

Implosion and Intoxication

Kittler, a German Classic, and Pink Floyd

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Introduction: Imploding a Classic

FRIEDRICH KITTLER has on several occasions referred with audible pride to his 1984 essay on Friedrich Schiller's play, *Don Carlos*. He calls it his 'favorite interpretation', one which gave him the feeling of having dealt with matters 'correctly' (Kittler and Banz, 1996: 11). It is no doubt a very representative paper; it captures best what Kittler set out to do in his first incarnation as a so-called poststructuralist literary scholar before he turned into a media theorist and then into something else that auxiliary labels like 'cultural scientist' or 'alphanumeric theorist' don't quite cover.

By most accounts, *Don Carlos* is a hybrid. It starts out as a quaintly Freudian family tragedy: Carlos, a son (and crown prince), falls in love with his stepmother (and queen) Elisabeth, which exacerbates his troubled relationship with his father (and king) Philip II. But the play soon mutates into a high drama of freedom and enlightenment by pitting Carlos's friend and tutor, the relentlessly idealistic Marquis Posa, against the dark powers of absolutism and the Spanish Inquisition. Posa, at first intent on molding Carlos into a model future ruler, gains the trust of Philip II and endeavors to convert the king himself into a good humanist by assailing him with one of the most famous exhortations of German literature: *Geben Sie Gedankenfreiheit!* 'Give us the freedom to think!' (Schiller, 1996: 116). Somehow the family romance got lost underneath all this pathos; it is as if Shakespeare halfway through *Hamlet* had decided to focus on Horatio's attempts to persuade Claudius to amend the rotten state of Denmark. Countless scholars have pondered this construction flaw; Schiller himself admitted that he had simply worked too long on the play instead of finishing it in one summer. Kittler doesn't care. There is no hiatus between family tragedy and politico-philosophical drama once the play is analysed in terms of historically

contingent discursive and institutional practices that collapse the distinction between state and family. Two points are of importance:

First, from 1773 to 1780, Schiller attended the *Hohe Karlsschule*, the academy founded by Duke Karl Eugen of Württemberg (1728–1793). ‘For the first time in history a German territorial state takes immediate and centralized control of the education and recruiting of its civil servants’ (Kittler, 1984: 243). The Duke had spent enough time in the age of Enlightenment to realize that nurturing productive and sufficiently independent civil servants required the modification of established education practices. The traditional regime of fear had to be complemented by loving guidance: While still drilled and disciplined by paramilitary overseers, students – the future ducal employees – were also paired up with specially selected and philosophically versed tutors. These were frequently only a few years their senior, they had no authority to punish their students, and they were under orders from the Duke to become the students’ confidants and report on them (just as the students were frequently ordered to ingratiate themselves with their peers and report on each other and write soul-searching self-analyses). As a result, enthusiastic friendships blossomed – such as between student #447, aka Friedrich Schiller (1759–1806), and Jakob Friedrich Abel (1751–1829), who later used his experience at the *Karlsschule* to produce one of the first German handbooks in psychology. Readers familiar with Kittler’s analyses of the discursive complicity of education, philosophy and the breeding of civil servants will recognize what is at stake: As the first teachers in the history of German education to elicit and receive ‘the love of their students’ (Kittler, 1984: 244), tutors like Abel are subjecting their young friends to a philosophically enriched diet of love, introspection and surveillance that will ensure their reliability as modern subjects. Feudal suppression yields to something far more subtle: In the name of individual autonomy the enlightened authoritarian state issues a ‘command of free will’ (Kittler, 1999: 259). Precisely this love-wrapped double-bind is at work in the relationship between Posa and Carlos. In short, there is no *Gedankenfreiheit* or freedom of thought, there is only the philosophically embellished *programmed* thought of freedom in the interest of the bourgeoning modern state:

When I think back on my literary criticism, the good essays are actually didactic pieces in programming. How did Duke Karl Eugen von Württemberg program Friedrich Schiller? I didn’t write anything about Schiller’s sentiments or religion, because all I had was a bare-bones model: educators and princes program the writer for a specific civil function in the state. You don’t need hardware or an understanding of technology to grasp that. What you need is a basic understanding of concepts such as hardware, programming, automatization, and regulation. (Griffin and Herrmann, 1996: 741)

Second, by the time he had founded his academy, the promiscuous Karl Eugen had settled down with the noticeably younger Franziska, Countess

of Hohenheim (1748–1811). The latter took an active interest in the *Karlsschule* and – due to a combination of ducal commands and the passions of the writer – became the object of some of Schiller’s earliest overheated poetry. If the Duke called himself the ‘father’ of his students (a label which in some cases was no metaphor), Franziska was presented, and presented herself, as their ‘mother’, though it is safe to assume that many of the sequestered teenagers perceived her otherwise. Here, to use one of Kittler’s favorite terms, is the ‘cleartext’ behind the ambiguous status of Elisabeth as love object and (step)mother in *Don Carlos*. Schiller’s tragedy replays Franziska’s double role as erotic object and sovereign mother or *Landesmutter*. The play, then, is nothing less than a literary execution of a cultural program revolving around a new oedipal order that was later with great fanfare discovered by Sigmund Freud et al.:

It was impossible even for a bourgeois culture to achieve the cultural function of motherhood all on its own. In order to enthrone this paradox the rules of culturalization had to cede to an arbitrary act. According to the testimony not only of Schiller’s early plays, the function of motherhood came into being far from bourgeois families; it was an absolutist simulacrum which then, as is usually the case with such programmes, entered so-called reality with all the power of the subconscious. Princes like Karl Eugen of Württemberg . . . found or invented mistresses, who could act both as daughter and lover, sovereign mother and spouse. (Kittler, 1991: 15–16)

While this may be Kittler’s favorite interpretation, it is certainly not a favorite among Schiller scholars. And with good reason, for if this analysis is indeed ‘correct’, most of them are wasting their (and our) time. ‘If the semiototechnology of the despotic family image is clear, then there is little left to say about *Don Carlos*’ (Kittler, 1984: 258). Ultimately, this is less of an interpretation than a discourse-analytical debunking in the course of which the humanist pathos directed against feudal or absolutist despotism is revealed as an effect of the very system it decries. Disregarding the many historical, aesthetic and philosophical elaborations that more conventional Schiller scholarship has unearthed in *Don Carlos*, the play is reduced to a historically contingent network of discursive and institutional practices that programmes subjects, including their belief that they are free rather than programmed. Interpretation, to use a term Kittler applied later, yields to *implosion*:

There was a program for this new school [the *Karlsschule*] which states how it was planned, what kind of old and new duties the students had, what forms of knowledge they were to be taught, etc. All that is like a computer program, and if it is read together with the text of *Don Carlos*, then it turns out that Carlos means the *Karlsschule* . . . and that Schiller is simply copying the Duke rather than protesting against him. In other words, if I manage to combine a text that is in apparent need of an interpretation with another text that states the rules of text A, then there is a nice implosion and things mirror each other

[dann implodiert das so schön und bildet sich aufeinander ab], and at that point I no longer have to ask myself, ‘What was Don Carlos feeling?’, I simply say, ‘Don Carlos is Schiller,’ or, ‘Don Carlos is this or that student at the *Karlschule*.’ (Kittler and Banz, 1996: 11f.)

Implosion normally refers to the inward collapsing of the walls of a vacuum system as the result of a failure of the walls to sustain the ambient pressure. Kittler uses the term to allude to a hermeneutic breakdown that occurs when meaning is sucked out of a text and the latter collapses back onto the algorithms or systems of rules that govern its functioning in the first place.

I will use this idea to illuminate certain aspects of Kittler’s work. Specifically, I will focus on two interpretations or implosions – one of Goethe’s most famous poem, the other of Pink Floyd’s most famous song – that are similar to his take on *Don Carlos*. The aim is three-fold. First, to (re)acquaint readers with the earlier portion of Kittler’s work that despite excellent early introductions (Wellbery, 1990; Holub, 1992: 97–107) has played little or no part in his reception in English-speaking countries; second, to highlight some of the continuities, if not recurring compulsions, that lie underneath the obvious caesuras of his work (e.g., first texts, then media, and finally codes); and third, to gesture, however briefly, to some of the rarely discussed political features of Kittler’s work.

1. The Mother of All Lullabies

On 7 September 1780 – or 1783, the experts have yet to agree – Goethe scribbled these eight lines on the wall of a mountain hermitage (followed here by my deliberately pedestrian translation):

*Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.* (Goethe, 1978: I: 142)

Above all mountain tops
Is calm,
In all tree tops
You feel
Hardly a breeze;
The little birds are quiet in the wood.
Just wait, soon
You will rest too.

Commonly known as the *Wanderers Nachtlied* (‘Wanderer’s Nightsong’), this national trinket has attracted two centuries’ worth of learned deliberations, many of them along these lines (see Segebrecht, 1978: 54–91):

There is in it not a simile, not a metaphor, not a symbol. Three brief, simple statements of fact are followed by a plain assertion for the future . . . We point to the immediacy with which language here conveys the hush of evening . . . It is absolutely essential, it is indeed the heart of the poem's meaning and the feature which stamps it peculiarly and specifically Goethean, that *Gipfel* should precede *Wipfel*. For the order of the objects mentioned is not arbitrary . . . It is an order of the inner process of nature as known by the mind, an organic order of the evolutionary progression in nature, from the inanimate to the animate, from the mineral, through the vegetable, to the animal kingdom . . . and so inevitably to man. A natural process . . . has become language, has been wrought in another substance, the poet's own material . . . It would be difficult to find in literature a lyric of such brevity containing so much profundity of objective thought. (Wilkinson; quoted in Goethe, 1978: I: 544–5)

I have quoted this highly representative animal-vegetable-mineral interpretation at length not only because it was considered worthy of inclusion – in its original English, no less – in the commentary section of the esteemed Hamburg edition of Goethe's works, but also because it would be difficult to find in German literary criticism a discussion of such brevity containing so much scholarly profundity that, at least in the eyes of the young Kittler, amounts to just so much profound nonsense.

In 1979, Kittler published a reading of Goethe's poem entitled 'Lullaby in Birdland' that touches upon themes and motives which were to return fully orchestrated in *Discourse Networks* (1990 [1985]). He expends no energy on the question of whether there really is an unbroken continuity of meaning extending all the way through nature from minerals to man. Instead he investigates the discursive a priori of this presupposition: What order of discourse, what mechanisms of speech production, what rituals of language acquisition have to be in place in order to assume that trees and mountains are brimming with messages able to soothe or stimulate the soul? What new installment in the 'historical adventures of speaking' (Kittler, 1990: 177) programmes readers to presuppose that there is no gap of meaning in the world, that even the absence of bird chatter is imbued with spiritual significance? No doubt the poem works toward such an interpretation by employing words that oscillate across a wide semantic expanse. Note, for instance, Goethe's fine use of *Hauch*, a poetically charged noun that encompasses both breath and breeze, thus conjuring up a world suffused by animated exhalations, or of the verb *ruhen*, which can refer to all states of rest from eternal slumber to an afternoon nap. Or you may follow Emil Staiger, the grand master of hermeneutic empathy, down to the sub-lexical sound level and admire how in the poem's first two lines 'the long "u" and the pause following it make the silent twilight audible', and how the *du* in line four 'is not as profoundly calming because the sentence does not end and the voice remains raised, and this corresponds to the last faint rustling in the trees' (1991: 41).

Once again, Kittler doesn't care. To him, the *Wanderers Nachtlied* is not so much a poem that invites interpretations but a highly seductive

linguistic event that gestures toward certain rules and conditions that gave rise to it as well as to the ways in which it is interpreted. Once again, he is engaged in a discourse-analytical implosion that has the text collapse into the discursive practices that urged upon the reader a seamless transition from *u* to *du* and *Ruh* and from there on to the assurance that even the most inaccessible alpine and arboreal regions are eager to calm ‘that most restless of beings, man’ (Staiger, 1991: 42). To start with that most venerable question of traditional criticism: Who is speaking? Certainly not some ‘lyrical I’. That concept is high on Kittler’s hit list: ‘What literary scholarship calls “lyrical I” does not exist at all’ (1991: 105). Especially, Kittler adds, in a poem that refers to states of being that exclude the usage of the first person. Regardless of whether *ruhen* refers to death or dozing, the phrase ‘I sleep’ is a ‘pragmatic paradox’ (1991: 105). Sleepers do not articulate that they are asleep; and with the exception of Edgar Allan Poe’s M. Valdemar, nobody has ever non-metaphorically claimed to be dead.

There is an obvious Lacanian influence at work here that is programming the young Kittler’s attempts to expurgate reflexivity in favour of transitivity. This was already evident in his dissertation on the Swiss poet, Conrad Ferdinand Meyer:

In the case of . . . Meyer I did not want him to have an image or a concept of himself. Rather, I wanted everything that he is to be his relationship to his mother, to his wife, to his sister and to his child. He completely dissolves in these psychoanalytic, Lacanian, formal external relationships, and there is no inner sanctuary, neither for me, who is writing, nor for Meyer, whom I am writing about. (Kittler and Banz, 1996: 45)

Indeed, the early work of Kittler could be circumscribed as a sustained assault on the reflexive pronoun *sich* (himself, herself, itself; see Winthrop-Young, 2005: 62–4), especially as it is used by Theodor W. Adorno, who, together with Jürgen Habermas, has invited some of Kittler’s harshest attacks (e.g., Kittler and Banz, 1996: 44; Kittler, 2003: 503). Here Goethe’s poem comes in handy, for it turns out to be very amenable to Lacan’s dictum that the subconscious is the discourse of the other. As the conspicuous use of the pronoun *du* indicates, the ‘discursive event’ (Kittler, 1991: 106) of the poem is an address. A voice speaks to the wanderer of the ways in which nature is speaking to him, with the result that the wanderer (and his readers) cannot but interpret even the most meaningless noise as a meaningful message. As readers familiar with *Discourse Networks* know, the *ur*-model of this voice that seduces ears into understanding is the voice of the mother – to be precise, the maternal voice as instituted by the new 18th-century child-rearing practices, according to which mothers as the new sole caretakers of infants are taught to teach them language in a new, ‘natural’ way.

In the second half of the 18th century the upbringing of infants and children undergoes significant changes. The emergence of the bourgeois nuclear family – which, as Kittler would have it, is kicked off by a feudal

simulacrum – redefined and promoted the role of mothers who were charged with turning raw infant material into individuals with a sufficiently developed psychic level commonly referred to as spirit or soul. The latter, in turn, is the indispensable precondition for the nurturing of poets, civil servants, and other productive citizens. Hence mothers had to be taught how to teach their children; they had to be instructed, for instance, how to put their babies to sleep in properly maternal fashion. Herbal concoctions, sedatives, tranquilizers, narcotics, threats, screams and beatings are all to be replaced by the loving voice of the mother:

*Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch.*

The mother's voice becomes 'a multi-purpose tool', it glides over and weaves together what had been separated by earlier discursive formations, 'the sensual and the spiritual, instinct and art, bodily technologies and the production of souls' (1991: 109). In order to achieve this effect, mothers are instructed to voice what Kittler terms 'minimal signifieds' (see Kittler, 1990: 27–53) such as *mu mo ma-ma*, that is, quasi-natural basic constituents of language that the child perceives to be pregnant with meaning in much the same way as the wanderer perceives even the most meaningless sounds to be brimming with existential significance, and as sufficiently trained readers perceive the 8 lines, 24 words, and 155 characters of Goethe's poem to be bursting with hermeneutically accessible riches.

Despite doubts expressed by other scholars, Kittler insists that a Silesian lullaby was 'both source and cleartext' (1991: 114) of Goethe's poem (followed here by a less literal but more appropriate translation):

*Schlaf, Kindlein, balde!
Die Vögelein fliegen im Walde;
Sie fliegen den Wald wohl auf und nieder,
Und bringen dem Kindlein die Ruh' bald wieder.
Schlaf, Kindlein, schlaf!* (quoted in Segebrecht, 1978: 64)

Hush, my baby, hush-a-bye,
In the wood the little birds fly,
Up and down the wood they fly
Until my baby stops to cry.
Hush, baby, hush.

Whether or not this Silesian connection is warranted is of less concern than the crucial switch from *ur-text* to 'cleartext'. Kittler's occasionally fetishistic use of the latter term is also a reaction against the importance German scholarship had accorded the former. The quest for the origin at the heart of the literary work is replaced with an equally rigorous Foucauldian step outside to decipher the code that programmes those who write, read and claim to understand literature in terms of truth and origin. The crux of

Kittler's reading is his insistence that Goethe's poem enacts that particular genre which arose with the new mothering techniques and which more than any other installs the mother's voice as an instrument for shaping infant souls: the lullaby. Lullabies sung by loving mothers are nothing less than the 'matrix of romantic poetry' (1991: 114). What makes Goethe's poem so interesting, then, is that it is a lullaby that awakens hermeneutic dreams by indicating where these dreams came from in the first place. It simulates an inscription technique that created emphatic souls and a desire to understand by literally *speaking into* those who do not have language; and it simulates that technique so well that it cannot but stimulate the reader's desire to set out on a quest for meaning. The poem both describes and brings about a hermeneutic infection precisely because it restages that which made us susceptible to this type of infection in the first place. In other words, the *Wanderers Nachtlied*, like all successful poetry, is a form of brain damage.

2. Looney Tunes

Pink Floyd has accompanied Kittler's work (not to mention Kittler himself) for a long time. Their lyrics already appear as mottoes in Kittler's dissertation on Meyer – and what better way to introduce a Lacanian analysis than Roger Waters' 'Haven't you heard it's a battle of words' from *Dark Side of the Moon*, or Syd Barrett's 'I'm wondering and dreaming / the words have different meanings' from *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (Kittler, 1977: 26 and 161)? In the German academic habitat of the late 1970s and early 1980s, it was still considered a breach of etiquette to take rock music this seriously; in fact, Kittler's habit of making Pink Floyd LPs part of his bibliographic apparatus was later cited as an example of the poststructuralist erosion of the boundary between scholarly and literary discourse (Spree, 1995: 167).

More importantly, Pink Floyd crops up in interviews with an audible political overtone. Kittler likes to point out that during the bygone days of the German student protest he preferred listening to Barrett/Waters to marching in the streets or consuming, as did so many of his peers, countless volumes of Marx/Engels or Horkheimer/Adorno. This sniping, no doubt, is related to Kittler's increasing – or increasingly vocal – conservatism, but there is more to it. For Kittler, the music engineered by 'the Pinks when they were not yet so terribly corrupted' (1994: 95) is not just a generational marker with political connotations, it also stands for a crucial techno-aesthetic experience that by virtue of its combination of simulated madness and technological sophistication appears to come closer to the project of a cultural revolution than all the verbose politicking of marching protesters ever did.

Three years after the essay on the *Wanderers Nachtlied*, Kittler published his reading of 'Brain Damage'. Once again, sounds and voices impact a listener; and once again, the usual interpretations – the song is about angst, alienation or our inability to respond to 'the child' or 'the real human being living inside' (Roger Waters, quoted in Jones, 1996: 101) –

are sidelined by an analytical shift from the inside to the outside, from human truths and messages to rules and (technical) standards. In much the same way as he had handled Goethe's poem, Kittler treats 'Brain Damage' not as a song that invites interpretations but as a highly seductive techno-acoustic event – one whose seductive qualities are due to a sophisticated performance of the technological progression that enabled these qualities. For 'Brain Damage', so the story goes, effectively retraces, performs and sings of the history of recording technology. It is nothing less than a genealogy of rock music in the age of technologically implemented madness.

Initially, 'the loonies' are outside 'on the grass', their distant voices and laughter are so far removed from the listener that they cannot be spatially localized. 'As an acoustic quote, then, the first stanza is the meagre time of monaural reproduction' (Kittler, 1982: 471). In the second stanza,

'The lunatic is in the hall. The lunatics are in my hall' . . . Already by virtue of the possessive pronoun there is a defined spatial relationship between the hall and the voice that is listening and speaking. The hall is near enough to allow for an acoustic differentiation between left and right, between one and many lunatics. This is exactly how at the end of *Grantchester Meadows* the acoustically built staircase functions, on which steps proceed from left to right – from vinyl directly into rooms and into the ears of the listeners. Stanza two, then, is the time of High Fidelity and stereophony. (1982: 471–2)

Finally, 'the lunatic is in my head'. Due to further advances in sound reproduction, sounds and voices coming from all angles surround and invade the listener. This is primarily due to the invention of the 'Azimuth Coordinator', an acoustic irradiation device Kittler attributes to Syd Barrett, but which was in fact 'essentially a crude pan pot device made by Bernard Speight, an Abbey Road technical engineer, using four large rheostats which were converted from 270 degree rotation to 90 degree' (Cunningham, 1997). In combination with a rudimentary quadraphonic PA system – in plain English, a couple of extra speakers set up around the room – the overall effect was an invasion of vertiginous ears that could no longer tell where the sounds and voices were coming from and whether they were outside or inside the listener's head. 'The explosion of acoustic media flips over into an implosion which crashes with headlong immediacy into the very centre of perception' (Kittler, 1982: 472). The brain has become one with that which arrives from the outside. In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, the same analysis is applied to David Gilmour's 'Fat Old Sun' (from *Atom Heart Mother*):

And if you sit don't make a sound
Pick your feet up off the ground
And if you hear as the warm night falls
The silver sound from a time so strange,
Sing to me sing to me. (Gilmour, quoted in Kittler, 1999: 32; misquotes corrected)

The first two lines are effectively a ‘magic’ command to the listener to assume a certain silent position when putting on a record: shut up, sit down, don’t shuffle around, listen:

And what transpires then is indeed a strange and unheard-of silver noise. Nobody knows who is singing – the voice called David Gilmour that sings the song, the voice referred to by the song, or maybe the voice of the listener who makes no sound and is nonetheless supposed to sing once all the conditions of magic have been met. An unimaginable closeness of sound technology and self-awareness, a simulacrum of a feedback loop relaying sender and receiver. A song sings to a listening ear, telling it to sing. As if the music were originating in the brain itself, rather than emanating from stereo speaker or headphones. (1999: 36–7)

Unlike the voices coming from singers on stage:

[these voices] implode in our ears . . . As if there were no distance between the recorded voice and listening ears, as if voices traveled along the transmitting bones of self-perception directly from the mouth into the ear’s labyrinth, hallucinations become real. (1999: 37)

So what, then, is the brain damage the song sings about? It quite simply means, as announced by the lyrics, that ‘there’s someone in my head but it’s not me’. Here three levels of analysis intersect. The first is a fairly conventional interpretation that rehashes traditional Pink Floyd lore according to which ‘Brain Damage’ (much like ‘Shine On, You Crazy Diamond’) is a paean to Syd Barrett. In an uneasy mixture of regret and relief, the song invokes Barrett’s exile to a ‘diagnostic no man’s land between LSD-psychosis and schizophrenia’ (1982: 469) otherwise known as *The Dark Side of the Moon*. Precisely this exclusion, however, enabled Pink Floyd’s global success; the band which could not have started without Barrett could not go on with him. But in Kittler’s reading, ‘Brain Damage’ also alludes to a possible return of – or rather: *to* – the excluded, for the song may well induce its own title, in which case the band will truly start playing ‘different tunes’ and thus join their former leader on the dark side of the moon, that is, in madness. Using the most up-to-date recording technology ‘Brain Damage’ performs the age-old association of moons with madness. The Azimuth Coordinator spells out the full meaning of the word *lunatic*.

The second level – one clearly indebted to Deleuzian and early Foucauldian strands of French poststructuralism – is built around the seemingly innocuous question: What is madness? Or rather: What sounds mad in the age of reason? Answer: the compulsive talking about the rules, technologies and/or institutions that make one talk. Madness, in other words, makes its appearance in the incessant discourse – devoid of all ‘critical’ or ‘reflexive’ distancing – on ‘the conditions of discourse channels’ (Kittler, 1982: 473). This is a diagnosis that looks far more impressive when compressed into a German compound noun: *ein Diskurs über*

Diskurskanalbedingungen. Obviously, branding this as madness presupposes that ‘discourses are perceived as individual speech acts’ (1982: 473), attributed to and presided over by an autonomous subject that is not merely a talking machine or a ventriloquist’s dummy attached to discursive or media-technological structures. Of course there always has been a way to produce such discourse on discourse without being labeled a lunatic – namely, literature:

If a discourse comprises a code that solely contains messages about this code, as well as aborted messages that only say what features of the code are announcing the message, then our culture isolates it as: madness. And if at the same time as this schizophrenic auto-reference a discourse arises whose words are both subject to a common code and at the same time name a different code in which they merely say that they are speaking, our culture isolates it as: literature. (Kittler and Turk, 1977: 26–7)

But ‘Brain Damage’ – and this is the third, truly Kittlerian level – is not literature, it is a complex recording that simulates its own title to such a degree that madness and music are as difficult to tell apart as outside and inside voices. The shift from a literary event like *Wanderers Nachtlied*, which could only encode the intruding voices by way of writing, to a sound event like ‘Brain Damage’, which manipulates physical effects of the real, indicates the increasing explicitness of the media-technological structures that make us by making us speak. The ‘loonies’ (as well as the engineers) are well aware of this: ‘Lunatics appear to be more informed than their doctors. They spell out that madness, rather than babbling metaphorically of radio transmitters in one’s brain, is, quite on the contrary, a metaphor of technologies’ (Kittler, 1982: 472f.). In the famous words of Arthur C. Clarke, any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic; for Kittler, any sufficiently advanced media technology is indistinguishable from madness. Yet this can no longer be called madness, for if the symmetrical relationship between madness and literature indicated above is linked to the old regime of the ‘Discourse Network 1800’, then with the demise of that regime, the terms, too, must change. Other terms, both older and newer, take their place, for instance, *Berauschung* (intoxication) or *Rausch* (inebriation).

3. The Other 1968?

Leaving aside the question whether or not Kittler is a ‘technodeterminist’, nobody can deny that beginning in the early 1980s his writings have become increasingly technologized. Processes formerly labeled in a more Foucauldian vein as ‘inscription’ or ‘disciplining’ are now referred to as ‘programming’, ‘cleartext’ turns into ‘algorithm’, and the discourse-analytical collapse of meaning into discursive structures is occasionally called an implosion. No wonder, then, that the very *production* of texts such as *Discourse Networks* becomes an engineering feat:

Because I had begun to solder transistors at home and knew what feedback was . . . I started to schematize the chapters of the book as switchboard diagrams. Basically, I linearized the history of Mothers, Poetry and Philosophy around 1800: the mother generates the mass of words which literature takes over and turns into works, and philosophy rereads the entire output of this production as theory. I visualized the whole thing as a switchboard diagram, which explains why technological metaphors like ‘feedback’ started cropping up. But it was supposed to be more than a matter of mere metaphors, I wanted to structure entire blocks of the text in this way. So I really took care that the Mother enters the channel of Poetry as input and, upon exiting at the other side, is collected in the storage medium of Philosophy. That was the concept. From the beginning, the book was designed like a machine. (Kittler and Banz, 1996: 45f.)

While his more overtly politicized peers to the left spent their summers working in factories to acquire proletarian credentials, Kittler burned the midnight oil to obtain engineering expertise. Both are an escape from the vagaries of bourgeois academic blather into hands-on relevance. After all, the adoption of Foucault by the young Kittler was fueled by a strong discontent over the unchecked arbitrariness and the ever-growing number of interpretations that were facilitated, indeed prescribed by established critical practices *and* by deconstructionist readings *à la* Derrida. What Kittler wanted was a stricter, more formalized way of dealing with literary works that would allow for their controlled reduction to historically contingent cultural technologies and programmes. Ideally, if interpretation yields to implosion, that is, if a text is revealed as the performance of a handbook (see Kittler and Banz, 1996: 11; further, see Schüttpelz, 2000), there may arise a ‘science of interpretation with true and false statements’ (Kittler, 1994: 97). Dealing with texts, then, demands a new version of Occam’s razor that comes equipped with a measuring device indicating whether or not a critical wiring performed by the analyst is operational. This is where Foucault – to be precise, the Foucault of *The Order of Things* – came in so handy: ‘With its hatred for commentaries and interpretations Foucault’s nominalist discourse analysis enforced a principle of scarcity [*ein Verknappungsprinzip*] that simplifies and formalizes the data of our culture’ (2002b: 36). *Verba non sunt multiplicanda*. Looking back, Kittler may celebrate Foucault’s helpful ‘sudden incursion into the boom of the Frankfurt School’ (2002b: 32), yet his technologically focused *intentio rectissima* tends to slip into a discursive reductionism that is reminiscent of the economic reductionism practiced by his more left-wing peers.

This goal explains Kittler’s noticeable preference for texts (in the widest possible sense of the word) that themselves gesture toward the rules that govern their production as well as their effects. The *Wanderers Nachtlied* not only points toward its blueprint, it also indicates its hermeneutic intoxication of readers. Poetry proclaims what poetry can do by simultaneously conjuring up how poetry’s effects came about. The same applies to ‘Brain Damage’:

After all, ‘Brain Damage’ doesn’t sing of love or other such themes; it is one single feedback between sound and listeners’ ears. Sounds proclaim what sounds have wrought and what surpasses all the effects Old Europe hoped to gain from the Book of Books or immortal poets. (Kittler, 1982: 475)

A song sings of the conditions under which it is sung. Precisely this self-implosion – which is not to be mistaken with so-called modernist or even postmodern self-reflexivity – is at the heart of Kittler’s Pink Floyd experience. It takes on such significance because it is no longer located in the imaginary of text-induced reveries but in the domain of technological manipulation of the real. Future biographers may study what music- or drug-induced experiences gained at the quarry ponds or *Baggerseen* surrounding Freiburg fueled Kittler’s work. He has already dropped enough hints (e.g., 2002c; 2004: 95). What is important is that Kittler’s aversion to established intoxications of the imaginary that culminate in reveries of spirit, soul, truth, or essence are the flip side of his willingness to submit himself to different, technologically more sophisticated intoxications, but only under the condition that he can later work them through.

Ultimately, Kittler’s whole work is based on these oscillations between intoxication and the study of how the intoxication came about. After being overwhelmed by ‘Brain Damage’ and comparable events, it became imperative to study how the song inflicted its title on listeners by building machines that disclose the rules of such an infection:

In the case of my generation, whose ears were full of Hendrix crashes and Pink Floyd and who were overwhelmed and completely awed, I tried to move back from these blissful shocks in such a way as at least to be able to build technical apparatuses according to plan that were themselves capable of performing these feats. That, after all, is the only way one can deal with art. (1994: 107)

The most revealing word in this quote is *my*. In fact, Kittler has over the last couple of years indulged in some pretty expansive usage of this pronoun: When he, as one of Germany’s most prolific importers of Foucault, refers to *The Order of Things* as a book ‘my generation grew up on’ (Kittler and Vismann, 2001: 11), then he is characterizing ‘his’ generation in terms of a fairly select group of people that included, first and foremost, himself. I would argue that Kittler – born in 1943 and thus in one of the core years of the German ‘68ers’ – is engaged in nothing less than a recoding of a generational experience that shifts the focus away from streets, protest, terrorism, Vietnam, and collective emancipation to the more silent or solitary intoxications of, among other things, Heidegger, drugs and Pink Floyd. From Kittler’s point of view, the 1968 clamor for social change is yet another instance of Schiller’s Marquis Posa demanding freedom of thought (Winthrop-Young, 2005: 171–6). The self-appointed revolutionary subjects who have imbibed thousands of pages from Marx to Marcuse remain ‘subject to gadgets and instruments of mechanical discourse processing’ (Kittler,

1997: 84) precisely because they view these gadgets as nothing more than mere instruments. Those who kept away to listen to Pink Floyd appear to know better.

Against this sequence of imaginary delusions in the name of social emancipation Kittler posits an alternative sequence of events which stretches even further back in time. His recent interest in Ancient Greece is also an attempt, as it were, to find historical resonance for Pink Floyd. As Claudia Breger points out in her article in this issue, Kittler's philhellenic fantasies are informed by earlier German constructions of Greece, and while Kittler may eschew the cultural chauvinism of 19th-century *Kulturgeschichte* by superficially replacing 'Germany' with 'Europe', this extremely German Europe is clearly separated from all extra-European influences. In much the same way as the later Heidegger had come to use the alleged special relationship between Greece and Germany to dream of a third, German way that is neither Western (i.e., American and capitalist) nor Eastern (i.e., Russian and communist), Kittler mobilizes a cultural construction of Greece to re-inscribe a uniquely European – that is, un-American and un-Oriental – identity. Greece, however, also serves to provide the blueprint for the cultural critique that is underlying Kittler's other 1968. A link is established between Pink Floyd and the so-called Dionysian elements of Greek culture foregrounded by Friedrich Nietzsche. The features of Syd Barrett merge with those of Dionysus, the returning exiled God, and other less Olympian deities. Tellingly, in 1984, Kittler published an extended version of his essay on 'Brain Damage' called 'The God of Ears'. The new title alludes to the Greek god Pan 'who dwelled in the acoustic' and suddenly – like a blast from an Azimuth Coordinator – 'boomed in all ears' (1993: 130). The sudden appearance of Pan, in other words, already stands for the inability to maintain a distance between the self and the source of noise, which justifies a direct link between him and Pink Floyd: 'It is said that the great god Pan is dead. But gods of ears cannot fade away. They return under the guise of amplifiers and PA systems. They return as rock songs' (1993: 130).

We are dealing with a project that will become fully visible only after the publication of his planned tetralogy *Musik und Mathematik* ('Music and Mathematics'); at the moment we are left with off-hand remarks. But then Kittler (like Derrida) is a great reader of asides; at least it is a gift or habit he tries to impart to his students. When reading Hegel, for instance, they above all have 'to learn to learn [*sic*] from Hegel's subordinate clauses' (Kittler, 2001: 120). The same applies to Kittler's texts. In his lecture on Nietzsche in *Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft*, he remarks that Nietzsche's *Birth of Tragedy* was less a philosophical treatise than an attempt at cultural politics based on old 19th-century analyses of medieval mass hysterias and new 19th-century psychophysical insights into psychomotoric induction on which Nietzsche modeled his ideas of Dionysian intoxication and subsequent infection (Kittler, 2001: 171; further, see Hecker, 1975). The project failed; Nietzsche was excommunicated from

academia and went mad – that is, he was reduced to a mindless body–media interface who spent the last ten years of his life ‘screaming inarticulately, mindlessly filling notebooks with simple “writing exercises”’ and ‘happy in his element as long as he had pencils’ (Kittler, 1990: 182; see also Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 1999: xxvii–xxx). In other words, Friedrich Nietzsche, who had to make do with Wagner operas instead of Azimuth Coordinators, preceded Syd Barrett to the dark side of the moon. And then follows this aside: ‘Even the so-called cultural revolution of 1968, at least its hallucinogenic wing [*ihr drogentechnischer Flügel*], can be understood as a mass infection aiming to return the Dionysian, that is, fantasy to power’ (2001: 172f.). Just like Nietzsche’s failed *Kulturpolitik*, the other 1968 gains its importance by virtue of the fact that it is part of an ongoing series that echoes an event that took place in Ancient Greece. And this, it seems, is turning out to be at the core of Kittler’s project which is increasingly turning into an update of Heidegger’s *Seinsgeschichte*: Something of fundamental importance in the history of being happened in Ancient Greece, and all that has followed since both leads away from and remains stuck to it. And it cannot be taught in the conventional sense, it can only be passed on by a type of intoxicating infection: by listening to the right music from Wagner to Pink Floyd, or by reading the right authors – Homer, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and maybe Kittler himself.

Postscript: The Wind in the Willows

Of course, there is a far more straightforward literary connection between Pan and Pink Floyd. As most English but very few German readers know, Syd Barrett named *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* (one of Kittler’s favorite LPs) after Chapter VIII of Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*. Rat and Mole are in search of Portly the Otter, and after a night of rowing they find him at dawn nestled between the hooves of Pan. This is not the panic-inducing Greek god who shocked shepherds out of their wits. He is not, as Kittler would say, an event, but a benevolent deity with all the pastoral kindness of a Victorian wood-spirit who is caring enough to gently remove himself from the memory of those who encounter him. Not that Rat and Mole are completely freed from his spell; rowing on, they have the same hermeneutically charged experience as Goethe’s tired wanderer: The ‘reeds’ soft thin whispering’ on the river bank turns into music and then into words, while those who intercept them become mere conduits of a cryptic message:

‘Helper and hearer, I cheer – Small waifs in the woodland wet – Strays I find in it, wounds I bind in it – bidding them all forget! Nearer, Mole, nearer! No, it is no good; the song has died away into reed-talk.’

‘But what do the words mean?’ asked the wondering Mole.

‘That I do not know,’ said the Rat simply. ‘I passed them on to you as they reached me. Ah! Now they return again, and this time full and clear! This time, at last, it is the real, the unmistakable thing, simple – passionate – perfect –’

‘Well, let’s have it then,’ said the Mole, after he had waited patiently for a few minutes, half dozing in the hot sun.

But no answer came. He looked, and understood the silence. With a smile of much happiness on his face, and something of a listening look still lingering there, the weary Rat was fast asleep. (Grahame, 1960: 132–3)

Before they return as rock songs, the gods return in the sleepy imaginary of reading experiences, and it will take a lot of waking up to get them out of there. So Shine On.

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