



“WELL, WHAT SOCKS is PYNCHON WEARING TODAY?” A FREIBURG SCRAPBOOK in MEMORY of FRIEDRICH KITTLER

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ABSTRACT This essay, a sequence of short memories and reflections, describes several encounters with Friedrich Kittler in Freiburg between 1980 and 1985.

KEYWORDS: Friedrich Kittler, Freiburg, Germany, Thomas Pynchon

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From 1980 to 1985 I studied at the University of Freiburg. One of my instructors happened to be Friedrich Kittler. In hindsight, he was the most extraordinary scholar I ever met. Since all traditionally accepted definitions of genius appear to be defunct, I can happily withdraw into my own: a genius is someone like Kittler. But that is how I think about him today; it is not how I judged him back then. Others may have been able to

discern the future butterfly; I just saw a caterpillar. But what a colorful specimen it was: down to the hookah and the strange way of talking, it appeared to have crept straight out of *Alice in Wonderland*.

Despite promising beginnings, I did not get to know him well. To the extent that I had a say in this, it was a conscious decision on my part. The Freiburg Kittler I encountered was a charismatic intellectual in his late thirties with considerable charm and a wicked sense of humor; he was also narcissistic, prickly, and at times downright abrasive. What follows is too impious to qualify as an obituary, too anecdotal to rank as a biographical sketch, and too frothy to be considered a scholarly appreciation. With notes and memories from bygone Freiburg days, I want to offer a scrapbook of snapshots and impressions designed to prepare readers for some of the more baffling things Kittler has to say in the interview with Christoph Weinberger that is part of this issue (as well as for the uniquely Kittlerian way in which he says them).¹ Many controversial aspects of his work—including war, women, and a strange continental provincialism that increased with age—were already apparent back then. Kittler (and he remains one of the few scholars worthy of the cliché) was ahead of his time, but he invested considerable energy into informing others that they were behind. He was an inspiring teacher, yet he was prone to seek out the danger zone where instruction turns into seduction, education becomes a form of contamination, and the pedagogue takes on the trappings of the demagogue. Kittler had more bulbs in his chandelier than most, yet he wouldn't have been able to emit such dazzling beams of light had they not first been concentrated between formidable blinkers. But the bottom line is that Kittler was *interesting*. When he spoke, you listened; when he spoke well, you took notes; and when he went off on his trademark tangents, you made sure you recorded them verbatim. Like many others, I learned a lot by linking my ears to his mouth, especially when it ran loose; but one of the main lessons was that Kittler, like all major fireworks, was best sampled at a certain distance.

September 1980. My first university course was a seminar on Gottfried Benn. I did not care much for Benn, but the class was scheduled for Thursdays, 18:00–20:00, a time slot acceptable to freshmen sleeping habits. I arrived at a quarter to six to find the room deserted; I had yet to learn that “18:00 c.t.” (*cum tempore*, or “with time”) was the polite Latin way of saying that everybody was free to arrive fifteen minutes late. A small group of other, equally confused neophytes started to trickle in, followed by a surprisingly large number of senior students. The instructor—listed in the course calendar as “PD F. Kittler”—was fashionably late. “PD,” this much I knew, stood for *privatdozent*, the polite German way of saying that the person did not have a real job. I do not recall how he introduced himself because I was much too preoccupied with the way he handled his smoking utensils. Never have I seen a man on more intimate terms with his

cigarette. The moment he lit up, it became a protean tool: magician's wand, conductor's staff, cheerleader's baton, mountain troll's cudgel. He would tap it against the tabletop like a telegraph key to signal impatience, turn it into a samurai katana to behead misinformed objections, and hold it upright as a glowing exclamation mark to illuminate an important point. Upon finishing, he would stare at the stub in baffled gratitude, pass a moment in silent communion, and reach for the next. You didn't need to study Alan Turing to understand the concept of a universal machine; you just had to watch Kittler smoke.

He had an interesting voice. Throughout his life Kittler retained a slight Saxon accent, and the more excited, irritated, or inebriated he became, the stronger it asserted itself. In Saxon-inflected German, *Medien* (media) sounds suspiciously like *Mädchen* (girls): whenever Kittler was sufficiently stimulated, media theory turned into girl theory (as those who have prowled through the first two volumes of *Musik und Mathematik* [*Music and Mathematics*] will confirm). But what struck me most was the way he ended sentences. If Kittler the writer gained notoriety for his flashy openings, Kittler the speaker was at his best when coming to a stop. On the one hand, there was the curt, apodictic conclusion, when the voice dropped with the downward slice of a well-oiled guillotine. This lowering was frequently accompanied by a very characteristic baring of the canine teeth (memorably described by Klaus Theweleit), which signified that Kittler had gone into bad-boy mode. On the other hand, there was a hesitant, almost awkward raising with which he managed to turn inflammatory statements into innocent queries. This upward lilt—when his voice resembled a timid periscope peeking out over an ocean of frothy syntax—added an endearing *Oliver Twist* quality to his outrageous pleas: *Please, sir, I want to provoke more.* (*More?* the establishment roared and sent out one reviewer after the other to bury his habilitation.) In hindsight, I believe that this vulnerability was as much part of his charisma as it was his intellect. The physical fragility Kittler displayed later in life was preceded by an emotional frailty that elicited among his more dedicated followers a potent mixture of idolization and concern. Here was a man you admired, yet also one you protected.

I was so fixated on how he spoke because, like many others, I had no idea what he was saying. If he had switched into Finnish to lecture on string theory, we could not have been more lost. It was disconcerting because everything seemed terribly important; you sensed that you needed to know this, yet it was always just out of reach and therefore all the more intimidating. It reminded me of the first time I walked into a tropical jungle at night; in the dark all the mysterious hissing, croaking, and slithering seemed to come from creatures ten times their normal size. Older students seemed able to follow him; they used the same phrases, invoked the same French names, and laughed at the same strange jokes, though I could not say whether they had ascended to Kittler's heights or whether he was operating

on their level of baloney, just in a more authoritative way. By 18:30 I was flustered, by 18:45 annoyed, and by 19:00 I had decided that PD Kittler did not deserve my presence. Freiburg boasted a large German department; statistically, it was guaranteed that it employed instructors you could understand.

But then things turned technical. Benn occasionally mentions radios in his poems, and Kittler appeared to be arguing that this act of technological remediation determined the status of the poems—hence any retreat into the standard tropes of Benn scholarship (or of textual analysis in general) was an irrelevant cop-out.² Slowly, the ground was giving way underneath me, and I began to experience the opening stage of the Kittler effect with its dizzying mix of elation and vertigo. It was an excavation by way of earthquakes: the pancaking collapse of traditional edifices of meaning accompanied by the corresponding emergence of hitherto obscured materialities of communication and inscription. I certainly did not grasp the finer points, but I came to understand that taking apart my Saba VS2160 amplifier or intently listening to scratches on old Yes or Tubes LPs constituted a genuine act of theory. While I was reveling in the new possibilities the study of German literature had to offer, Kittler started to talk about the early, Edisonian days of phonography that, somehow, had altered the fundamentals of language. Suddenly, to the delight of all present, he broke into broad Saxon English to quote some of the very first words recorded in analog fashion: “Märy häd eh liddle lämb / eets fleesz vas vite äs snou.” This, PD Kittler lectured, reveals the constitutional autism or self-sufficiency of the data stream known as language as well as the breakdown of the only recently inscribed oedipal familial order under new technological conditions. It is the voice of a little girl that needs neither mommy nor daddy (*das braucht keinen Pappa und keine Mama*); all it needs is an engineer like Edison to come along and record its output.

For a brief moment I sensed—and all my subsequent academic experiences have confirmed my fleeting epiphany—that no matter how long I studied, no matter how many more classes I attended, it could only go downhill from here.

Kittler may not have been famous yet, but he already was controversial. The main bone of contention was his pronounced antihumanism, which with the shift from French discourse theory to media had become a great deal more tangible and less nebulous. “You are from now on subject to gadgets and instruments of mechanical discourse processing” (Kittler 1997: 84)—*that* anybody could understand, or at least parrot. Kittler was freeing us from the obligation to ponder Man and Meaning (especially the improvement of the former and the subtleties of the latter), and this was as liberating to some as it was cynical to others. Indeed, for a first-year student wandering the corridors of Freiburg’s fractured German department, the late twentieth-

century theory wars first appeared in the guise of disciplinary infighting. Kittler was not only granting us the license to forget what we had learned in school, he was also issuing letters of marque to attack what was being taught in other lecture halls. As a result, the image of Kittler was already back then subject to partisan division. On the one hand, he was a provocateur eager to engage in polemical raids on large portions of his profession; he descended upon his discipline with all the finesse of an ill-tempered wrecking crew. On the other hand (as he points out in the Weinberger interview), there were formidable forces arraigned against him—against his work in particular as well as against him as a representative of so-called poststructuralism. It was difficult not to sympathize with him: here was the young insurgent, the Jacques Lacan—spouting Luke Skywalker battling the calcified empire. The legend was already taking shape, and throughout his life Kittler remained enough of a showman to nurture it.

But darker, more sinister Machiavellian tales permeated the Freiburg corridors, and those less enamored with Kittler's project of kicking the human out of the humanities (to provide a more fitting translation of the title of his 1980 collection *Austreibung des Geistes aus den Geisteswissenschaften* [*Expulsion of the Spirit from the Humanities*]) were all too willing to pass them on to innocent ears. The rise of poststructuralism in Germany and in Freiburg in particular (for which Kittler in the Weinberger interview claims probably more credit than he deserves) was said to be a tactical alliance gone awry. Under attack from the Left, so I was told behind carefully closed doors, the conservative Germanist establishment had adopted and bred young poststructuralists like Kittler to unleash them against the Left. The antiprogressive alliance, however, was doomed to backfire because the posthermeneutic and antihumanist Parisian arguments brought to bear against (neo-)Marxist or Frankfurt-inspired scholarship could just as well be deployed against the conservative patrons. One of my German instructors likened the situation to Goethe's poem about the magician's disciple who cannot control the brooms he conjures up. An unhappy medievalist compared Kittler to an increasingly insufferable Siegfried at the court of vexed Burgundians who had missed the opportunity to get rid of him in time. Reading Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, I stumbled across a more memorable image: Kittler was Loki, the Nordic trickster god. Odin, troubled caretaker of an embattled world, enlists the help of the deviously ingenious Loki (a mixture of Mephistopheles and MacGyver) to ward off the evil forces of ice and fire. But the wayward Loki has a mind of his own: he cannot be contained by shaky alliances and soon devotes himself to bringing down the Asgard establishment. Kittler—whose knowledge of all things Nordic was channeled through Bayreuth—would have been amused.

In any case, the many stories, rumors and nascent legends, while of little help when it came to understanding Kittler's work, certainly added to his notoriety. The man was a scandal, but more important,

he was a stimulating riot, and for the time being I was happy to be wired into the circuits of inspiration.

February 1981. Toward the end of the Benn seminar Kittler asked me to translate Pink Floyd's "Brain Damage." He was working on a "little paper" and needed as literal a German rendition as possible. A few weeks later I found myself on the floor of his apartment arguing whether "loonies" should be *Irre*, *Verrückte*, or *Beklopte*. Kittler was on a roll: he had just returned from the German leg of Pink Floyd's Wall Tour, and fueled by copious supplies of coffee that was soon more dregs than liquid he rehearsed parts of his Pink Floyd essay.³ "Brain Damage," he lectured, was a performative genealogy of rock music, an electronically enhanced discourse on discourse channel conditions revealing that each of us has a *voice in my head but it's not me*. And it didn't stop with "the Pinks." As he turned coffee into wine, LP covers appeared from every corner of the room. We passed through the Stones to the Fugues and ended up with the Doors' parricidal *Apocalypse Now* anthem "The End." What exactly, Kittler asked, did Jim Morrison mean with "lost in a Roman wilderness of pain"? No idea. He gazed at me with enthused pity: Well, isn't it obvious? The reference to Rome is preceded by a repeated invocation of "everything that stands." So? Once again, I felt like a Japanese radio operator listening in on Navajo windtalkers. Look, he insisted, it is Plato read through Martin Heidegger: *Being* stands, and precisely that is lost in the switch from Greek being to the inferior Roman wilderness. The song records a change in the History of Being. He flipped into vintage Kittlerese: "Jim Morrison dionysiert sich zurück nach Griechenland" (Jim Morrison is dionysizing himself back to Greece). And here—cigarette pausing in erect exclamation—we're back with the early Pink Floyd. After all, Syd Barrett had the Great God Pan in mind when he titled his LP *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn*—

"But that's from the *The Wind in the Willows*," I protested.

"Portly the Otter." . . .

Canines bared, eyebrows flaring: "Ze vind in ze villows?"

A surreal scene was threatening to unfold. Here was the *enragé* Freiburg wunderkind, the inverter of Michel Foucault, updater of Heidegger, avatar of Friedrich Nietzsche—and he was about to be lectured on the riverside exploits of Rat, Mole, and Toad. What next? Beatrix Potter? Barrett had loved her tales too. But the doorbell rang, guests arrived, topics changed, and the world was forever deprived of the media archaeology of the Flopsy Bunnies.

Over a quarter century later I reencountered that February afternoon in the first volume of *Musik und Mathematik*. Whatever else may be involved in Kittler's extravagant Greek recursions, *Musik und Mathematik* is also an autobiographically inflected attempt to short-circuit Jimi Hendrix and Friedrich Hölderlin. If the autopoietic systems theory engineered by Niklas Luhmann (b. 1927) is the last

great aria of the so-called skeptical generation that came of age in Germany in the 1950s, the triptych made up of the *Musik und Mathematik* project by Kittler (b. 1943), the *Book of Kings* project by Theweleit (b. 1942), and the *Spheres* trilogy by Peter Sloterdijk (b. 1947) represents the last great attempt to transform, sift, and conserve (it is tempting to use the three Rs of Hegelian sublation: raise, revoke, and retain) the cultural inheritance of the rebellious 1960s. And if Kittler and Sloterdijk share an ambition to tell a story of occidental proportions, Kittler and Theweleit agree that the most interesting part of that inheritance is the volatile synthesis of the musical and the sexual. For Theweleit, the fusion of sounds and bodies facilitated by US Armed Forces radio stations of the 1950s and the British invasions of the 1960s served to expel fascism even from the bodies it had once taken hold of; for Kittler, it served to retrieve ancient Greece.

What sets Kittler apart is a second, somewhat idiosyncratic 1968 synthesis: that of the aesthetic (he would have heartily disliked the term) and the religious (which he would have disliked even more). It was certainly not religious in any conventional sense: ultimately, grafting Morrison onto Dionysus is an early twenty-first-century reboot of the early nineteenth-century romantic project to establish a *Kunstreligion*, an aesthetically inflected religious spirituality teeming with gods that had the good fortune of being invented by poets rather than priests and were worshiped between sheets rather than in pews. Intellectually, Kittler may be a composite of Nietzsche, G. W. F. Hegel, Heidegger, Lacan, Foucault, Marshall McLuhan, and Claude Shannon; he was also Friedrich Schlegel (and a couple of other romantics) on acid.

But maybe the whole Greek adventure is the last big joke the crafty Loki played on us. Kittler was, after all, one of Foucault's most zealous readers; he was much too familiar with the latter's seminal essay on Gustave Flaubert's *Temptation of Saint Anthony* not to suspect that all his philhellenic revelries wrapped in their gaudy halo of priapic psychedelia are, just like Flaubert's story, the product of an imaginary that "grows among signs, from book to book, in the interstice of repetitions and commentaries" (Foucault 1977: 91). It is a library fantasy in which—to quote Kittler's favorite living author—"the real and only fucking is done on paper" (Pynchon 1973: 616).

Despite misgivings about the atmosphere in the Benn seminar, I joined Kittler's next class but quit after a couple of weeks and never again attended any of his courses. The final straw was a brief clash regarding the ethics and organizational abilities of Nazi minister of armaments Albert Speer. The matter was tangential and of little interest to anyone, and Kittler himself must have forgotten it five minutes later; for me it was a tipping point.

As a teacher and supervisor, Kittler could be extremely generous and supportive of those willing to join him on his exodus into the

promised land of *Medienwissenschaften* (media studies); but like Moses, he could be pretty harsh in his treatment of those who questioned route, goal, and leadership. This, however, was something I could live with; much the same applied to the many Marxist, neo-Marxist, psychoanalytic, or retro-hermeneutic crusades that were being staged in adjacent seminar rooms. I was also able to stomach his burgeoning military fetish with its constant references to the communication capabilities of the German Wehrmacht. (Unfortunately, Kittler's knowledge of VHF-equipped blitzkrieg tactics outstripped his familiarity with the post-Monty Python career of John Cleese: when I accused him of being Basil Fawlty in reverse—*Mention the war! By all means do mention the war!*—I was dismissed with a blank, mildly insulted stare.) The main problem had less to do with Kittler himself than with those we at the outer rim of the Kittlersphere called the *Kittler-Klüngel*, a coterie of devoted disciples, acolytes, and clones. (The awful term *Kittlerjugend* [Kittler Youth] was not yet around.)

Like Heidegger, Kittler was throughout his career able to attract a number of highly gifted students, such as Bernhard Siegert, Bernhard Dotzler, Cornelia Vismann, and Markus Krajewski, who all went on to do first-rate work of their own. But like Heidegger, he also attracted followers who came to talk, write, and sometimes even dress (and smoke) like him and who jealously guarded the nest they never left. When enthused mediocrity attaches itself to charisma, the latter provides the ideas but the former sets the tone. Like so many others in his profession, Kittler appreciated human amplifiers and echo chambers; the problem was that their presence at times dictated his performance. He was not above playing to his audience. Predictability is the curse of ongoing provocation; after a while you sort of knew what was going to come out of his mouth because he knew what eager ears were expecting. At their best, Kittler's seminars gave us the feeling that students attending Heidegger's Marburg lectures must have had: here was a young nonconformist offering something radically new and deliciously dubious. At their worst, they resembled a 1970s disco with Kittler as John Travolta and his acolytes parading fancy French names like cheap polyester suits.

I acted as many others did: we avoided the man and his minions and stuck to his texts. (And those were great days to read Kittler; in many ways the essays of the early and mid-1980s leading up to the publication of *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* represent him at his peak.) But not even Kittler himself was worth the pain of dealing with Kittlerians.

I did not see him for almost three years and most likely would have left Freiburg without ever talking to him again had he not contacted me to ask whether I could translate J. M. Barrie's *The Twelve-Pound Look for Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. I did, but word got back that he couldn't use it because the text was too long; besides, the pub-

lisher had no money to pay me. I complained; in return he pledged to write some nice letters of reference.

From then on we met on an irregular basis to discuss everything under the sun, with the exception of the promised letters. The most important topics by far were LSD and Thomas Pynchon, though to this day I do not know where Kittler drew the line between the two, if indeed he drew any. He liked to compare our meetings to the question and answer sessions in *Gravity's Rainbow* when German doper Säure Bummer quizzes Seaman Bodine on esoteric American phrases like *ass backwards* and *shit 'n' Shinola*. But the truth is that Kittler—one of the most tenacious readers I have ever come across—needed no help; he just wanted somebody who knew Pynchon well enough to appreciate his readings. Pynchon was a special case in the densely populated Kittler pantheon: he was the only living writer whom Kittler accorded the veneration he usually reserved for dead engineers. And Pynchon was to blame for the only time I saw Kittler lose his cool.

To shore up my finances I had started freelancing for the Südwestfunk, the Southwest German Broadcasting Network. Having reviewed the German translation of *Slow Learner*, I proposed a longer feature on Pynchon and submitted an outline describing his well-known invisibility. My boss turned it down and accused me of amateurish gullibility: all this talk about Pynchon's inaccessibility, he scoffed, was nonsense. He had been told by colleagues that Pynchon wasn't withdrawn at all; on the contrary, he was openly living with his girlfriend in a villa in southern France and happy to talk to anybody who dropped by. In fact, he had just attended the Frankfurt Book Fair wearing his "customary yellow socks."

The socks got to me, and I suspected they would get to Kittler too. I looked him up in his office the next day. He was in an exceptionally bad mood and quickly worked himself into a state of nicotine-fueled indignation. Long before folks in the Freiburg English department ever heard of Pynchon, *he* had already read and studied him in English and German. *He* had deciphered much in *Gravity's Rainbow* that US scholars had yet to discover.⁴ *He* had planned to organize a conference in, of all places, Peenemünde but had been shot down by the East German authorities because the Russians appeared to be stationing SS-20s where there once had been V-2s. *He* had done all this, and now some broadcast stooge had access to Pynchon? He was familiar *with his socks*? Realizing that he had crossed over into possessive petulance, he calmed down and pointed a cigarette at me. Find out whether there's anything to it.

Of course there wasn't. At our next meeting my boss mentioned in passing that the whole story down to the socks had been a case of mistaken identity. I left a note in Kittler's mailbox: Pynchon's feet unsullied by culture industry.

A few weeks later I ran into him outside the German department, surrounded by the usual praetorian throng. His mood had visibly

improved. “Na, was für Socken trägt Pynchon heute?”—“Well, what socks is Pynchon wearing today?”—he cried, his face lit up by a beatific canine smile. “It was a nice touch though. Pynchon himself could have come up with it.” Pause for effect. “In love as in literature, footwear has an undeniable reality effect.” Still grinning and trailed by a puzzled entourage, he disappeared into a lecture hall. It was the last time I ever saw him.

What will remain? We will have periodic updates from the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach: unpublished juvenilia and increasingly edited volumes of *Musik und Mathematik*—marked, no doubt, by the recklessness of youth and the equally liberating knowledge of impending death.

How will he be judged in the long run? I do not know, but it will not be fair. In the Weinberger interview Kittler claims that every fifth sentence in McLuhan can be proved wrong. Speaking as a Kittler translator who has spent many an afternoon hunting down factual errors, faulty page references, and bungled quotations, I doubt whether his stats are much better.⁵ In many ways (though not for the reasons you will find in media studies handbooks) Kittler was indeed a lot like McLuhan. On the one hand, both were—simply, indubitably, and irrevocably—*right*; it just took the *cum tempore* world an average of fifteen years to catch up. Many formerly outrageous assumptions have turned into everyday phenomena too obvious to discuss. Unfortunately, we are far more willing to pay respect to those whose foreknowledge of the future appears to be the result of serious and systematic reflection than we are to acknowledge those whose clairvoyance seems to be composed of shameless simplifications (Kittler), the statistically inevitable result of scattershot predictions (McLuhan), and provocations churned out on an industrial scale (both). On the other hand, both produced impressive piles of nonsense—but then again, we all do (though on a less grandiose scale). What sets their texts apart is the lack of any middle ground between center and periphery, the obvious and the outrageous. An abyss separates that which technological evolution has changed into quotidian doxa from the verbal spasms flickering across the outermost fringe of common sense. Under these circumstances, fairness of appraisal is not an option. We cannot quite get our adjectives around them.

The truth is that neither McLuhan nor Kittler subscribed to reasonable arguments or rational discussion—they were far too familiar with the dynamics of intellectual history and academic proceedings to believe in such things. “Unlike me,” Kittler notes in the Weinberger interview, “everybody is so keen on conciliatory gestures.” Later on he expresses his dislike of “dreary and dismal... books that constantly try to weigh all the pros and cons.” In other words, Kittler never betrayed his enemies: he remained throughout his life a determined anti-Habermasian. There is no communicative reason, no inherent norms that regulate an idealized discourse of reason. Kittler

did engage in simplifications, provocations, exaggerations as a form of linguistic self-stimulation not only to get the verbal juices flowing; he did come up with many good one-liners and an equal number of bad jokes not only because he was afraid of boring his readers (a phobia you'd wish on more Germanists and media scholars); but he did it because it also comes closer to the ways in which we really communicate. It is no coincidence that Kittler was an admirer of Luhmann: both hammered home the point that communication doesn't communicate. What we perceive as agreement is the short rest before the pendulum swings the other way; what we call consensus is nothing but the mingling of the scraps and shards resulting from black boxes grinding against each other. The numerous mistakes and errors were unavoidable collateral discourse damage; but above all they were the equally inevitable result of Kittler's desire to process his desires, to get a grip on that which—in life or on paper—had gripped him.

And he knew it. For over twenty-five years our contact was restricted to one awkward phone call about copyright and a short letter I received in 2006 in which he—very graciously—congratulated me on a German introduction to his work. He singled out that I had mentioned the importance of the 1968 raptures for his work, though he added that I hadn't gone far enough: "In your place I would have dared describe those afternoons when we were sitting on my floor transcribing rock songs. You are more discreet and show me welding circuit boards. But I completely agree with you: Kittler errs quite often, but because he is fascinated by something [Kittler irrt recht oft, aber weil ihn etwas fasziniert]." The letter is dated July 5, 2006. Pink Floyd fans—real ones, like Kittler—will recognize it as the day after Barrett's death. Knowing that Kittler never wavered in his glorification of Barrett and other gods of his youth (his phrase, not mine), I included in my response an excerpt from Jody Rosen's (2006) poignant obituary that casts Barrett in a slightly less heroic light:

Barrett spent his final years in his mother's house in Cambridge, England, living comfortably off the royalties that his former bandmates made sure he collected. Reportedly, his pastimes were painting and gardening, and he was often seen by neighbors on his bicycle. It sounds like a pretty nice life, actually, and it's pleasant to think of Barrett ending his days as a vaguely Victorian figure—an odd old Englishman who'd made quite a splash in his youth, tottering through town on two wheels.

I had to think of this in the days following October 18, 2011. Kittler was, of course, *Kittler*: genius, game changer, psychoraptor extraordinaire; a bright comet among barren asteroids. But it is also pleasant to think of him ending his days as a vaguely Wilhelminian figure—

an odd old German professor who'd made quite a splash in his youth and then, happily, kept on splashing.

February 1981. One of the last meetings of the Benn seminar. Kittler sauntered in, sat down, and stared out the window. Long silence. We have come full circle, he finally said (as if addressing the parking lot outside); when we first met back in September it was still light when we began, now it is light again. Another long silence. Turning to us, he encountered, as he did for almost forty years, expectant faces eager for the next Kittlerian jolt. He sighed in mock desperation. "Herrgott, wir können doch nicht immer nur Geistreiches von uns geben. Manchmal reicht es, einfach nur festzustellen, daß es Licht gibt und Wärme und daß man sich daran erfreut"—"Good Lord, we can't always come up with witty stuff. Sometimes it's enough to simply state that there's light and warmth and that we take pleasure in them."

NOTES

1. To repeat: this is a snapshot of the younger, lesser-known Freiburg Kittler; for a close-up of the older, more renowned Berlin version, see Krajewski 2011.
2. Those interested in Kittler's Benn, see Kittler 1990.
3. A long overdue English translation of the expanded version ("The God of Ears") is forthcoming in the collection *Kittler Now* from Polity Press.
4. Those interested in Kittler's Pynchon, see Kittler 1997: 101–16.
5. Kittler's speciality is the creatively enhanced misquotation. What follows is a representative sample: (1) At the very beginning of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, just above the famous claim that "media determine our situation," Kittler (1999: xxxix) quotes Pynchon: "Tap my head and mike my brain / Stick that needle in my vein." The German original gets it wrong; it reads: "Tape [*sic*] my head and mike my brain." A minor mishap, no doubt, but one that conveniently updates Pynchon by bringing his ditty in line with the correspondences between cerebral subroutines and analog storage media ("tape") that are at the center of Kittler's study. (2) Misquoting Nicole Oresme's *Tractatus de commensurabilitate vel incommensurabilitate motuum celi* (*Treatise on the Commensurability or Incommensurability of the Heavenly Motions*), Kittler transforms the original's prosaic "*musae et scientiies*" into "Muses and Sirens," which sounds a great deal more attractive and also happens to be exactly what Kittler is writing about. (3) In *Untimely Observations* a grumpy Nietzsche dismisses his fellow human beings as "writing, speaking, and thinking machines." The younger Kittler had a special fondness for this quotation, but he kept turning "speaking machines" (*Redemaschinen*) into

“calculating machines” (*Rechenmaschinen*). As in the case of Pynchon’s tap/tape, the misquotation serves to update the original: Nietzsche is catapulted into the Turing age. In short, Kittler the writer displays all the ameliorative sloppiness that Kittler the analyst attributes to authors of the “Discourse Network 1800” such as Goethe and Hegel, who kept bungling their quotations in highly creative self-serving ways.

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