out for India centuries before Columbus or Vasco da Gama and never returned) but does not mention Dante's ambivalent fascination with the Homeric hero and his dignified eloquence. Odysseus's words to his shipmates, calling them to join him in exploring the ocean beyond the limits of the known world (which was then Gibraltar), would seem worthy of a Kittlerian hero:

Considerate la vostra semenza:
fatti non foste a viver come bruti,
ma per seguir virtute e canoscenza.
(*Inferno* 26.118–20)

[Consider well the seed that gave you birth:
you were not made to live your lives as brutes,
but to be followers of worth and knowledge.]⁴

The power of these last words suggests not only Christian but also antique notions of “virtue” and knowledge, as Hugo Friedrich (1942) has shown; none other than Kittler’s beloved Nietzsche appealed to this Renaissance sense of *virtù* (in *Der Anti-Christ* [*The Anti-Christ*]). Dante is also, like Johann Gottfried von Herder in Kittler’s *Kulturgeschichte*, drawing an anthropological distinction here, between man and animal. It is possible that Kittler’s bypassing of Dante’s sympathy for Odysseus may originate in Friedrich, who also minimized this aspect (Kleszewski 1985: 29n12). However, Kittler may also himself dislike Dante’s Odysseus for having chosen to explore the Atlantic, given that he regrets, later in this lecture, having to live and think in a transatlantic context. Yet without Dante, “the *translatio studii* [transfer of knowledge] from the Greeks to the Romans to northern Europe” would never have happened, and Kittler is himself only the last link in that migration. If the *translatio imperii* (transfer of rule) that Charlemagne attempted with the foundation of Dante’s beloved Holy Roman Empire failed, the *translatio studii* did not. Kittler seems here to be implicitly paraphrasing the famous last words of Richard Wagner’s *Meistersinger* (*Master Singer*) into a Hellenic context: “Zer-ging das Heil’ge Römische Reich in Dunst / Uns bliebe doch die heil’ge deutsche Kunst” (If the Holy Roman Empire dissolved like fog / We still have Holy German Art). For he follows up quickly on Dante with Gottfried’s *Tristan*, in the figure of whose Isolde “Muses and Sirens become one.” The German recursion of Homer thus pre-dates the eighteenth century. Clearly, cultural odysseys are, for Kittler, more perdurable than political ones.

Godard’s *Le mépris*, the third stop or station in Kittler’s Homeric wake, receives the shortest mention of all; more time is in fact devoted to a rant against American censorship practices (somewhat inaccurately attributed to the Federal Communications Commission [FCC], when the real censor was the Hays Office). The jeremiad against North American puritanism is oddly reminiscent of similar passages in Adorno’s *Minima Moralia* or the culture industry segments of *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectic of Enlightenment*). Kittler’s factual inaccuracy about the production history of Godard’s film undermines his entire interpretation here, however. Although he claims that it was Carlo Ponti who insisted—contra Godard—on the famous nude scene with Brigitte Bardot at the beginning, the pressure came as much from the film’s other producer, the American Joseph E. Levine, who wanted to cash in on Bardot’s body for commercial success (Marie 1990: 19–20). Godard’s ironic response to this was to film Bardot in artificial red and blue lighting, accompanied by a commentary resembling a metaphorical Renaissance blazon, a list of Bardot’s body parts.⁵ Instead of close attention to Godard’s film, Kittler offers us the idea that Godard answers Emperor Tiberius’s two questions about the *Odyssey*: whether Penelope remained faithful to her husband (Kittler thinks not) and what the Sirens sang (for Kittler, “desire and knowledge,” *Lust und Wissen*). Kittler never

explicitly mentions the fact that Bardot is conceived of by Godard as cognate to Penelope in the *Odyssey*, but only a passage from *Le mépris* where Paul (Michel Piccoli) tells Camille (Bardot) that Penelope did not love Odysseus gives the last line of Kittler's lecture its full meaning as an allusion. Although Kittler does not mention this either, the lines given to Fritz Lang, director of an *Odyssey* film-within-the-film, suggest that Godard viewed Homer as rooted in nature and Being just as much as Kittler did. (Lang also recites the lines Dante gives to Odysseus already quoted here.)

2001: *A Space Odyssey* is discussed at more length than Godard or Dante. What interests Kittler here is the "idiocy of manned space travel," a specifically North American version of intergalactic puritanism whereby men and machines do without women; in a sense, Kubrick has here merely transposed a favorite Kittlerian phantasmatic *Urszene* (primal scene)—that of Nathanael's father making babies with Coppelius in E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Der Sandmann" ("The Sandman") (Kittler 1977)—into outer space. But Kubrick's astronauts are merely the puppets of the monotheistic program that has already addressed them: their actions take place "in the wake of the rediscovered black monolith," which Kittler has called several paragraphs previously a "Kaaba," referring to the most sacred Islamic site in Mecca. (Kittler did not invent this comparison, but he is in very strange company by making it: the Kaaba comparison has been popular among New Age devotees wont to find cryptic symbolism in Kubrick's film. In an ironic bit of surrealist "objective chance" that would have amused Kittler, Apple, at the time of this lecture, was building a Kaaba-like black cube in New York in 2006, called the "Mecca Project," thereby causing some anger among Muslims. *Grosse Kulturpolitik* [great cultural policy] seems less to have died after Heidegger's flirtation with National Socialism—as Kittler claimed in *Kulturgeschichte*—than to have migrated to computer companies and mass media.) In an interesting aside devoted to Aristotle, Kittler discusses how a misunderstanding of machine as organon (a mere "extension of man" in Marshall McLuhan's sense) was linked to the antique reliance on slave labor, as none other than Karl Marx noted. Kittler could have linked this to the fateful North American "peculiar institution" of slavery as well.⁶ He also misses the fact that HAL's singing "Daisy, Daisy" is a reference to the first singing IBM from 1961. In a brief concluding coda, the lecture alludes to Peter J. Bentley's notion that technology may—following Heidegger's famous Hölderlin quotation—be the solution to the danger it is. Once again, though, Kittler's proposal for decentralizing control over technology is not far from his archenemy Adorno's, although Kittler's "bottom up" model is applied to computers, whereas Adorno's was to radio. The redemptive model Kittler hints at in the end seems, however, to be less that of Enlightenment than of the posthuman.

III

Although the lecture's chatty informality may make it look lightweight, "In the Wake of the *Odyssey*" can be read as a miniature variant of narratives staged at greater length in *Musik und Mathematik* and *Eine Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaften*. The latter, in particular, spells out at one point its own idiosyncratic "culture-historical" method of combined excursion and recursion in programmatic fashion: "After the culture-historical path has once been successfully constructed or run through [*durchlaufen*] up to one's own culture-historical present, the gaze [of the culture historian—LP] turns a second time backward, in order to measure all pasts against the present" (Kittler 2000: 82, my translation).⁷ This "culture-philosophical reentry" (Kittler 2000: 82, my translation), as Kittler calls it with reference to Niklas Luhmann, need not be historically accurate (any more than Kittler's own speculations are), but it is the necessary condition for the "takeoff" of culture history, just as it was for technology's.⁸ Just as computers become functional by reentering their own codes back into themselves, so societies become reflexive when they can reenter their own distinction of true/false back into itself, thereby considering the conditions of knowledge. (Another well-known example would be Kurt Gödel's famous incompleteness theorems and their corollary of recursion.) Recursion, or metaphor, is the basal figure in each case.

Yet the differences from Luhmann are marked. Just as in Luhmann, basal recursivity is a quasi-technical operation, something that does not necessarily translate into knowledge, but rather precedes the latter. Recursion—although Kittler sees it as lying at the base of "transcendental knowledge" (2000: 76, my translation)—not only is not reflection, or self-knowledge, but also may serve to block off the latter. Already in Luhmann, recursiveness may serve to hide basal paradoxes (with what Luhmann calls "Invisibilisierung" [invisibilization]), in particular the inability of systems to ground their own legitimacy (this is what Luhmann calls "conditional programs," the assumption or "system trust" that law will produce justice, to take one egregious example). In Kittler, however, the blindness of recursion goes even further. We have seen how his preference for Greece as chief Event in the History of Being led him to minimize Dante or "European literature"; it might even be argued that Kittler's very logocentrism unwittingly reproduces later Christian reinterpretations of the Greek Logos. But his growing anti-Americanism similarly elides the fact that Kittler's whole cultural-historical project would hardly have been possible without certain developments in North America. The very separation of culture from sociology lying at the base of Kittler's method was pioneered back in the 1960s by none other than Clifford Geertz (1964), whom Kittler has called overrated. Kittler's own career was defined at a crucial moment, when he had not yet begun work at Ruhr University, Bochum, through invited stays at American universities. Older texts by him acknowledge this, like

the rhapsodic end of *Dracula's Legacy*: "I shut off the whirring of my office typewriter, raise my eyes and see in the fog over the bay the Golden Gate Bridge, our hyperreal future.—Berkeley, March 22, 1982" (Kittler 1993a: 57, my translation). Can we imagine Kittler without his equally rapt invocations of the Doors and Jimi Hendrix, Thomas Edison and Thomas Pynchon? These North American excursions were surely as constitutive for his work as any Mediterranean ones. Yet Kittler's late work seems to elide its basis in historical excursion in favor of a self-referential absolutizing of recursion.

Kittler's basal recursions are, however, even more fundamentally distinct from Luhmann's. For they are, in opposition to Luhmann, *not functional* in any technifiable sense (except perhaps rhetorical). The recursion, in Kittler, is a metaphor and thus the most obvious instance of rhetoric in his work. Its ancestor is Nietzsche's notion of the ultimate metaphoricity of language (in "On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense," 1873). Whereas Luhmann keeps his different levels of recursivity (such as first-order and second-order observation, or observation and operation) neatly distinct, Kittler again and again collapses them. Thus in the Greek invention of the alphabet, which is also the origin of musical notation, *poesis* (artistic making) and *techne* (technology or craft), kept distinct by Heidegger in "The Question concerning Technology" (1949), are run together. Poetry and philosophy—also distinguished by Heidegger (1951: 97)—are similarly conflated. So too are words and music. At this point, one begins to be suspicious of the implications of this collapse; a comment by Kittler's archenemy offers a hint why. In "Fragment on Music and Language," Adorno discusses various theories of musical form and criticizes both Wagner's purely intentionalist (or rhetorical) model and that of Eduard Hanslick's formalism. (Hanslick was Wagner's late nineteenth-century contemporary and an advocate for Wagner's nemesis Johannes Brahms.) Hanslick's "counterthesis" to Wagner's emphasis on music's text-bound expressivity, that music is "forms moved by sounds," "amounts to no more than empty stimulus [*Reiz*] or the mere existence [*Dasein*] of sonority, lacking that relation of aesthetic shape [*Gestalt*] to what it is itself not, and by what it first becomes an aesthetic shape" (Adorno 1997a: 255, my translation). In other words: for Adorno, even music—contrary to what so many have seen as its absoluteness—cannot be purely self-referential or recursive; its meaning must also refer outside itself, to historically sedimented meanings. Adorno's characterization of Hanslick could be, *avant la lettre*, easily applied to Kittler's reduction of music to nothing more than "sound" (his favorite anglicism, which he himself popularized in German and which is itself a very concrete instance of the traces of North American English in his thought). For unlike Luhmann, who always insisted that self-reference had to be accompanied by hetero-reference (also called by Luhmann "asymmetrization," the breaking through of the magic circle of reentry), and distinction paired with designation, Kittler

elides any moment of concretion or referentiality via his basal self-reference. For Luhmann, media cannot be observed except via the forms that use them; a medium cannot be observed in itself. We hear the vibrations of an oboe's spectral sonority as an A, relative to other notes of the scale, and not just as "sound." Kittler, however, wants to do just this—observe the medium—and thereby creates a fundamental paradox in his work. Media are supposed to be able to observe themselves (i.e., produce meaning); this explains Kittler's massive disinterest in specific interpretations of artworks and his reduction of music (such as Wagner's or that of Homer's Sirens) to the medium of sheer "sound." Medium and form are, in other words, collapsed in Kittler's work.⁹ The result is a colossal dedifferentiation of terminology, which we must read as Kittler's atavistic attack on social modernity, something according to Luhmann typified by functional differentiation. This very dedifferentiation at the basis of Kittler's own odyssey (out to North American technological *Zivilisation* [civilization] and back to old-European *Kultur* [culture] and Being?) can itself be historically dated; sociologists have seen the popular culture and protest movements of the 1960s, with their characteristic blurring of traditional distinctions between religion and art, or theory and practice, as a form of dedifferentiation (Lechner 1990). Kittler, too, turns out—in an age of other fundamentalisms—to be true to the "fundamentalism" or "hunger for experience" of his own 1960s roots. And once again, he also turns out to have more in common than he knew with his nemesis Adorno, who never stopped attacking excess "socialization" (*Vergesellschaftung*) in the anarchic name of art and its paradoxical knowledge.

At the bottom of this elision or collapse is a more fundamental omission (or concealment?) in Kittler's work, namely, that of rhetoric itself, which serves paradoxically to found Kittler's entire culture-historical enterprise and thus cannot itself be thematized or observed.¹⁰ What Adorno calls "intentionality" in his critique of Hanslick could be restated in a form less bound to traditional subject-philosophy as, precisely, rhetoric.¹¹ Kittler's methodical elision of "society" from "cultural technology" is at bottom an elision of rhetoric. *Kulturtechnik* (cultural technology) thus turns out to be a form of short circuit, just like the short-circuiting of music and words, poetry and technology, or poetry and philosophy; the fundamental "sound" of Kittler's work is the sound of audio feedback, like that of his beloved Hendrix holding his guitar too close to the amplifier. The dysfunctionality of Kittler's basal recursiveness also motivates the episodic looseness and repetitiveness of his narrative or historical excursions. Recursive short circuits can generate history not in the usual linear sense but only in repetitions. What has been called here excursion and recursion might be correlated with the figures of irony and allegory Lars Friedrich has found in Kittler.¹² Irony, on the level of tone, corresponds with allegory on that of narrative (Friedrich 2006: 508); while irony (like recursion) is "instantaneous," allegory must

unfold itself in time. Yet “allegory coincides with irony, in that it says other than it means, and means other than it says” (Friedrich 2006: 508–509, my translation). Cultural history, for Kittler, is only an allegory for that of technology. In Kittler’s case, we might add that the allegory is multiple, since his *Odyssey* is at one and the same time a narrative of technology and sex; reference to the two veers back and forth within Kittler’s sailor’s yarn like the *coq-à-l’âne* of a Renaissance satirist (a historical and humorous form of crossing the wires of signification).¹³ It is thus not surprising, given the built-in instability of a basal short circuit, that “allegory can only compulsively repeat that which is indecidable [i.e., a paradox—LP] and cannot synthesize itself in any compelling reading” (Friedrich 2006: 509, my translation). It may be a mark of Kittler’s honesty that he, too, ends his own brief Homeric wake with something unresolvable—namely, the question of Penelope’s love.

NOTES

1. The difference might be that whereas Freud considered his interest in the Shakespeare controversy a mere hobby, Kittler has elevated his late amateur Hellenism to the center of his work. For an interesting deconstructive view of Freud’s obsession, see Royle 1995, chap. 5.
2. Other Lacanian apothegms from this seminar, given at the height of 1968, might also remind one of Kittler; “il n’y a de discours . . . que de la jouissance” (there is no discourse but of jouissance), or “le savoir est moyen de jouissance” (knowledge is a means to jouissance) (Lacan 1991: 90).
3. On this concept, see Andriopoulos, Schabacher, and Schumacher 2001.
4. The translation is by Allen Mandelbaum (Dante 1982: 245).
5. “Camille’s body connotes ‘art’ more than ‘sexuality’; the camera transforms it into a reclining sculpture” (Silverman and Farocki 1998: 34).
6. See the discussion of *Huckleberry Finn* by Leo Marx (1964).
7. Kittler is discussing Friedrich Schiller and Voltaire. Note the computer-like resonance of the term *durchlaufen*, as if a punch card or sequence were being run through a machine.
8. The programmatic statement here is Kittler 1993b, which interestingly devotes more space to the Middle Ages than the Greco-philic Kittler would later do.
9. This observation has also been made by Dirk Baecker (2002).
10. This has been noted by Lars Friedrich (2006) and also by Anselm Haverkamp (2001). Friedrich (2006: 506–7) points specifically to Kittler’s short-circuiting of literature and metaphor with hermeneutics.
11. The same motif can be found, not coincidentally, in Adorno’s critique of Heidegger’s slipping from the grammatical function of the copula “is” to the hypostasis of Being: “the transition

- ignores the intention of the expression,” in other words, its rhetoric (Adorno 1997b: 111, my translation).
12. Again, the *Kulturgeschichte* is explicit on the importance of “Figuren” (figures) to its method (Kittler 2000: 28, 34).
 13. *Coq-à-l’âne*—literally “rooster to donkey” or “cock to ass”—was a satirical form invented by Clément Marot around 1530 (we may remember again the earlier suggested comparison of Kittler to Rabelais); Bernard Dupriez (1991: 113) defines it as “a form which skips between two unrelated ideas” and adds that “normal discourse proceeds by avoiding both redundancy and *coq-à-l’âne*” (114)—precisely what Kittler loves to indulge in.

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