

Gods, German Scholars, and the Gift of Greece

Friedrich Kittler's Philhellenic Fantasies

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1. Introduction: Kittler's German Culture Studies

As outlined by Friedrich Kittler, German *Kulturwissenschaft* is constituted through its difference from US cultural studies. Kittler's recent *Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft (A Cultural History of Culture Studies, or literally: Culture Science, 2001a)* is framed by two gestures of Atlantic distancing. The monograph, which is based on a series of lectures at Humboldt University in Berlin, begins with a polemical remark about 'US-American' literature departments renaming themselves as departments of cultural studies, presumably without methodological consequences, 'apart from that of ignoring all canonical texts' (2001a: 11).¹ After providing his own canon of mostly philosophical texts as an antidote to that alleged absence, Kittler concludes his programmatic lecture by asking his students to 'not put down this occidental knowledge, just because some professors from New York or wherever just pulped it [*eingedampft*] into handy and sellable *Reader's Digests*'. Instead of Americanizing 'the good title of *Kulturwissenschaft* into cultural studies' and thus 'surrendering' to the 'highest-bidding *Pax Americana*', Kittler suggests, the 'old Eurasian continent needs to research and write its cultural history itself'. 'Between Tartars and Celts, Indians and scholastics, Arabs and Germans, there is enough for us to do' (2001a: 248–9).

While the joyfully polemical tone will sound familiar to experienced Kittler readers, the target of his forceful rhetoric on this occasion may be more surprising. Didn't Kittler previously credit his exposure to US-American academia with providing foundational input for the development of his own, technology-centered approach to the history of culture (see 1996:

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735)? *Eine Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft* seems to turn its back on this influence. The book indulges its high-cultural obsessions with German philosophy to the degree that they even displace Kittler's usual focus on the hardware of communication (see Landwehr, 2001). As I show in this article, the *Kulturgeschichte* lecture series and its thematic companion piece, *Vom Griechenland (Of Greece, 2001b, with Cornelia Vismann)*, announce a shift within Kittler's work. Following previous turns from discourse analysis in the 1970s to the electronic media in the 1980s and the digital realm in the 1990s (see Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xx), Kittler's work once more takes a different direction at the beginning of the 21st century. In performing this shift, however, the recent works also highlight aspects of his thinking which have, if somewhat less visibly, been present throughout the past decades.

As I argue, the framing gesture of Atlantic distancing in *Kulturgeschichte* underlines Kittler's participation in a discourse of European, and also German, identity. His reference to the 'American Empire of capitalism' may seem to resonate with topical concerns of political critique at the turn of the 21st century, but it draws on a long-established discourse of cultural distinction. Opposing German or European 'culture' to American 'civilization' and 'culture industry' (alias 'cultural studies'), this rhetoric serves to re-capture collective identities in the age generally known as the age of globalization. As articulated in the passages quoted above, Kittler's alternative to the American Empire operates on the 'classical' terrain of modern European Orientalism (between 'Tartars and Celts'). Culminating in a realm of national signification (between 'Arabs and Germans'), Kittler's territorial gesture is reminiscent of the world-historical narrative developed by German philosophers of history at the turn of the 19th century. Does Kittler, at the beginning of the 21st century, reiterate their notions of how 'Occidental', and especially German culture, is based on the 'higher' development of its 'Asian' roots?

Arguably, it is a little more complicated. Kittler's performance of collective identity is not classically Orientalist in all respects, and it does not proceed in straightforwardly nationalist ways. Nonetheless, in mapping the terrain of Kittler's 'Eurasian' reference geography, my article pursues the idea that his unAmerican culture science is of a peculiarly German kind (see Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xvi). Specifically, I argue here that Kittler builds on discursive components from the construction set of the German *Kulturnation*, that is: the imagined community (Anderson, 1983) constituted by what its proponents have identified as outstanding contributions in the sphere of 'high culture'. At the end of the concluding passage quoted above, Kittler significantly rounds off his polemic against Anglo-American cultural studies by complaining that they replace (emphatic notions of) 'culture with everyday life, and Herder's peoples with minorities' (2001a: 248).

Thus, Kittler explicitly dissociates his 'culture science' from inclusive concepts of culture as the sum of human activity as well as the critical work

on social marginalization and cultural heterogeneity undertaken in British and American cultural studies. Importantly, Kittler's feeling on these matters resonates with broader German academic hesitations to embrace such 'Anglo-American' endeavors. Overall, German *Kulturwissenschaft* has clearly been less interested in class than its British counterpart, and not as focused on issues of gender, queer, critical race, postcolonial and globalization studies as its North American equivalent. Instead, the majority of scholars active in German culture studies have been fascinated with a different set of organizing paradigms, notably the triad of systems, cultural memory, and media hardware, as associated respectively with the sociologist Niklas Luhmann, the Egyptologist Jan Assmann, and, *primus inter pares*, Kittler himself (Winthrop-Young, 2002: 828). While designating three quite different approaches, the theoretical clusters accumulated around these notions have one feature in common: They aim to offer an encompassing view of society, history or culture as a 'whole', beyond individual power differentials such as class, gender, or race. Within media theory specifically, the preoccupations with hardware are shared by competing approaches like those of Kittler, Norbert Bolz and Hartmut Winkler. Leaning towards grand narratives of media development, they eschew the analysis of concrete representational practices (see Geisler, 1999). Toying with Kittler's own polemical *gestus*, we could say that dominant factions of German media and cultural theory have trouble with cultural as well as textual difference.

It is tempting to connect their encompassing narratives to the discursive legacy of German collective identifications. As I will pursue here specifically with regard to Kittler, contemporary German culture studies in some respects read as peculiar late products of 19th-century German nationalist discourse which, in the absence of territorial unity, developed with a particular emphasis on socio-cultural identity (see Winthrop-Young, 2005: 112). Obviously, this does not mean that we can locate the 'national character' of Kittler's theory in the 'distinct cultural essence' or tradition postulated by Herder's readers in the 1800s. At the turn of the 21st century, the paradigm of globalization has underlined the crucial insights of post-colonial theory, according to which national identity is always already an effect of translation, and necessarily constructed in a re-articulation of heterogeneity and hybridity (see Bhabha, 1994). Kittler's theory is co-constituted by 'American' attention to technology and the 'Canadian school' of media theory (see Kittler, 2002a: 21) as well as the import of French paradigms into the context of German academia. Its 'distinctly German' character is effected by the ways it translates these impulses (see Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xvi) and mixes them with ingredients from a German philosophical tradition to which the French masters had been exposed themselves – notably the works of Heidegger, Nietzsche and Hegel.

Reminiscent of early 20th-century German 'reactionary modernism' (Jeffrey Herf; see Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xxxvii), Kittler's recent texts forcefully assert that 'culture cannot be had without technology and technology cannot be had without culture' (Kittler, 2002b: 50). This article

argues that this conceptual marriage mediates ‘grand’ narratives of cultural identity. Encompassing historical narratives were already present in the earlier works. Influenced by the world-historical accounts of mid-20th-century Canadian media theory, Kittler analyzed how ‘Europe’ developed under the ‘monopoly of writing’ (1999 [1986]: 4; see Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xiii). But whereas these earlier narratives were mostly focused on the media technologies themselves, Kittler’s recent work more fully develops their cultural contexts into an elaborate account of the ‘Eurasian’ history of culture.

The focal point, as well as horizon, of this history is ancient Greece. The concluding passage from *Kulturgeschichte* quoted above culminates in the charge that US cultural studies foreclose the ‘dark room’ of ‘a foundational emptiness’, in which it can never be taken for granted that ‘intoxication/ecstasy [*Rausch*] and the Gods, tragedy and heaven never ever exist’ (2001a: 249). *Vom Griechenland* revolves around the notions highlighted in this last sentence. In the name of a foundational contingency which, as we will see, is of the Heideggerian kind, Kittler’s culture science zooms in on a set of virtual figures coded as Greek in the European imagination. These figures are not without ancestors in his theoretical universe. In some respects, Faust’s ‘ecstasy’ at the occasion of his excessive sign consumption in *Discourse Networks* (1990: 7), and the *Rauschen*, the white noise of poststructuralist media theory (see already Kittler and Turk, 1977: 21), have simply found new metaphorical homelands in the realm of ancient Greece.

However, this relocation certainly produces new significations. With his turn to culture, the organizing trope of German national identification, Kittler seems to have also embraced the legacy of *The Tyranny of Greece over Germany* (Butler, 1958 [1935]). Germany’s ‘obsession’ with ancient Greece has become a generally accepted ‘cliché’ (Marchand, 1996: xviii). The act of locating Kittler’s work in this context has to proceed with care. Marchand’s own, institution-based history claims that German philhellenism came to an end in the late 20th century (1996: 374). In my view, the prominence of Greek themes in contemporary German thought and literature (see Chytry, 1989; Riedel, 2000) suggests a different conclusion; however, the lasting ‘tyranny’ in question cannot be theorized in terms of homogeneity and continuity. Rather than ‘one’ Greece, a multiplicity of often contradictory – Apollonian and Dionysian, Doric and Corinthian, emphatic and critical – appropriations has contributed to the articulation of collective German identities in different historical moments. The project of placing Kittler’s Greece in this context is fueled less by a notion of unbroken historical tradition than by suspicions of discursive loops. As we will see, Kittler returns to concepts and fantasies articulated in 19th- and early 20th-century philhellenic thinking, but I argue that these moves are driven by late 20th-century feedback.

In analyzing Kittler’s Greek fantasies, my discussion strives to outline the politics of his German culture science. Politics is to be understood in a

broad sense here. It includes 'polemical' questions about issues of colonialism, Orientalism, gender and sexuality, but also a more encompassing look at the field of knowledge as configured in Kittler's recent works. Which questions does his culture science ask, by virtue of its focus on ancient Greece, and how are these questions answered through the use of specific Greek *topoi* and tropes? My critical look positions Kittler's Greek fantasies in the context of his overall oeuvre, but also strategically highlights contrasts vis-à-vis his earlier texts, in particular, *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900*, which, unlike the recent work, I found inspiring for my own readings of German cultural history. Pursuing subtle shifts in Kittler's methodological and theoretical choices as well as the concrete stories he tells in his Greek texts, my discussion targets both his overall mapping of history and cultural identity and the specific figures chosen to populate this terrain.

2. The Gift of Greece: Revisiting the Philhellenic Narrative

Postcolonial scholarship has challenged the hegemonic narratives of European modernity, including its philhellenic obsessions, and resituated them in the context of political conquest. With Edward Said's groundbreaking study, *Orientalism*, the discursive realm of 'Eurasia' which hosts Kittler's German culture science was located in the sphere of European imperialism. Kittler incorporates these challenges into his own approach to cultural history. *Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft* highlights that the knowledge of European culture studies is marked by the imperialist context of its production (2001a: e.g. 194). But whereas postcolonial scholars concluded that academic scholarship needs to focus on the people and cultures affected by European colonial endeavors, Kittler in *Kulturgeschichte* distances himself from such a 'nowadays customary' critique (2001a: 194). He rhetorically delegitimizes the postcolonial approach through reductive political association, suggesting that the 'colonized of Edward Said, Jassir Arafat's former consultant, are to a large extent over and done with'. Instead, Kittler declares, the now timely question is 'not directed at the other [*das Fremde*], but at the self [*das Eigene*]: What is it that predestined Europe to become the cradle of both imperialism and *Kulturwissenschaft*?' (2001a: 80).

Possibly even more important than Kittler's 'hypothetical answer' to this question – the 'scandalous notion of real numbers' (2001a: 80) – is the fact that this move comes with the installation of a double, or split, notion of Europe. As we see in the quote above, its better half is paradigmatically embodied in Kittler's culture science. More disconcertingly perhaps, Europe's better half also seems to be German in Kittler's *Kulturgeschichte*. This does not mean that Kittler simply repeats old modern nationalist tales of German superiority. Rather, his practice of distinction emerges in a space newly carved out by postcolonial scholarship itself. Said's classical study proved influential not least by its claim that by virtue of the initial lack of actual colonies, 19th-century German Orientalisms were 'almost exclusively' scholarly (1979: 19). More recent postcolonial scholarship in German studies has challenged these assumptions, outlining both the importance of

aggressive *Colonial Fantasies* in pre-imperialist Germany (Zantop, 1997) and the active colonial contributions of German Orientalists in the age of Romanticism (Murti, 2001). On the other hand, Russell Berman has argued that German colonial authors displayed more ‘hermeneutic openness’ than their actively colonizing neighbors (1998: 222; for a more differentiated position, see Kontje, 2004).

Defending German thinking in mostly indirect ways, Kittler’s *Kulturgeschichte* follows a similar path to Berman’s contribution. While he emphasizes the colonial contingency of knowledge wherever French or British thinkers are concerned, Kittler highlights that their German colleagues had ‘less imperial influence’ (2001a: 63). Without completely ignoring the imperial inflections of German thinking, Kittler provides them with a positive twist. Thus, he points out that Hegel excluded the African continent from his world history, but finds it ‘remarkable’ that thereby, ‘cultural history explicitly names its other for the first time’ (2001a: 105). More generally, he credits Hegel with being the first to think world history as ‘a space of possible globalization’ (2001a: 105, see also 193–4).

This defense paves the ground for Kittler’s re-reading of Hegel, and his German colleagues, in terms of partial affirmation and great respect. Of course, we may suspect some personal coquetry when Kittler’s lecture at Humboldt University, where he has been teaching since 1993, presents Hegel’s Humboldt University lecture hall to his students as ‘a philosophical shrine’ (2001a: 92, see also 87, 94). However, neither the purposes of self-stylization nor the responsibilities of Kittler’s Berlin chair in aesthetics and the history of media fully explain why *Kulturgeschichte* heroizes selected German philosophers in a way that earlier texts, generally full of disgust for ‘so-called man’, mostly reserved for ‘the conquering engineer’ (see Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xxxiii, xxxvii). In the midst of his usual anti-humanist rhetoric, Kittler distinguishes, in particular, the trio of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Hegel.

While this professed respect explicitly includes Hegel’s philhellenic obsessions, Hegel’s overall legacy remains more ambivalent for Kittler than that of Nietzsche and Heidegger. This configuration can be studied in the final essay of *Vom Griechenland*, entitled ‘Goethe’s Gift’. The text returns to a historical transaction discussed in *Discourse Networks*: In April 1821, Goethe sent a ‘triune gift’ to Hegel (Kittler, 2001b: 113). The parcel consisted of supplements to Goethe’s *Theory of Colors*, a drinking glass from Carlsbad and a short toast, which identified Goethe as the ‘Ur-Phenomenon’ studied in the enclosed treatise and recommended himself to the ‘Absolute’, that is: Hegel. In *Discourse Networks*, Kittler used this transaction to illustrate his thesis about the smooth exchange between philosophy and poetry around 1800. Founding German idealism as ‘a game of give and take’ (1990: 157), this hermeneutic exchange created the humanist fiction of sovereign authorship, negating the actual control of discourse through state institutions. In *Vom Griechenland*, the evaluation of Goethe’s gift has become more ambivalent. Building on his earlier critical reading, Kittler presents

an analysis of the way idealism configured its Greek fantasies. At the same time, he now highlights moments of otherness within this discursive figuration. Enlisting the help of Nietzsche and Heidegger, Kittler then displaces what he identified as the problematic aspects of the idealist legacy and supplements his critique of German 19th-century philhellenism with a re-affirmation of 'the gift of Greece'.

Inspired by Marcel Mauss's (1990) foundational essay on the gift, Kittler's analysis emphasizes its twofold nature. On the one hand, the theoretically voluntary gift exchange is, in practice, part of a regulated economy which requires return gifts and establishes hierarchical social relationships. With his gifts to Hegel, Goethe 'hires the Absolute' as his 'Prussian bodyguard', for the 'battle mission' of defending his 'impossible' theory of colors, which is to be 'proven' by the refraction of the glass (2001b: 113–14; 2001a: 90). Hegel in fact swears to remain philosophically true to this theory. On the other hand, he also swears to 'only look into the glass given to him as a wine drinker' (quoted from Kittler, 2001b: 114). In *Discourse Networks*, his thirst was predominantly metaphorical. Getting drunk on 'infinity', 'the absolute spirit' consumed 'supplementary sensuality' (1990: 160–1). In *Vom Griechenland*, Kittler instead emphasizes physical consumption, adding that 'merry with wine', Hegel celebrated his birthday together with that of Goethe. 'For Hegel, Goethe was thus a party/feast [*Fest*] and a gift' (2001b: 114). Here, the notion 'gift' signifies that which escapes the realm of 'proper' economy, for example, the excessive rites of *Potlatch* discussed by Mauss (1990).

Thus, Goethe's poetic gift now also disturbs the 'give and take' game of German idealism. As Kittler suggests, Hegel responds to Goethe's gift by 'subjugating himself to a speaking ban'. Kittler reads the desire to 'hold his breath' expressed in the thank-you note (Kittler, 2001b: 115) in analogy to what he sees as another moment of pause in the philosopher's speech, a passage from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* which features the 'gift of Greece' and shows that 'philosophy, once in its lifetime, was able to mourn' (2001b: 118). Mourning is necessary because Hegel's attitude towards Greece is 'one of elegy' (Chytry, 1989: 184). For the modern author, the 'spiritual artwork of Greece' is lost. It has become

beautiful fruit already picked from the tree, which a friendly Fate has offered us, as a girl might set the fruit before us. It cannot give us the actual life in which they existed . . . , but only the veiled recollection of that actual world. (Kittler, 2001b: 116–17; Hegel, 1977: 455)

Remembering his poststructuralist training, the reader could highlight that Hegel's romantic rhetoric of nature, life and death dramatizes insurmountable conditions of difference and mediation. Kittler's (romantic) interpretation, however, does not target Hegel's desire for immediacy, but the diagnosis of its loss instead. 'The gift of Greece' no longer exists because Hegel on his 'way towards state official' forbade himself from indulging in

fantasies of poetic salvation (2001a: 104). By virtue of his inability to fully enjoy the pleasures of Goethe's gift, the philosopher's longing for Greece can take a conjunctive form only: 'If it were only permissible to have such a longing, for such a people, such a state' (*Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, quoted in Kittler, 2001b: 118). Articulated thus indirectly, however, Hegel's desire for Greece produces what Kittler calls 'German Romanticism' here (2001b: 118). That is, the 'gift which the Greek gods are' reaches Germany in moderate and modest, feminine form (2001: 127, see also 118): Hegel suggests that the lost 'Spirit of the tragic fate' wins a renewed presence in the girl who 'sums' up the dispersed natural elements 'in higher mode, . . . in the gesture with which she offers them' (Kittler, 2001b: 117; Hegel, 1977: 456).

Eventually, remembering his poststructuralist training, Kittler diagnoses 'metaphysics of presence' (2001b: 118), but his main concern is the human(istic) figuration of this presence in Hegel's text. Displaced by a girl, the gods themselves are man-made in Hegel (2001b: 119). This humanizing move in the service of the Prussian state comes at the expense of divine materiality. In Hegel's psychological reading of Goethe's *Iphigenia*, his 'gift' to the emerging discipline of German literary studies (2001b: 123), the material presence of (the statue of) Artemis is dissolved into Iphigenia's soul. With the latter's reflection (that is, for Kittler, refraction), Goethe's theory of colors has become the logic of Hegel's being (2001b: 127). Through this smooth exchange between poetry and philosophy analyzed already in *Discourse Networks*, the 'crushing of gods into literary "*Weltanschauungen*"' helped, as Kittler emphasizes once more, to produce 'modern nations' (2001b: 124).

In postwar Germany, the modern nation has become a thoroughly problematic concept, historically tainted by its development into a fascist state. But whereas *Discourse Networks* seemed content with its critical analysis, *Vom Griechenland* does not stop here. In the discursive tradition of Germany's 'elective affinity' with ancient Greece (see Marchand, 1996: xviii, 6), the latter comes to stand in for an alternative model for collective identification. In this discourse, ancient Greece is doubly coded as a realm of both cultural identification and otherness, 'the epitome of Europe', but also 'its pure childhood' (Bernal, 1987: 29). Thus, Kittler positions Greece by analogy to 'non-colonizing' 19th-century Germany as discussed in *Kulturgeschichte*, implicitly suggesting its innocence: Greece was disadvantaged in imperial matters because the wooden or marble representations of its gods were not easily transferable (2001b: 120). A 'god in book format succeeds more easily in dominating the world than heavy idols' (2000: 126).

Of course, the virtual gift of Greece must be freed from the distortions of its modern German reception. Kittler's essay begins this work of unpacking by discussing Hegel's second return gift to Goethe, his theory of sounds. On the one hand, Hegel's treatise treats 'the givens of perception' as Urphenomena, and thus puts philosophy into the service of poetry's anti-scientific crusade (2001b: 134). On the other hand, Kittler suggests, Hegel's

'return gift to Goethe' also shows that 'the trembling sound, in other words physical frequency, is . . . the subject, the philosophical term [*Begriff*] itself'. Thus, it produces 'a self that starts trembling in time to music' (2001b: 136, 130). Music, of course, is Nietzsche's quintessentially Dionysian art (Nietzsche, 1964: 21). As read by Kittler, Hegel's subject is affected by the Dionysian forces of self-dissolution, which are 'brought within closest ken perhaps by the analogy of drunkenness' (Nietzsche, 1964: 22). In the midst of idealist humanism, the being of so-called man reveals itself as ecstasy.

Goethe, however, and, as Kittler claims, with him the humanities in general, did not fully comprehend this philosophical gift with its physicist subtext (2001b: 137). Therefore, physics itself had to step in and mark the limits of Goethe's gift. The final passage of Kittler's text discusses Hermann v. Helmholtz's works, in the context of which, as Kittler highlights elsewhere, Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* was written (2001a: 166). Helmholtz refuted Goethe's *Theory of Colors*, concisely declaring that it remains on the level of sensual appearance. Kittler concludes: 'Phenomena which don't exist at all [*die es gar nicht gibt*],² are replaced by contingent numbers' (2001b: 138). Notes excluded, this is the second-last sentence of the book *Vom Griechenland*. The appearance of closure, however, is arguably deceiving. The last sentence, which is separated from the previous one by a paragraph break, reads: 'In the shimmering [*Flimmern*] of sound and light, Greece does exist' (2001b: 138).

We may be tempted to read this last sentence ironically. Understood by analogy to the phenomena of perception in the previous sentence, the shimmering image of Greece is deceiving. Kittler's narrative thus seems to end on a note that brackets its own phantasmatic engagements. Like the essay's other gifts, however, this final one signifies ambiguously. Read literally, that is, as an antithesis to the preceding sentence, Greece, in fact, 'exists' for the media philosopher in the unstable, absence-marked mode of shimmering that is induced by the physical processes of light and sound. This literal reading is supported by the title of the essay's final section: 'A physics, in which the physis of Greece returns' (2001b: 136). *Physis* (Greek: 'nature') is a central term in Heidegger's post-Nietzschean appropriation of Greece, where it is understood not as a 'mass of matter' but rather as 'emerging' with light and sound effects (see Bambach, 2003: xxi; Chytry, 1989: 387).

For Kittler, Heidegger's ontology escapes the critiqued idealist 'metaphysics of presence' because it theorizes being as marked by ecstasis and timeliness. Thus epistemologically legitimized, Kittler's 'gift of Greece' is mediated through Heidegger's 'gift of pouring' (Kittler, 2001a: 249), that is: the moment of 'un-being/absence' [*Abwesen*] which defines Heidegger's prototypical object, the jug, a relative of Goethe's glass (Heidegger, 2000: 173). Earlier in the essay on Goethe's gift, Kittler explicitly endorses its phenomenological affirmation when suggesting that 'gifts only exist for a thinking which is less than and different from [read: pre-Heideggerian, C.B.]

philosophy’, since ‘what they give, cannot be deduced; that they exist [*dass es sie gibt*], even less’ (2001b: 114–15). To summarize, science in Kittler restores a divine Greek (un)being which we have begun to understand as a Dionysian force. With some help from Nietzsche and Heidegger, Kittler saves the poetic, philosophical gift of Greece which, according to his analysis, was distorted by its humanist reception in the early 19th-century German exchange between poetry and philosophy.

3. A Story of Origin: Kittler’s *Ars Aphrodisia*

While these reflections on German philhellenism provide *Vom Griechenland* with its narrative closure, the volume has its gravity center in a piece entitled ‘Eros and Aphrodite’. Positioned as the second of Kittler’s three contributions to the book, this essay also resonates, more than the other two, with the contributions by Kittler’s co-author Cornelia Vismann. Not surprisingly then, the essay’s opening question is reprinted on the back cover of the book: ‘How is it that people in Europe don’t know love, but love knowledge?’ (2001b: 67). This inquiry is inspired by Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*. But despite their shared Greek interests, Foucault may have been turning in his grave apropos the way in which Kittler pursues the matter. Thus, Kittler announces that he wants to look for an earlier ‘model’ to the text which serves as the model ‘of all European talk about love’: Plato’s *Symposium* (2001b: 67, 70), but that in doing so, he is not interested in the idea of

series as such, and even less in the circulating litany that origins are always already displacements, repercussions, litanies. On the contrary, this is about a story, or history as such [*eine oder die Geschichte*]. From the binge of free gods to the bitter end: our outrageous, namely sober knowledge and talk about sex. (2001b: 67)

Foucault’s archaeologies of European culture highlighted the historical contingency of the trope of origin, which provided so-called man with his historical identity in the modern *episteme* (Foucault, 1994: 328–35). Even early Kittler texts do not fully reflect this Foucauldian critique of origin. Rather, he and Horst Turk privileged Lacan’s psychoanalytic take on the matter when they chose to entitle their programmatic volume on post-structuralist theory *Urszenen (Primal Scenes, 1977)*. Similarly, ancient stories already had a prominent place in the early works. Kittler’s 1980 call to exorcise the humanist spirit from the humanities began by relating three ‘old’ ghost stories from ‘Jewish, Greek, and Latin books’ (1980: 7). With Foucault and others, however, Kittler was then critically interested in the silencing of these multiple stories through modernity’s singular concept of History and the Hegelian spirit (1980: 8). His own return to this spirit (see 2001a: 15; 2002a: 17) is also a return to History in the singular form. An earlier version of the ‘Eros and Aphrodite’ text still described its project as ‘a history/story [*Geschichte*] of decline’ (Kittler, 1995: 31). Only the rhetorical shift in the later version endows the Greek story with its definite, singular

status as an origin of European identities. To be sure, this does not mean that the historical narrative Kittler develops on the following pages remains unchallenged, even in his own work. Other recent texts provide us with different versions; notably, they combine the story of decline more strongly with a supplementary account of how ancient Greece first introduced the positive aspects of European culture (see e.g. 2001a, 2006b). What all these texts have in common, however, is their defiance vis-à-vis the postmodernist critique of 'grand narratives'. Forcefully, they affirm the project of using history as a foundational myth (see 2001b: 72). In the spirit of German philhellenism, Kittler undertakes 'a redemptive return to mankind's origins' (Marchand, 1996: 35).

In 'Eros and Aphrodite', the story is told as a story about 'hangover and sobering up' (2001b: 68). On the day after the initial celebrations of Agathon's victory in the Athens' tragedy competition, Plato's *Symposium* features, at least initially, only moderate drinking. In this spirit, the assembled men choose a topic previously neglected in the poetic tradition, the god of Eros, and begin to produce 'scholarly prose', which can be written down (2001b: 70). Kittler's story draws on motifs advanced by Nietzsche, Heidegger and Harold Innis. Plato's hero Socrates embodies a 'turning-point and vortex of so-called universal history' (Nietzsche, 1964: 117), which is 'the spread of writing', the 'conquest of prose over poetry' (Innis, 1972: 57), and which comes with the invention of meta-physics (Heidegger; see Chytry, 1989: 398) and man (Kittler, 2002a: 29). As long as the sober regime of writing lasts, the non-transferable *Rausch* (intoxication/ecstasy) will be passed on as a gap; Eros is 'transferability itself' (2001b: 71). Only Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy*, which coincides not only with Helmholtz's physiology, but also with the advent of film (2001a: 170), will re-introduce *Rausch* as the Dionysian principle in Greek history.

Kittler highlights that this story of decline and virtual salvation is gendered. Women are excluded from Socrates' symposium. Between the assembled men, the 'forgotten question whether ecstasy and love belong together' only re-enters the discussion when Socrates rehearses the knowledge of Diotima (Kittler, 2001b: 71). This argument recalls Kittler's discussion of the way gender worked in the discourse network 1800. While women were excluded from the active production of literature and scholarship, they were idealized as its 'natural' source (1990: 25). Even this early analysis, however, remained haunted by the clichés which it discussed (Winthrop-Young, 2005: 55). In *Vom Griechenland*, Kittler's use of Diotima resonates even more strongly with the analyzed Romantic discourse itself. Referencing Lacan's seminar on transference, Kittler describes Diotima's knowledge as non-dialectical. As 'myth' or 'narrative', this knowledge of a 'woman' counters all definitions of Eros provided at the symposium (2001b: 72). Plato's text itself seems to suggest that matters are a little more complicated. Diotima's discourse prominently includes dialectical questions, and her story about Eros functions within the system of ancient rhetoric, to prove her argument 'that love is neither beautiful nor good' (Plato, 1989: 45). But

Kittler's interpretation certainly corresponds to a tradition of reading established well before Lacan: In his 1861 *Mother Right*, Bachofen envisions Socrates 'at Diotima's feet, hardly able to follow her completely mystical revelation' (1984: 104). In labeling her knowledge as 'priestly' (Kittler, 2001b: 83) and her discourse as an element of mythical otherness in the speech of men, Kittler follows Bachofen in projecting Romantic gender codes onto the classical text, and thus reiterates the modern construction of gender in terms of essential binaries.

In *Kulturgeschichte*, Kittler credits Bachofen's *Mother Right* with coining the notion of the Dionysian (2001a: 141). Beyond the figure of Diotima, the 19th-century text forms an important intertext for *Vom Griechenland*. For Kittler, Diotima's tale proves the point that the male figure of Eros has displaced Aphrodite. In Bachofen's history of civilization as the development from 'birth-giving motherhood' (1984: 89) to patriarchy, Aphrodite's realm precedes not only the latter, but also regulated matriarchy, which is associated with marriage, agriculture and its goddess, Demeter. In other words: Aphrodite represents the *ius naturale* (1984: 115). Kittler's narrative presents an analogous configuration. Before Plato's producers of sober prose, the gods celebrated Aphrodite's birthday with the excess consumption of nectar, which, as 'the first seduction', 'precedes all culture' (2001b: 74).

Inspired by the ghosts of 19th-century thinking, Kittler thus establishes a realm of nature in the posited space 'before' the canonical *Symposium*. Possibly, this gesture should not be taken entirely literally. We have already seen that the space of Kittler's 'before' is populated not only by Aphrodite, but also by the phallic Dionysius, who is a son of Zeus, and stands less for 'nature' than for its call 'under the conditions of a patriarchal or intellectual culture' (Kittler, 2001a: 141). In other contexts, Kittler also distinguishes between pre- and post-Socratic Greek *culture* (2004a; 2006a). Nonetheless, Kittler's investigation into Plato's *Symposium* and its models tells a story quite unlike the account given in Foucault's *The Use of Pleasure*. While Plato's *Symposium* marks a crucial turning point in Foucault's genealogy of the European subject of desire as well, he asks how new practices of the self gradually replace an only partially different configuration of cultural codes (see, e.g. 1990: 15). Kittler, on the other hand, indulges in a fantasy of divine otherness.

For Kittler, Diotima's story shows that 'the birth of sexual fertility' 'precedes desire' (2001b: 78). As the representation of 'beauty per se', Aphrodite is 'without lack and therefore without desire' (2001b: 78). With such claims, Kittler, of course, abandons not merely Foucault, but also Lacan and Derrida. Rather than with these French thinkers, his romantic fantasy of a divine fullness unmarked by difference resonates with the programmatically anti-repressive developments of psychoanalysis generally associated with the student movement of 1968 and left-wing politics in its wake. In this respect, Kittler's thinking thus joins forces with some of his favorite opponents in German academia, including Herbert Marcuse, who

re-centered Heidegger's ontology of ecstasy around the sexual theme omitted by the master himself (see Chytry, 1989: 406–7; on Kittler's affinities with the Frankfurt School, see Geisler, 1999).

In this narrative, lack comes into play only once the original realm of fertile pleasure is displaced. Eros' mother is Penia, the mortal representation of meagerness, and since he was born, things have been looking bad for 'the phallic function' of Dionysian excess: The 'mythical phallus . . . is replaced by the murky empiricism of men, who, strictly according to Lacan, are precisely not the phallus, but only have it' (2001b: 81). Since Plato's *Symposium*, the mythical power of masculinity has been affected. After all, Socrates refuses to have sex with Alkibiades: 'Speech replaces *Rausch*' (2001b: 86). Foucault presented the situation as follows: In the name of truth, which has become the object of Eros, the theme of asceticism begins to announce its future dominance in the discourse on love (1990: 240, 244). This shift comes with a significant change in the role-coded game of Greek love. Whereas traditionally, the adolescent was the object of the actively desiring adult, the 'old man with the ugly body' now becomes the object of admiration himself (1990: 241). In Kittler's account, this bodily 'meagerness' of Socrates, and the lack of desire/lust (*Unluste*) that Kittler attributes to him (2001b: 87–8), are the defining features of this constellation. For Foucault, however, Socrates' refusal to sleep with Alkibiades proves precisely the opposite: Within his system of cultural codes, Socrates' sovereign ability to renounce what he *does* desire is the basis of his masculinity (1990: 20, 69, 83). Accordingly, Foucault emphasizes that the *Symposium* praises the old man as physically enduring and extraordinarily strong (1990: 242). To the degree that Socrates' 'no' announces European regimes of desiring subjectivity, Foucault's narrative therefore suggests that these regimes are based on fictions of powerful masculinity. For Kittler, it is the loss of the latter which is at the 'origin' of European culture, here specifically 'academies and universities' (2001b: 87).

Not entirely unlike representatives of the mytho-poetic men's movement (see Bly, 1990), Kittler's narrative praises the 'lost' masculinity as sexual potency. This fiction of mythical masculinity is clearly heteronormative. Whereas Foucault analyzes how Plato's *Symposium* marks a shift within existing practices of *aphrodisia*, including what we call heterosexual and homosexual relations, Kittler lets Socrates' lack coincide with the beginning of 'the age of classical pederasty' (2001b: 80, see also 2003a: 502). Implicitly affirming the notion's negative connotations in modern discourse, Kittler's narrative reiterates stereotypical associations of male homosexuality with emasculation. In the name of Aphrodite, Dionysius' phallus presents a mythical cure for this condition of lack, which is European culture.

4. Greek Roots: Variations on a Story of Splendid Isolation

Not just the trope of origin *per se*, but also its location in ancient Greece has, of course, its own historical location. In his *Black Athena*, Martin Bernal

has shown how racist 19th-century linguistics and classical studies freed Greece from its Egyptian and Semitic connections. When 19th-century Orientalism developed the notion of an Indo-European homeland in central Asia, Greece became ‘Aryan’ territory as well. With the end of World War II, this vocabulary disappeared, but, as Bernal argued in the 1980s, the larger model was not altogether overturned. While partial revisions led to the acceptance of Phoenician (more than Egyptian) influence, other scholars probed defensive re-assertions of Greek cultural autonomy (1987: 400–1, 407). The heated controversy stirred by Bernal’s book suggests that even at the end of the 20th century, many of his colleagues were in fact unwilling to seriously entertain the possibility of Athena’s Black history (see Lefkowitz, 1996; Bernal, 2001). But despite these resistances, postwar scholarship overall did establish a new paradigm of cultural contact (Marchand, 1996: 359, for the German context). In the last decades of the 20th century, the relations between ancient Greece and the ‘Orient’ even became a major focus of research for German historians of antiquity. At the same time, these historians for the most part simply ignored Bernal’s work, and some of them continued to vehemently re-affirm the special status of Greece for the European tradition (e.g. Christ, 1999: 410–11, 424).

Kittler’s recent work finds its place in this constellation. As far as I can see, Bernal’s name is mentioned nowhere, but his contemporary impact is reflected when, in passing, *Kulturgeschichte* attributes equal status to both Greece and Egypt as ‘cradles of European culture’ and criticizes Hegel’s respective neglect of Egypt (2001a: 67, 106). Furthermore, Kittler does not explicitly defend any notion of Greek ‘Aryan’ purity or cultural autonomy. However, his historical narrative for the most part re-affirms variations on these themes. Some of Kittler’s Greek texts present stories of cultural contact. More often than not, these narratives follow the geographical mappings established by 19th-century Orientalism, thus emphasizing Asian rather than Mediterranean connections (see, e.g., 2001a: 248–9; 2006a). Importantly, these gestures towards Europe’s ‘Oriental’ connections distinguish Kittler’s work from Heidegger’s vehemently anti-‘Asian’ geo-politics (see Bambach, 2003: 167). At the same time, Kittler also downplays the ‘Oriental’ links by highlighting the Greek contributions to European culture as decisive, both explicitly and through their overwhelming presence in his texts. While *Kulturgeschichte* acknowledges Egypt as Europe’s cradle in passing, the respective function of Greece is constantly reiterated (e.g. 2001a: 18, 23; see also generally 2003a, 2004a, 2004b, 2006a).

To some degree, this continued reliance on ancient Greece can be attributed to the philhellenic legacy in Kittler’s favorite sources, including Harold Innis’ contributions to Canadian media theory. In accordance with the dominant paradigms of his time, Innis insisted on the *relative* autonomy of Greece (see, e.g. 1972 [1950]: 40). However, the matter becomes more conspicuous when we turn to *Vom Griechenland*, where the focus is not on the classical moments of European culture in philosophy and other sciences, but on the ‘other’ Greece of Dionysius and Aphrodite. As Kittler himself

remarks in passing, 19th-century authors like Bachofen preferred to locate this world in 'swampy regions like the Nile delta' (2001a: 139). Unlike its classical counterpart, this 'other' Greece has been intimately linked to both 'Asian' and 'Egyptian' influences in its modern reception. Kittler's *Vom Griechenland*, however, almost completely erases these established connections, which continue to be discussed also in his later 20th-century sources (e.g. Burkert, 1972, see below). That is, in the very context where German philhellenism has highlighted cultural contact, Kittler *de facto* establishes a realm of cultural purity. It should be noted that in this way, Kittler effectively deletes the racist overtones of 19th- and early 20th-century literature. He himself might argue that not re-iterating the 'Oriental' ties of his 'other' Greece breaks down the 'cordon sanitaire' which the Greek lovers of European modernity erected against the 'Oriental swamps' of the Dionysian (see Kittler, 2001a: 175). In not visibly 'orientalizing' Greece, however, Kittler effectively 'greekifies' the realms of 'Oriental otherness'. The Greece presented in *Vom Griechenland* does not seem to be constituted in a process of intercultural exchange at all. Rather than as a challenge to the defended territories of modern philhellenism, it is tempting to read the book as an enactment of the postwar German taboo on the languages of race.

But perhaps we don't even need to engage in psychoanalytic interpretation. The common denominator of Kittler's indirect, and direct, ways to distinguish ancient Greece at the expense of its neighbors is that he simply does not show a serious interest in any other ancient culture. In *Kulturgeschichte*, he explicitly legitimizes this preference with Heidegger, suggesting that the latter's epistemology, by historicizing 'being', accomplishes 'both a radicalizing and an execution [*Erledigung*] of all relativisms of cultural studies' (2001a: 223). Unlike the historical analysis of cultural identities undertaken in 'Anglo-American' cultural studies, Heidegger's historicizing endeavor targets an ontological 'historicity'. By contrast, he derogatively associates 'history' in the sense of a multiplicity of articulations with 'the remotest and strangest cultures' (quoted from 2001a; see 225). Endorsing Heidegger's affect against cultural difference, Kittler adopts his project to 'radically historicize' European culture while declaring other, that is, the 'strangest/most foreign [*fremdesten*]' cultures 'relativizable' (2001a: 223). Beyond the explicit ideological articulation of any purity model, Kittler's texts re-iterate the special, splendidly isolated status of ancient Greece for his German culture studies.

5. Mortal Gods, Murderous Heroes: Philhellenic Anthropology

But what exactly does it mean to 'radically historicize' one's own culture in Heideggerian terms? As *Kulturgeschichte* highlights, Heidegger's 'elemental culture studies' targets 'historicity' in the sense of 'being born' (*Gebürtigkeit*) and 'mortality' (Kittler, 2001a: 225). *Vom Griechenland* follows this lead. Its first essay presents another facet of the presumed Greek origin of Europe by pursuing the idea that the immortality of gods is based

on a classical ‘regulation of discourse’ (2001b: 18). With a quote from *The Order of Things*, Kittler introduces this claim as a critical variation on the ‘old’, Nietzschean–Foucauldian ‘story’ about the death of God: The *mortality* of the gods is ‘its essential precondition’ (2001b: 11).

As quoted by Kittler, Foucault’s reflections culminate in the idea that the ‘murder’ of god by ‘man’ ‘itself is doomed to die; new gods, the same gods, are already swelling the future Ocean’, whereas ‘man will disappear’ (Foucault, 1994: 385; Kittler, 2001b: 11). Kittler’s reflections on pre-classical divine mortality form a part of this return of the gods prophesied by Foucault. More surprisingly, ‘man’, as a mortal being, also returns with the mortal gods in Kittler’s essay. For they dwell together, as *Kulturgeschichte* suggests with reference to Heidegger (2001a: 249). In his essay on the thing, Heidegger discusses the close, albeit still distant relationship between mortals and (here immortal) gods by musing on the twofold nature of the gift, which is *Trunk*, thirst-quenching wine, for the mortals, and sacrifice, or *Trank*, for the gods (2000: 174–5, see Kittler, 2001a: 246). Kittler’s thesis on divine mortality ‘radicalizes’ this scenario of closeness and distance. In exploring the relations between humans and gods, his essay entangles questions of religion and anthropology in the German sense, that is, the transhistorical and transcultural study of ‘man’ in the singular form.

The significance of the last category may seem surprising in Kittler. As I believe, however, this return of man in the recent works suggests that his demise was incomplete in the first place. Drawing on notions such as Lacan’s ‘premature birth of man’ (e.g. Kittler, 1977: 151), even the early works were concerned less with displacing any anthropological inquiry than with problematizing affirmations of human autonomy. At the turn of the 21st century, Kittler newly foregrounds anthropological questions within this anti-humanist framework. Thus, man re-enters the stage of his notoriously ‘inhuman’ culture science as Nietzsche’s ‘non-identified animal’ or the ‘drunken town musician’ of 19th-century physics (2002a: 30, 32; 2003b). A figure of natural and technical contingency, this new Kittlerian man nonetheless has his grandeur. His close relations to the Greek gods are crucial in this regard.

After initially establishing his thesis about the mortality of gods with regard to ancient Crete, Kittler’s text moves on to another pre-classical realm, the ‘backward region of Arcadia’ (2001b: 24). This realm is accessed through Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. As Kittler argues, this late text is marked by the discourse regulation prohibiting divine mortality, but nonetheless undermines it by telling the story of Lycaon, the ‘wolfish despot of Arcadia’ (2001b: 22). Lycaon’s attribute suggests that in Kittler’s summary, the story involves more than one border transgression. When Zeus visited Lycaon’s house in human guise, he was faced with two ‘experiment[s] in distinction’ (2001b: 29): Before trying to kill the god, Lycaon served him human meat. In Ovid’s regulated discourse, the borders between gods, humans, and animals are eventually re-affirmed. Zeus proves his divine nature by passing

the cannibalism test and strips Lycaon of his human nature by transforming him into a wolf. Kittler's differently regulated discourse emphasizes the transgressions thus tamed. Lycaon's transformation into 'the other of himself' (2001b: 30) shows precisely that humans cannot be clearly distinguished from murderous animals, and nor can gods. The Arcadians 'offer sacrifice to a Zeus whose epithet Lycaios, or the wolfish, characterizes him as a murderer himself' (2001b: 25).

Importantly, Lycaon is not just any human, but rather 'the very first man' in Kittler's narrative (2001b: 22). This claim implies, of course, that Kittler follows Ovid's Greek-centered tale of the origin of the world. However, it also entails an unacknowledged departure from the Greek text: In Ovid, Lycaon represents the murderous 'race of iron', which doesn't mark the beginning of human life, but the completion of its three-step fall from paradise. Bypassing Ovid's fiction of a golden age, Kittler's humankind begins where, in Ovid, the situation had deteriorated to the degree that the gods felt intervention was necessary – thus Zeus' visit to Lycaon's house (see Ovid, 1998: 3–9). In 20th-century terms, Kittler's 'first man' is the *Homo Necans* analyzed by Walter Burkert in a 1972 study quoted by Kittler in this context. This study provides an explicitly anthropological correlate to Kittler's long-term fascination with the history of media as a history of war (see Winthrop-Young, 2002). Burkert's attempt to explain man's religious behavior by turning to biology, psychology, and ethnology, defines man as the 'hunting ape' (1972: 1, 24): 'Man became man . . . through the act of killing' (1972: 30).

As Kittler declares, murder was established even before 'love', or the matters of Aphrodite (2001b: 33). Like the later European realms of philosophy, this 'earliest world' excludes women (2001b: 31): 'Hunting is a male preserve' (Burkert, 1972: 25). Apparently, patriarchal culture developed more smoothly out of nature than Bachofen thought; once more, Kittler's realm of origin discloses itself as a space of mythical masculinity. But gender is not the only differential category operating in this text passage. In sacrificing a human, who might be his own son (see Burkert, 1972: 101), Lycaon does not commit the 'threatening sin of Abraham, but the foundational sacrilege of his cult' (Kittler, 2001b: 32). A footnote refers to Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* as the source of this distinction. In Nietzsche, 'Aryan' sacrilege is distinguished from the 'Semitic' myth of (feminine) sin by the 'dignity' of its masculine, active nature (1964: 78). Again, Kittler does not explicitly re-assert these racial categories as such. However, he does affirm the distinctions that they helped to establish in the earlier text. His first human alias murderous animal is endowed with the masculine dignity of Greek tragedy. As a Greek *heros*, man is not that far from the gods proper. With reference to Klossowski, Kittler's argument culminates in a genealogical construction which identifies Lycaon and the Lycaion Zeus (2001b: 34).

Other recent Kittler texts remind us of the fact that this world of Greek nature, as it exists for the contemporary media philosopher, is a product of

science after all. In Kittler's 21st-century discourse, humans repeatedly turn immortal by virtue of technology or their role in inventing it (2004b; 2006a). This does not imply a complete 'inversion of postmodern anti-humanism' (thus Mehring, 2004). After all, dignity does not come with critical agency here. Rather, the model of tragedy (for its new prominence in Kittler, see also 2006a) confers dignity on transgression under the guidance of fate, or heteronomy. Nietzsche suggested that 'the ethical basis of pessimistic tragedy' is 'the *justification* of human evil – of human guilt as well as of the suffering incurred thereby' (1964: 78; emphasis in the original). In the 1970s, Burkert made a similar move: His return to the 'beginnings of man' was inspired by the diagnosis that 'aggression, violence of man against man . . . has become a central problem of the present' (1972: 9). Burkert's explanation of this violence as the essence of man is a paradigmatic case of the 'anthropo-skepticism' which became a dominant paradigm in postwar German philosophy, anthropology, and theology (Marchand, 1996: 372). Kittler does not explicitly contextualize his investigation of man's murderous origins with the need to work through the Holocaust or other instances of modern violence. Nonetheless, his Greek fantasies return to postwar configurations of coming to terms with the past. At the turn of the 21st century, Kittler's German culture studies may still be caught in the loops of memory and repression, guilt and desire for 'normalization'.

Beyond this suspicion, however, I believe that we can locate Kittler's turn to Greece in more specific historical terms. With ongoing normalization discourses functioning as both symptom and motor, German culture has been haunted by intensified cravings for collective identity at the turn of the 21st century. In the aftermath of unification, the legacy of the split nation encountered the processes of European integration and globalization. September 11th, 2001, and the following debates on Islam merely highlighted ongoing conflicts about cultural identity in a society still hesitant to accept its immigration realities. The overdue reform of *ius sanguinis*-based German citizenship legislation implemented in 2000 should help to eventually turn Germany's long-term Turkish residents into citizens. With Turkey waiting to be admitted to the EU, however, the old definitions of national, and continental, identity in terms of its presumed religious and ethnic homogeneity have continued to dominate much public discourse.

While I am writing this essay in 2005, German feuilletons are explicitly reinvigorating emphatic notions of a German *Kulturnation* (e.g. Nida-Rümelin, 2005). Already throughout the past decade, this nation's imagined partner in elective affinity once more assumed a new importance in literature and scholarship. Even after 1945, with philhellenic institutions in decline (see Marchand, 1996), Greek themes had remained prominent in German literature (see Riedel, 2000). Nonetheless, Marchand is partially right when she suggests that the anthropo-skepticism of the postwar period signaled a break with 'Greece's tyranny over Germany'. As a 'new universalism' in 'German guise', anthropo-skepticism presented a paradigm for

which the Greeks were not necessarily of particular significance, except for the fact that they often came to embody a critical moment in human estrangement from nature or a striking example of 'man's depravity' (Marchand, 1996: 373, 372, 362). In Kittler's turn back onto the Greek-German axis, both of these negative moments play a role. Nonetheless, we have seen that his insistent distinction of Greece at the expense of its neighbors is not predominantly critical. Based on his double evaluation of the European legacy, Kittler's turn-of-the-21st-century philhellenism includes the praise of Greece for its foundational role in Europe's making as well as an emphatic return to what was lost in the process, the 'world of rapturous Graecophilia' that characterized romantic German encounters with its other self (Marchand, 1996: xcii).

While an extended discussion is beyond the scope of this article, it would be worthwhile to compare Kittler's Greek fantasies to other recent instances of German philhellenism. In media theory, I am thinking particularly of Norbert Bolz's post-Nietzschean and post-Heideggerian uses of the Dionysian (e.g., 1997). More actively mediated through systems theory than in Kittler, Bolz's uses of the Dionysian come with a prominent interest in anthropological foundations as well. With regard to contemporary literature, Kittler's fascination with the realms not only of divine love, but also heroic murder may bring to mind the controversies around Botho Strauß's (1993) essay 'Anschwellender Bocksgesang' (literally 'swelling goat's singing', that is, Greek 'tragedy') and his (1996) drama *Ithaka*. With its gravity center in the *ars aphrodisia*, Kittler's *Vom Griechenland* seems much more harmless than Strauß's essayistic prophecies regarding the approaching bloody end of 'mass democracy', and his dramatic fantasies of sacrifice and heroic restitution inspired by the end of Homer's epos. However, the shared theme of tragedy is noticeable, especially given the prominence of this concept in 19th- and early 20th-century national ideology (see Hörr, 1997). While Kittler's Greek scenarios refrain from developing Strauß's explicitly political fantasies of cathartic murder, they do contribute to contemporary replays of the 'German' tropes of heroic distinction and death. Reminiscent of old fantasies of ecstasy as (masculine) violence, their anthropological frame certainly discourages us from asking critical questions about the politics of violence and exclusion in different historical contexts.

Turning the anthropo-pessimism of the postwar period into essayistic experiments with renewed distinction, Kittler's narrative descent into the presumed ecstatic origins of Greek man provides partially explicit, partially implicit offers of cultural identification. With their world-historical dimensions, his stories offer fictions of coherence and relative stability. Mostly without directly addressing current political debates and events, they implicitly answer the challenges of postcolonialism and globalization by returning to 19th- and early 20th-century narratives of cultural identity. With his special connection with German culture science, Kittler's quintessentially Greek man provides a bar against contemporary discussions of alternative canons, different modernities, or even simply more inclusive

definitions of Europe as a space constituted by cultural exchange across the Mediterranean.

6. Conclusion

In analyzing Kittler's recent Greek obsessions, this article discussed a shift in his oeuvre, which, however, does not represent a radical break with his earlier 'hardware studies'. Without departing from his general mathematical and techno-determinism (e.g. 2001a: 27), Kittler's works from the current decade highlight an essentially Greek culture as a necessary supplement to science and technology (e.g. 2004a: 251). In the tradition of early 20th-century, notably Heideggerian, cultural pessimism, Kittler's 'culture science' rejoices in investigations of origin and subsequent decline. Its Greek narratives follow the hardware routes of Canadian media studies, with an emphasis on Harold Innis' overdetermined accounts of historical empire-building through media. *Vom Griechenland* discusses the hegemony of writing as the crucial moment in the foundation of Europe. Focusing on an imagined Greece before that rupture, the book hints at this world's virtual return in electronic media technologies. Other recent texts put the emphasis on the distinction of the Greek alphabet vis-à-vis other forms of ancient writing (see Innis, e.g. 1951: 40–1). The potential of this alphabet, in which 'writing, number, image and tone' converged, might then return in the (however, ambivalent) worlds of the computer (2006b; also 2004a). Either way, Greece stands in for both the foundation of European civilization and its virtual better self, a realm of sensual *culture* ('songs of heroes and sirens') as opposed to the modern, compromised European or American world of 'trade, government or the law' (2006b).

With this double function, Kittler's Greece still occupies the very structural place it had in 19th-century German philhellenism. Most of the figures inhabiting it are familiar from these discourses as well. While criticizing the 'un-divine', and 'meta-physical', reception of Greece in German idealism, Kittler indulges in Bachofen's, and Nietzsche's Dionysian worlds, celebrating divine heterosexuality and the 'masculine', if violent nature of tragic heroes who have learned to 'submit to divine fate' (2004b: 23). I suggested, however, that these philhellenic loops should be analyzed with regard to the contemporary feedback that drives them. Kittler's Greek fantasies start from post-World War II developments in the historical disciplines and participate in the reformulation of collective identity at the turn of the 21st century.

On the level of explicit articulation, this identity is mostly 'European' rather than 'German'. Replaying the theme of 'elective affinity', however, the Greek *Kultur* nation subterraneously still feeds a distinction of German culture. The relative absence of national signifiers may point less to contemporary processes of European unification than to older discourses supplementing national with transnational rhetoric. Already in 1937, Heidegger developed an emphatic notion of Europe as 'the name for a specific philosophical-historical interpretation of Western culture' (Bambach, 2003: 172).

Such transnational language won additional significance in postwar German discourse which ostensibly replaced the tainted nation with the 'Occident' (see Christ, 1999: 299). Departing from the dominant westward orientation of postwar politics and society, Kittler develops 'Eurasia' as his most extensive frame of collective reference. Like Heidegger, he thus vehemently excludes the US (Bambach, 2003: 163ff.); unlike Heidegger, he returns to Herder's, Hegel's and Nietzsche's world-historical narratives which ambiguously include 'the Orient' as a source of what remains quintessentially Europe's cultural accomplishment. After fascism as well as decolonization, Kittler's discourse keeps its distance from any rhetoric of essential 'Asian' as well as 'African' inferiority. Both directly and through omission, however, his narratives of world history nonetheless affirm slightly modified tales of Greek superiority over its neighbors in the ancient Mediterranean. In other words: Kittler's 'primal fantasies' of aphrodisian *phalloi* and hunting heroes don't escape their modern European, and German, histories.

Notes

1. The translations from German editions are the author's. She apologizes for the awkwardness of some of these translations. For the purposes of her critical reading, she had to reproduce Kittler's often idiosyncratic and 'tortured' prose as exactly as possible. The author would also like to thank Kathryn Brooks for her help with the translations and prose in general, and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young for providing unpublished material, as well as for his feedback.
2. The German wording exploits linguistic connections between 'to give' and 'to be' that cannot adequately be rendered in the translation.

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