Scilicet: Kittler, Media and Madness

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Speaking Your Mind

In an interview with John Armitage published in 2006, Kittler spoke of his stratagem for speaking his mind.

> [M]y work in literary criticism was not only a pretext but also a historical necessity which, all the same, permitted me to talk about German poets whilst saying things I wanted to state in my own name but did not dare to articulate. You may ask why it was so difficult to say things in my own name. Well, apart from the fact that I am a shy person, it was very hard during that time in Germany to move beyond the study of dialectics and the self's relation to itself. Consequently, I had to cover up all I wanted to say with nice stories about young German poets. (Armitage and Kittler 2006, 18)

All of this was prompted by the irritated apprehension that 'in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, one had always to pretend that what one wrote had been written down in some book one had consulted' (Armitage and Kittler 2006, 18). Deleuze has spoken in rather similar terms about his earlier work, in which he says that he used other philosophers as mouthpieces, or rather, surrogate parents, on whom he fathered his own conceptions, before beginning to be able to write *in propria persona*. So Kittler seems to be saying that, in order to escape from the necessity of pretending that everything he had to say was already written down somewhere, he found himself surrendering to, indeed engineering something like the very exigency he sought to evade, by saying what he had to say only through surrogate forms that were indeed already written down.

A few moments later in the interview, Kittler explains that even the title of the book that appeared in English as *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* had a title in German that seems to allude to this condition of prescription, since it is a phrase taken from *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, the book in which Daniel Paul Schreber provides a detailed account of his delusional system. What in English is a 'discourse network', in German is an *Aufschreibesystem*, a 'writing-

down system', and 'it was not the done thing', Kittler remarks 'to take the title of a tenure track book from the text of a madman'. I have it in mind, or someone has it, possibly somewhere else, to try to draw out some of the implications and outcomes of the gramophonic madness that supplies Kittler with his governing concept of the writing-down system or, as it might otherwise be rendered, registering, recording or notation system. In order to keep in mind the question of the already-written-down, I will be using the phrase 'inscription system' to translate Aufschreibesystem in place of 'discourse network'.

The writing-down system is first described some 100 pages into Schreber's text: '*Books or other notes* are kept in which for years have been *written-down* all my thoughts, all my phrases, all my necessaries, all the articles in my possession or around me, all persons with whom I come into contact, etc.' (Schreber 2000, 123). Schreber believes that the rays which are assailing him, the nerves of God, as he believes they ultimately are, are being drawn to him by his unique power of attractiveness. Indeed, the physical and mental tortures of the rays are in fact designed to protect them from being wholly assimilated to or absorbed in his being, as they otherwise would be. He explains that one of the principal purposes of the writing-down system is actually to enable the rays to immunise themselves against him:

> It was believed that my store of thoughts could be exhausted by being written-down, so that eventually the time would come when new ideas could no longer appear in me; this of course is quite absurd, because human thinking is quite inexhaustible; for instance reading a book or a newspaper always stimulates new thoughts. This was the trick: as soon as an idea I had had before and which was (already) written down, recurred – such a recurrence is of course quite unavoidable in the case of many thoughts, for instance the thought in the morning "Now I will wash" or when playing the piano "This is a beautiful passage," etc. – as soon as such a budding thought was spotted in me, the approaching rays were sent down with the phrase, "We have already got this," *scilicet* written-down; in a manner hard to describe the rays were thereby made unreceptive to the power of attraction of such a thought. (Schreber 2000, 127-8)

Schreber reassures himself of the inexhaustibility of mind, and yet feels emptied out by the unavoidable necessity of repeating oneself, since every such repetition seems to be the occasion for or proof of a spoken word that has written itself down in advance. Schreber begins to feel himself to be nothing else but a playback mechanism.

Later on, he suggests that the writing-down system may also be employed to test whether he is still alive and capable of mental activity:

> People around me are made to say certain words by stimulating their nerves; as for instance madmen throw in a certain learned term (possibly in a foreign language) which they perhaps remember from the past; these come to my ears and simultaneously the words "has been recorded" (*scilicet* into awareness or comprehension) are spoken into my nerves: for example a madman says without any connection "rationalism," or "social democracy" and the voices say "has been recorded", thereby attempting to find out whether the terms "rationalism" or "social democracy" still have a meaning for me, in other words whether I have enough reason left to comprehend these words. (Schreber 2000, 220)

Reason now just means the residue of whatever has not yet been taken down in evidence. Reason is whatever can succeed in being off-the-record.

Kittler is among a number of commentators who have observed how closely related media technologies are to disability or sensory deficit – deafness in the case of Edison, blindness in the case of the typewriters which were marketed as forms of automatic writing for the blind. The phonograph offers itself as a supplement that will plug that gap in being that voice is, since it streams out so unstintingly and irrecoverably. The phonograph promises to restore the voice to itself, to allow it to cleave to, no longer be deaf to itself, even the phonograph is itself deaf to what it nevertheless hears or overhears, in that it is unable to discriminate between phonemic structure and phonetic phenomenon. With the phonograph, the voice is not just an event or overflow of being, it is an object for having. And yet, at least in Kittler's commentary, universal and simultaneous autoinscription leaves the voice more depleted and defective than ever before, since recording confiscates all its powers of original utterance.

Schreber's systematic account of his delusional system provides more than a symptomatic registration of the awareness of new recording technologies. It is at the heart of Kittler's understanding of the drastic shift from one system of inscription to another that took place following the development, from the 1870s onwards. of apparatuses that allowed the storage and manipulation, not just of words, but of sound and of moving image. We might note, without being able to do much more at this stage than merely note it, that Kittler focusses his account of the writing-down system much more on technologies of storage and recall, the phonograph and the

cinematograph, than on the technologies of transmission and dissemination, the telephone and radio, which developed coevally with them.

1800/1900

The phonograph, or gramophone is at the centre of the transformations undergone between 1800 and 1900 because Kittler sees them as involving a radical deformation of the values associated with the voice, as the embodiment of life, spontaneous expressiveness and the continuity of Man and Nature. In speaking, Man gives voice to and is given voice by Nature. In 1800, according to Kittler, voice is still conceived as Aristotle conceived it in his *De Anima*, the sound of that which has soul in it, with the difference that Aristotle's notion of soul extended to animated beings in general, and not just to the human animal. Quoting Herder's On the Origin of Language, Kittler declares that 'language in 1800 "was full of living sounds" ' (Kittler 1990, 43). In a sense, this might seem to mean that Aufschreibesystem of 1800 is not, or not yet, a writing-down system at all, in that all writing is held to conduce or aspire to the condition of voice. A better rendering might be a 'notation-system', since notation describes those encodings of music and dance the purpose of which is not so much to record, as to allow the production of actions. In a similar way, writing at the beginning of the nineteenth century is subject to what Kittler calls 'auditory hallucination'; it is an oralised writing, which contrasts with the engraphed or conscripted speech that holds sway at the far end of the century. The mediator between voice and script in 1800 is handwriting, which seems to enact the seamless continuity of mind, hand and word, a continuity which is broken apart by the typewriter, which breaks language down into separate units. Kittler attaches great importance to the cursive forms of handwriting, arguing that '[t]he great metaphysical unities invented in the age of Goethe – the developmental process of *Bildung*, autobiography, world history – could be seen as a flow of the continuous and the organic simply because they were supported by flowing, cursive handwriting' (Kittler 1990, 83). The curves of the pen caress the page, monitored attentively by the eye of the writer; the keys of the typewriter blindly impact and incise it.

Kittler offers us an analogy for Schreber's condition in Ernst von Wildenbruch, the Wilhelmine poet laureate, who was a one of a number of poets who were persuaded to record their voices with the new phonograph. Indeed, he even wrote a poem for the occasion, the feeble rhyming of which, says Kittler, attests to the paralysing effect of the new apparatus: 'the voice can no longer be pure poetic breath that vanishes even as it is heard and leaves no trace. What once necessarily escaped becomes inescapable; the

bodiless becomes material' (Kittler 1990, 236). Kittler represents the move from orality to media as a move from spirit to matter: soul gives way to material marks, or neurological sparks. Voice, that had previously signified spirit, or the translatability of soul and body, becomes reduced to pure matter. Phonography, the writing of voice, may be regarded as a kind of phonotopy, or the spatialising of voice.

This is exemplified most clearly in the trope of auditory persistence, which animates a number of fantasies and romances. The principle behind these stories is articulated in a paragraph read by the demented inventor who is the protagonist of Florence McLandburgh's 'The Automaton Ear' (1877):

> "As a particle of the atmosphere is never lost, so sound is never lost. A strain of music or a simple tone will vibrate in the air forever and ever, decreasing according to a fixed ratio. The diffusion of the agitation extends in all directions, like the waves in a pool, but the ear is unable to detect it beyond a certain point. It is well known that some individuals can distinguish sounds which to others under precisely similar circumstances are wholly lost. Thus the fault is not in the sound itself, but in our organ of hearing, and a tone once in existence is always in existence."

The idea serves as the donné for a number of technological fables and scientific romances of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, one of which, Salomo Friedlaender's 'Goethe Speaks Into the Phonograph' (1916), Kittler reproduces in the 'Gramophone' chapter of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (Kittler 1999, 59-68). The vanishing of words and sounds is therefore henceforth to be understood simply as a diminishment of volume. In order to retrieve the lost voices of the past it is no longer necessary to traverse time: one must simply reach down into matter, and, through a conjoined process of amplification and of attunement, restore the lost sounds of the past. We are not forgetful of the past, merely deaf to it, and so we need, not a time-machine, but a hearing aid, like the ear-trumpet that the inventor in Mclandburgh's 'The Automaton Ear' purchases and modifies. Phonography stockpiles sound and, inasmuch as the evanescence of sound figures the unstable flow of time itself, it can be said to materialise time too. The late nineteenth-century Recording Angel in this respect anticipates Walter Benjamin's Angel of History, who, with his back towards the future, experiences the passage of the centuries only as the steady accumulation of the pile of rubble at his feet.

The most important feature of the gramophone for Kittler, the one that entitles it to be identified with the real rather than the imaginary or the

symbolic of Lacan's schema, is that it hears passively or nonselectively. This brings about a shift from a focus on the signifieds, or meanings of texts, to their material signifiers: 'the gramophone empties out words, by bypassing their imaginary aspect (signified) for their real aspects (the physiology of the voice)' (Kittler 1990. 246). The gramophone allows the registration of the unconscious or inaudible noise that always inhabits and accompanies the voice. Perhaps the most telling parts of Kittler's analysis concern, not so much the ways in which the phonograph captured the voice as the ways in which it revealed the voice to be a carrier of and itself always emerging out of noise. After the phonograph, the voice was not so much the defeat of noise by signal as the product of a specific signal-to-noise ratio, for, Kittler tells us, 'the discourse network of 1900 places all discourse against the background of white noise' (Kittler 1990, 288). Thus 'writing circa 1900 means being without voice' (Kittler 1990, 285), and the swallowing up of the voice in noise means the dissolution of the subject. All the media devices of the late nineteenth century, combined with analytic constructions like those of Freud which mimic them, 'all can track traces without a subject. A writing without the writer, then, records the impossible reality at the basis of all media: white noise, primal sound' (Kittler 1990, 316). Writers and writing are 'accidental events in a noise that generates accidents and can thus never be overcome by its accidents' (Kittler 1990, 184). Where Nietzsche's voice is lost in the hollow howlings of his last madness, Schreber finds that the only way to keep down the noise of the twaddle that fills his head is to shout it down with more noise, with bellowing, with empty rhymes, with piano-playing, with words the import of which he does not understand, all this 'responding to Flechsig's psychophysics with a psychophysical nonsense' (Kittler 190, 301).

Kittler is surely right to insist that one important effect of the new media of the late nineteenth century was to make noise unignorable. Understandably and tellingly, Kittler focusses on those points in discourse in which pure noise, pure nonsense, breaks through or overwhelms sense, soul, voice. But most of the time this does not happen. In fact, the gramophone does not abolish voice or murder soul – it merges with them, forming a new, mixed body. Noise is not simply set aside or filtered out, even when it is defined as that which must be so set aside or filtered out. Rather, it enters into signal, providing its most essential features – the grain of the voice, the timbre that defines the essence of some sound.

The materialisation of voice and of moving image allows for two effects that had previously been available only in fantasy or dream, and are both important features of nonsense: the modification of speed and the playing of sounds backward. Schreber reports the first effect in terms that suggest a

familiarity with phonographs and cinematographs, which were commonly cranked at non-natural speeds:

> No one who has not personally experienced these phenomena like I have can have any idea of the extent to which speech has slowed down. To say "But naturally" is spoken B.b.b.u.u.u.t.t.t.n.n.n.a.a.a.t.t.t.u.u.u.r.r.r.a.a.a.l.l.l.y.y.y., or "Why do you not then shit?" W.w.w.h.h.h.y.y.y.d.d.d.o.o.o.............; and each requires perhaps thirty or sixty seconds to be completed. This would be bound to cause nervous impatience in every human being, not like myself more and more inventive in using methods of defense, as to make him jump out of his skin; a faint idea of the nervous unrest caused is perhaps the example of a Judge or teacher always listening to a mentally dull witness or a stuttering scholar, who despite all attempts cannot clearly get out what he is asked or wants to say. (Kittler 2000, 202-3)

Reversibility emerges from the decomposition of the seemingly natural ongoingness of the stream of speech, which ordinarily can never turn back on itself without actually extending its stream onwards, into the vibrations which are its elementary form. A vibration may give rise to a powerfully propagating wave, but the particles which compose it actually go nowhere, merely shuttling back and forth in a very small compass (in the case of a longitudinal wave), up and down (in the case of a transverse wave), or in repeated small orbits (in the case of a compound wave such as one finds in the sea). The transcription system of 1900 effects this elementary decomposition, moving in close to every discourse as one might move in closer and closer to a newspaper or video screen, until all one sees is the clustering of the dots which compose it. This cures or destroys the ongoingness of time; it makes time reversible at the cost of pulverising all meaning, which becomes typified by elementary palindromes like *mama*, *papa* and *DADA*, and less elementary ones like *phonograph* and *gramophone*.

The most important and far-reaching effect of all this is that Man, who is both the giver of meaning in the previous system of inscription has his meaning given to him by it, is evacuated: 'Once the technological differentiation of optics, acoustics and writing exploded the Gutenberg monopoly around 1880, the fabrication of so-called Man became possible. His essence escapes into apparatuses…So-called Man is split up into physiology and information technology' (Kittler 1999, 16). The larger narrative of his history of media is the removal of Man from the circuit of media, which henceforth speak directly to each other, without the mediation of human users or agents – like the two gramophones which Kafka

imagined speaking to each other in lieu of a lover's conversation: 'the individual falls in the crossfire between psychophysics and psychoanalysis; in its place is an empty point of intersection constituted by statistical generality and unconscious simplicity' (Kittler 1990, 280).

Scilicet

Schreber is rather uncertain as regards the actual mechanism of his writing-down system:

> I cannot say with certainty who does the writing down. As I cannot imagine God's omnipotence lacks all intelligence, I presume that the writing-down is done by creatures given human shape on distant celestial bodies after the manner of the fleeting-improvised-men, but lacking all intelligence; their hands are led automatically, as it were, by passing rays for the purpose of making them write-down, so that later rays can again look at what has been written. (Schreber 2000, 123)

One of the most grotesque, but surprisingly common séance-room stunts, was the materialisation of an ectoplasmic mouth, throat or larynx. The more technically-minded would have appreciated the explanation frequently given by spirit controls that this was a necessary mediating structure to allow otherwise bodiless spirits to make vocal sounds. In this case, an intermediary object is formed in order to allow a certain bodily action to take place. In Schreber's account, something different occurs. Here he imagines a transcription system whose means are brought about simultaneously with the action it performs. Like the 'fleeting-improvised-men', whom he believed were summoned up out of nowhere and nothing, the agents and means of transcription are nonce-formations. Here the message is, or magically conjures, the medium.

The inscription-system of 1900 might seem to be identified with universal mediation; we are, after all, accustomed to think of Friedrich Kittler as a media theorist. But we can say that there are in fact two phases to this mediation. The first is the development of the capacity to capture, store and retrieve voices. The second is the development of something like the principle of spontaneous self-capture. The first is a reality; the second, needless to say, is a fantasy, though a powerfully diffused one. In Schreber's delusion, potential becomes achieved and absolute fact. Being able to be recorded loops back in time to become the fact of already having been recorded, of being on record in advance of having for the illusory first time

arisen. At this point, the capacity for universal mediation has become a kind of *immediation*, in which the condition of every utterance is that it instantly inscribes itself, without delay, deflection or reflection. This would might then suggest a reversal of the apparently obvious contrast between the systems of 1800 and 1900. It might appear at first that the focus on signifieds rather than signifiers of 1800, and the centring principle of the mother's voice, would imply minimal mediation, with the voice everywhere immediately present. The system of 1900 would appear by contrast to surround and inundate the voice with mediations and surrogates. In fact, however, the system of 1800 would give a voice that was everywhere implied and dissimulated, in which everything required to be translated back into a voice that lay always behind material appearances. In the system of 1900, by contrast, the mediation is so total and so immediate that originals mediate themselves instantaneously and in real time. Play is indistinguishable from universal, simultaneous playback.

Kittler offers in *Discourse Networks* a brilliant reading of Schreber's text as a kind of autoanalysis, seeing his impossible 'endopsychic perceptions of brain functions' (Kittler 1990, 296) as 'a psychic information system that Freud takes at its word rather than as mania' (Kittler 1990, 292). In this, he follows Freud himself, who claimed that his insights on paranoia were anticipated in Schreber's self-analysis. In a passage quoted by Kittler, Freud writes that [i]t remains for the future to decide whether there is more delusion in my theory than I should like to admit, or whether there is more truth in Schreber's delusion than other people are as yet prepared to believe' (quoted Kittler 1990, 291). Kittler wants us firmly to make up our mind to believe the latter. On the one hand, it is a perfect and obedient enactment of the 'soul murder' practised by the new psychophysics that, for Kittler, is so closely bound up with the materialisation of language – 'the patient dissects his own organs and notes their modifications while he is still alive, with a positivism that honors psychophysics' (Kittler 1990, 294).

Under these conditions, it is the claim to genuine expressive authorship that is real delirium, while the embrace of the condition of anonymous hallucination 'achieves discursive reality' and '[a] delirium written down coincides with what sciences and media themselves were doing' (Kittler 1990, 305). Schreber's text is read as an inspired defence through simulation of his violent reduction to psychophysical phenomenon by psychiatry: he 'makes delirium into literature when…in defense against the imbecility forced upon him he occasionally simulated the imbecile' (Kittler 1990, 305). It does not seem possible for Freud to take Schreber entirely at his word, perhaps because of his unnerving proclivity to reduce himself to the words imprinted on his nerves. But, where Freud sees Schreber's persecution as the enactment of unconscious fantasies of Schreber's father, with the figure

of Schreber's doctor Flechsig as a screen or mask for Schreber senior, Kittler treats Kittler's allegations about Flechsig literally: Schreber's God is Flechsig, the one who literally reduces Schreber's thoughts to nerve-impulses, who refuses to Schreber the possibility of any rest or intermission, but demands from him a voice that can nevertheless only speak nonsense – for ours is, as Kittler affirms, 'the epoch of nonsense' (Kittler 1999, 86). And yet Schreber does succeed in systematically writing down the writing-down system. As Kittler puts it, '*Schreber as Writer* [*Schreber als Schreiber*] writes up what has written him off' (Kittler 1990, 304). This writing, that is, that writing. Schreber uses the fact of exact, immediate equivalence to establish his own equivalence. The hinge word for him is a bookish term he favours throughout his text – *scilicet*, that is to say, 'that is to say', literally, 'it is permitted to know', or that which lets itself be known. We have met it twice already: 'the approaching rays were sent down with the phrase, "We have already got this," *scilicet* written-down'; 'these come to my ears and simultaneously the words "has been recorded" (*scilicet* into awareness or comprehension)' (Kittler 2000, 128, 220)

It is not that Schreber has taken leave of his senses: it is that he is incapable of standing apart from them. On the one hand Schreber experiences his mind and body as utterly out of his control, subject to spasmodic and unwilled 'miracles' of autonomous operation. On the other, he cannot allow his phantasmal body ever to slip below the threshold of awareness, cannot allow either mind of body to work on their own, and so must subject himself to endless self-monitoring and supervision. One may suspect that that automatism is simply the side-effect of this hypertrophied self-attention. It is not the unconscious which is the mainspring of Schreber's madness – it is the intolerance of any idea of the unconscious. What torments him most are not the thoughts that assail him but rather the irremissability of thought itself, the denial of the capacity to think of nothing.

Kittler finds in Schreber's text much more than evidence for the system of transcription of 1900. Schreber's text conjoins with that of Freud and with those of other psychophysical explicators of the mind, so that 'the mental apparatus as described by the psychotic and psychoanalytic corpus [is] a single, highly complex information system' (Kittler 1990, 293). Schreber's writing is not merely a discourse network or system of inscription on its own terms, it is a kind of autobiographical self-inscription by the system of inscription of 1900 itself: 'The paranoid machine operates like an integrated system of all the data-storage devices that revolutionized recording circa 1900' (Kittler 1990, 299). Here, in finding the principle of the self-identity of the 1900 system of transcription made literal in Schreber's system, Kittler risks succumbing to Schreber's madness, which consists in mistaking mediation for mind itself.

It is not in the mediation of mind – the self-representation of mind in terms of mediatic forms and processes – that Schreber's madness consists. Rather, it is in what might be called his immediation – the mistaking of mind for media, the collapsing of mind into media, of a metaphorical relation into one of identity. Why is Schreber mad? Not because he is not himself, for it is actually the condition of sanity never fully to coincide with or consist of one's own identity, always to be other than or to the side of oneself. Schreber's madness lies in his dream of absolute self-identity, the identity of a self that attempts encyclopaedically to explicate itself, to command and set down the entire system of which he believes itself to consist. His madness is the literalisation of the Delphic prescription *nosce te ipsum*. It is the intolerance of exception, anomaly, of anything unconscious. Like Murphy's mind, in Beckett's *Murphy*, his system 'excludes nothing that it does not already contain'. Signal and noise are therefore no longer antagonists, but perfect mirrors of each other: nothing is meaningless, every bit of nonsense is charged with significance, noise *scilicet* signal, signal *scilicet* noise. The delusions of mechanoiacs like Schreber are not so much the signs of a dissolution of a Cartesian subjectivity by telematic media, or the effects of the irruptive riot of the unconscious, as the signs of a crisis of hyperconsciousness, a consciousness brought to crisis by the terrifying intensity of its fancied consciousness of itself.

This is to say that the problem of taking Schreber as the poet or analyst of the discourse network of 1900 is precisely that he is – utterly, epically and appallingly mad. What is more, his may not even be symptomatic delusions, delusions that belong authentically and expressively to the period in which they arise and to which Kittler claims they give a systematic, mutilated kind of voice. Certainly Schreber's delusions are richly anticipated in other periods. Kittler tells us that the '[t]he sudden, direct link between data-storage machines and individual cases liquidates the basic concept of 1800: the ownership of discourses' (Kittler 1990, 299). But in fact there is a paranoid schizophrenic writing in around 1800 who represents his condition in ways that are so close to Schreber's that one could only suspect plagiarism, were it not for the astonishing sameness of report across many times and places of psychotic delusions. Indeed, the first example of what Victor Tausk (1991) has called the 'influencing machine', the systematic fantasy of a mechanism that systematically controls the sufferer's own thoughts and powers of imagination, arises in the case of James Tilly Matthews, who is writing, and having his words transcribed by his doctor, James Haslam, in the very heart of Kittler's 1800 dispensation (Haslam 1988, Jay 2004). Similarly systematic delusions were set out in 1838 by John Perceval (1838, 1961) and from 1852 onwards by Friedrich Krauß (1967), both of which depend upon contemporary and proleptic ideas of media machinery.

Kittler frequently quotes with approval McLuhan's principle that the content of one medium is always the form of the medium it supersedes – thus, radio broadcasts theatre and live concerts, TV transmits films. But his epochal, all-or-nothing view of the ages of media makes his analysis less attuned to anachronisms, ambivalences or historical syncopations than it might be. This is all the more odd, since, as he himself observes, his very method depends upon such chimera-like consortings of new and old, given the overwhelming use of literature to register the impact and meaning of new technological forms like phonography, film and radio – 'What writers astonished by gramophones, films and typewriters – the first technological media – committed to paper between 1880 and 1920 amounts, therefore to a ghostly image of our present as future' (Kittler 1999, xl). However, more recently, Kittler has spoken in favour of a Serresian notion of what he has called 'recursive history', in which the same forms and ideas recur repeatedly at different moments in time, but with different emphases and effects – one example of this being the siren, which begins life as the name of seductive sea nymph in Greek myth, develops into a more monstrous form in the medieval imagination, and is then adopted in 1819 as the name of an alarm signal that functions equally well in and out of water (Kittler 1996; Armitage and Kittler 2006, 33).

Perhaps the most striking thing about Kittler's analysis of the discourse network of 1900 is what it is said to replace. The discourse network of 1800 is centred on the universal principle of what might be called oralised writing. This is to say that it is built, not on a specific material form and its effects, but rather upon what Kittler himself suggests is a constructed but consensual hallucination, namely the capacity for a kind of 'earsight' or 'hearsight' that allows one to mistake writing for voice, to imagine that writing is everywhere suffused with the most intimate and expressive accents of the voice. When Kittler comes on to describing the effects of the writing-down system of 1900, he seems to forget this, for now it is the voice as such that seems to have been subject to capture. Indeed, the voice as such, the Lacanian 'real' of the voice, in the purely sonorous phenomenon of vocalisation, drives away the fantasy of the voice as the marker of the human, as the vehicle and warrant of soul. In fact, however, one might wonder whether, if the voice as such was only ever formed of fantasy, it is really subject to such absolute obliteration and dispersal. We might expect to find instead the formation of other kinds of vocal phantasm. Indeed, the very notion of the pure materiality of the voice may be regarded as a particular product of a work of fantasy, rather than simple or given reality. Machinery cannot be said to have replaced dreamwork, since machines are in large part formed of dreamwork. The mechanical magic of the phonograph does not so much capture and denature the voice as release a kind of magical mechanism. We have not passed out of imaginary relations

into the real, as Kittler maintains, since that real is now more than ever itself a phantasmal precipitate. The real is always the *nom de plume*, or, better, perhaps, the *nom de stilo* of the imaginary. But this then suddenly makes the choice of Schreber as the amanuensis of the inscription-system fully appropriate after all.

I have suggested that Kittler's conception of the inscription system of 1900 is both impelled and impounded by the imprint it bears of Schreber's systematic fantasy of a universal system. Schreber's madness is not the madness of a rampant and irruptive unconscious, but rather of a psychototalitarian hyperconsciousness, convinced that he is entirely responsible for himself, capable of coinciding with or precisely doubling himself, letting himself be known in his entirety. But seeing Schreber's system at the inceptive heart of Kittler's system also allows us to construe the argument not as a laying bare of a violent reality – the soul-murder of media technology – but as the illumination of a series of complex fantasies about the commingling of soul, mind and mechanism. Such a perspective might also help account for the irresistible sense one gets from a table of correspondences between the inscription systems of 1800 and 1900 such as the one I drew up earlier, that Kittler is in fact an historical writer principally in the sense that he projects into an historical form the terms of a conceptual opposition between voice and writing that has been an engine of philosophical argument at least since Plato. Read as an historian of the dreamwork whereby systems of inscription are themselves inscribed, Kittler would be offering an account not wholly and solely of what media do, but also of what we do to media, and what we do to what media do to us. In this account, man would no longer be abolished or displaced by media. He would be where he has always been: in the middle of things, as the mediator of mediations.

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