
THE TECHNOLOGICAL INTROJECT

*Friedrich Kittler between Implementation
and the Incalculable*

JEFFREY CHAMPLIN AND
ANTJE PFANNKUCHEN, EDITORS

Fordham University Press: New York 2018

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Visit us online at www.fordhampress.com.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data available online at <https://catalog.loc.gov>.

Printed in the United States of America

20 19 18 5 4 3 2 1

First edition

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THE TECHNOLOGICAL INTROJECT

61. Kittler, "Auto Bahnen," 376: "Wo der Zufallsgott (mit seinen Hermen an jeder griechischen Wegekreuzung) ausgespielt hat, beginnen Rollbahnen und ihre Kentaurer. Kein Drama mehr, sondern ein Weg der Panzer."
62. Friedrich A. Kittler, *Musik und Mathematik*, Bd. 1, *Hellas*, Tl. 1, *Aphrodite* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2005), 170.
63. Jacques Lacan, *The Other Side of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 2006), 120.
64. Brian R. MacDonald, "The Diolkos," *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, no. 106 (1986): 193.
65. Jeanette C. Marchand, "Kleonai, the Corinth-Argos Road, and the 'Axis of History,'" *Hesperia: The Journal of the American School of Classical Studies at Athens* 78, no. 1 (January–March 2009): 159; Georges Raepsaet, "Le diolkos de l'Isthme à Corinthe: son tracé, son fonctionnement, avec une annexe. Considérations techniques et mécaniques," *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 117, no. 1 (1993): 237.
66. Yanis A. Pikoulas, "Travelling by Land in Ancient Greece," *Travel, Geography and Culture in Ancient Greece, Egypt, and the Near East*, ed. Colin Adams and Jim Roy (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2007), 80.
67. Lacan, "Instance of the Letter," 431; Jacques Lacan, *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1997), 303.
68. M. J. T. Lewis, "Railways in the Greek and Roman World," in *Early Railways: A Selection of Papers from First International Early Railways Conference*, ed. A. Guy and J. Rees (London: Newcomen Society, 2001), 10.
69. Lacan, *Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, 306.
70. *Ibid.*, 310.
71. Kittler, *Musik und Mathematik*, 175.
72. Friedrich A. Kittler, "The Cold Model of Structure," *Cultural Politics* 8, no. 3 (2012): 380.
73. Friedrich A. Kittler, "Derridas Didaktik," in *Jahrbuch der Deutschdidaktik* (Tübingen: Narr, 1989), 35.

KITTLER AND HEIDEGGER

The Trouble with Ent-fernung

Dominik Zechner

Young Friedrich had to find a way to avoid being swallowed up by the brilliant force field he had maneuvered himself into when going to Freiburg. Being enthralled by Heidegger could easily morph into an academic death sentence. Not so much politically, but in terms of an all-too-possible absolute surrender facing the master's abyssal brilliance. Kittler could tell you a thing or two about that. Remembering his fellow students back in the day, he clarifies how Heidegger's vicinity posed a profound threat to his admirers. Especially those "who loved Heidegger too much," and thus "never came out of his intellectual shadow in that they simply imitated his language." Kittler himself was perfectly conscious of his own high-end parodist skills when it came to engaging with and appropriating great authors and had to be on his guard so as not to lose traction for his stylistic sensibilities.² Kittler rejected the sweet lure of epigonism and found himself on an existential mission not to become crushed by the weight of the Heideggerian lexicon which would have definitively chained Kittler's diction to the untimely dignity of Grimm's dictionary. Such a crush would leave no room for the techno-poetics of which he became an exemplary standard-bearer.

EVOCATIONS OF FREIBURG

Distancing became the key operation. Especially given that Heidegger's primary retirement hobby consisted in mindfucking his students. Says Kittler: "I really knew people who, after an interview with Heidegger of just one hour, never finished their PhD because his questions and answers were so brilliant."³ It took Professor Heidegger only one hour to devour and destroy an academic baby existence. Shaken by such cruelty—the intentionality of which remains

questionable, to be sure—Kittler opted for silence, preferring not to address the master. Encountering Heidegger became a matter of exercising desistance. To avoid getting burned by Heidegger's linguistic and conceptual authority, his blazing closeness that could irrestorably break you, Kittler decided to abstain and watch the spectacle from the auditorium, engaging without engagement. Which meant to desist from occupying the official disciple's position, and refrain from posing any certified claim to succeed the champion of Freiburg (or contest his designated successors).

Commemorating these seemingly negligible events in a late lecture, Kittler found a concise way of framing his life-saving disposition and the strategic ambivalence it sanctioned: "My god, why am I telling you all this? Because I was there without being there. . . . Because the little old man shuffled through the hallways of the Freiburg Philosophical Seminary—but he never had to exchange a word with me, thank heavens!"⁶ Heidegger never had to talk to Kittler. Heidegger—who, at a safe remove, forfeits his intimidating edges and simply turns into a little old man who dragged his feet through the university's hallways. And why is it that Kittler can so freely talk about all that? Because he didn't go down with it, he was able to save his own work's investments from the old man's dazzling nearness. Because he, Kittler, becoming medium himself, maintained a Dasein-not-being-there—more or less distanced yet right in the thick of it, part of an ontological broadcast system. Not without reason, as we shall see, is Dasein essentially de-distancing.

In the final analysis, Kittler gives us very little to hang on to when it comes to deciphering his intricate relationship with Martin Heidegger. If anything, he offers no more than a nano-trace of information or insight, astonishingly undignified: "Once I had the privilege of helping Heidegger dispose of his garbage."⁷ We thus learn that once Friedrich A. Kittler was compelled to shorten the distance in order to help Martin Heidegger take out the trash. The garbage in question, Kittler explains, consisted in books authored by Heidegger's colleagues, all of which contained "pompous" dedications to the professor. These offshoots of a specific branch of remembrance the philosopher did not care for and wished to relinquish. For young Kittler, the release of books profiled a mark of humility that distinguished a beautiful mind. So, he assisted. Radically at Heidegger's disposal, Kittler disposed of what Heidegger's syntax and system was unwilling to process, leaving us with the question of what it means for a Heidegger to dispose of books, for a Kittler to carry—and carry out—the burden of the unwanted and unsaid? Knowing that he'll never be able to finish disposing of Heidegger.

In his early years, Kittler hardly ever mentioned Heidegger. Nonetheless, Kittler's techno-philosophical edifice never lacked a place, however invisible,

for Heidegger. Precisely by dint of the distancing rupture that paralyzed their transmission cablings and disconnected the two, Kittler held dear to his avowed/disavowed *maître* until the very end—to the extent that he was ready violently to refuse merely to address the case of Heidegger, disallowing even the smallest grain of critique. When Peter Weibel went after Heidegger's alleged "metaphysics of language," Kittler immediately pulled the emergency brake, putting a ban on the subject for the rest of the conversation: "You'll never get me to badmouth Heidegger."⁸

Inheritance works out in ways that cannot be predicted nor easily discovered in terms of itineraries and destinations, but may end up in a peculiar scene of carrying out teacher's disposed missions. What is Heidegger's role in Kittler's major works of which his untoward autobiographical memento gives us only a sense? On the surface of things, Kittler barely mentions Heidegger; yet he admits to being under his sway. This relation exceeds any certitude we might have about what constitutes a marginal or, for that matter, central place in the structure of inheritance and anxiety of influence. In strict keeping with the Foucauldian exigency, according to which "it's important to have a small number of authors with whom one thinks, with whom one works, but on whom one doesn't write,"⁹ Kittler made a point of avoiding, for the longest time, openly to set foot on Heideggerian paths when conceptualizing and putting together his own work's meticulous architectonics. The primal scene of taking out the trash becomes legible as an allegory for the way in which Kittler affirmed and at the same time disposed of his Heideggerian heritage.

If we follow the unfolding of Kittler's oeuvre closely—of which I can only give a sense in this essay—we can observe a paradoxical development: the more overtly Heidegger is admitted to Kittler's project and integrated, the less he looks like Heidegger. Something odd befalls the master as the rogue heir takes stock and starts assembling a Heidegger for the twenty-first century. To put it candidly, Kittler's endeavor simultaneously relies on the master and is aimed at his destruction. Let me give you some pointers as to how all this goes down: Kittler hardly mentions Heidegger in his coming-out masterpiece, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Only the posthumously published *preface* Kittler appended to clarify some of the discussions that went on around his postdoctoral process (*Habilitationsverfahren*) makes explicit reference to Heidegger.⁸ Then there's that ominous moment in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, where an excursus from Heidegger's *Parmenides* seminar is quoted at length. The passage is legendary: Heidegger freaks out about the typewriter's uncanny ability to tear "writing from the essential realm of the hand, i.e. the realm of the word," which causes, in part, "the increasing destruction of the word" ("zunehmende Zerstörung des Wortes").⁹ Kittler cites this passage for pages—though not without

irony. There's no commentary, argument, not the slightest critical assessment that would accompany or embed Heidegger's worries. *Le maître* is there, he speaks for himself, but Kittler's text disregards him deliberately. We had to wait until the later and latest stages of Kittler's intellectual trajectory, precisely the moment when he turned to Greece, to find a more explicit engagement with Heidegger. In conversation, Kittler called his later works "Heideggerian through and through,"¹⁰ and, indeed, it's the final phase of his oeuvre that made him return to the trash bin once again in order to conclude his reassessment of Martin Heidegger. Let me zone in on several traces we can find in late Kittler.

THE SPACE OF DASEIN

By the late 2000s, Heidegger had become the subject of various lectures and essays, including "Martin Heidegger, Media, and the Gods of Greece." Kittler's later works were determined to curate, in a strikingly explicit fashion, a remastered Heidegger that looked increasingly like Kittler himself.¹¹ Invocations of Freiburg instantiated some of the numerous projects Kittler left unfinished (and left us with): a very late essay, "Towards an Ontology of Media," formulates the nearly megalomaniacal task of writing up (or "writing on," *anschreiben*, as Kittler would say) a complete ontology of media. The project seeks to develop an analysis of the historical stages of the process according to which philosophy, in its principal manifestation as Western metaphysics, had hitherto mistreated, deliberately disregarded, or simply neglected issues pertaining to essential aspects of technicity and mediality. Placing him at the key position of philosophy's fragile yet eventful overture toward technical media, Kittler declares Heidegger the sole enabler of a nonoblivious relation between thinking and *technology*: "It is only with Heidegger's help that we can hope to develop something like an ontology of technical media."¹² On this matter, let me take one thing and one ontological indicator at a time.

The chosen point of departure for Kittler's plan to carry through ontology's technification is indexed to *Being and Time*. There's a passage in Heidegger's major work to which Kittler obsessively returns wherein the author discusses the technological impact on Dasein's spatiality. I'm talking about paragraph 23, in fact a famous argument, entitled "The Spatiality of Being-in-the-World" ("Die Räumlichkeit des In-der-Welt-seins"). The context is well-known: technical media like spectacles, the street, or telephone, revolutionize the Cartesian understanding of space and transform a geometrical understanding of *Räumlichkeit* into an unstable dynamic of relations. Heidegger's words made Kittler ecstatic: "For someone who, for example, wears spectacles which are

distantially so near to him that they are 'sitting on his nose,' this useful thing [*gebrauchte Zeug*] is further away in the surrounding world than the picture on the wall across the room."¹³ The technological artifact fundamentally transforms Dasein's sense of space in that it nears the surrounding world while at the same time retreating into a distance that cannot be measured geometrically. The pair of glasses is still there, sitting on my nose, as Heidegger says, but I'm unaware of it. The medial production of nearness coincides with the reduction of distance, resulting in Dasein's essential de-distancing character.¹⁴

Even though this passage takes up merely a handful of pages in the body of *Being and Time*, for Kittler it represents the essence of Heidegger's assault on metaphysics. In "Towards an Ontology of Media," Kittler holds the following: "At its very end or destruction, ontology turns into an ontology of distances, transmissions, and media."¹⁵ The statement of course refers to Heidegger's set aim to destroy the history of metaphysics, which for Kittler coincides with a new determination of philosophical purpose, namely as ontology of media. In his view, Heidegger completes a process that had been instigated by Aristotle's notion of *μεταξύ* ("in-between")—the first philosophical term to designate the medial. Yet, what in Aristotle appeared to mark a merely epistemological circumstance, in Heidegger is calibrated as a technological problem with ontological dimensions. According to Kittler's redaction, Heidegger's conceptualization of *μεταξύ* pathbreakingly assures: "In the middle of absence and presence, farness and nearness, being and soul, there exists no *Nothing* any more, but a mediatic relation. *Es gibt Medien*, we could say, with Heidegger's late lecture on *Time and Being*."¹⁶

The Heideggerian elevation of Aristotle's elementary media theory from its epistemological grounds to the very summit of ontology for Kittler amounts to a final break with the demands of metaphysics. Until Heidegger's intervention, philosophy had pursued the strangely persistent yet inescapably myopic notion of a metaphysics that stubbornly refused to calibrate nearness in any other way than by identifying Being with "presence, immediacy, and being-here"—thus ontologically covering over, in a categorical fashion, the numerous, if often hidden, systems of transmission to which it remained indebted.¹⁷ With Heidegger—and, according to Kittler, *only* with Heidegger—we observe philosophy reach the techno-nihilist heights of its completion as a millennial claim to presence collapses. This development leaves us in and with a trans-geometric space where the de-distancing ways in which Dasein demolishes its surrounding world undermine the binding laws that structure ontologies of nearness understood as presence.

In addition to introducing the disjunctive series of *Zeug* involving glasses, the street, and telephone, paragraph 23 of *Being and Time* brings into focus a

fourth instance of technological redescription by means of the radio. Ushered in under cover of quotation marks, radio appears to share the same putative status as "world," also a quoted quality at this point: "With the 'radio' [*Rundfunk*], for example, Da-sein is bringing about [*vollzieht*] today de-distancing [*Ent-fernung*] of the 'world' which is unforeseeable in its meaning for Da-sein, by way of expanding and destroying the everyday surrounding world [*Umwelt*]."¹⁸ The turning point and surprising moment in this inherently problematic phrasing resides in Heidegger's use of *vollziehen* (to bring about, or, more explicitly, to fulfill, implement, execute, or enforce). Arguably, Heidegger's text after the so-called *Kehre*, an important reorientation of and within Heidegger's thinking, would have little tolerance for such a lexicon that tends to overcapacitate Dasein—as though technology were controllable and less threatening than Heidegger nonetheless asserts it to be. In this passage, the radio becomes a figure for technological destructiveness that falls in the hand, or ear, of Dasein.

Let me stay with the example and the argument that holds Kittler in thrall.¹⁹ By use of radio, Dasein expands and destroys its surrounding world, de-distancing even the greatest remoteness in ways not yet assessable. The dynamic of *Ent-fernung* entails that distance continuously is reduced; spatial remoteness loses empirical significance in light of technological media. Radio functions as a means of achieving such relativity of space—"for example," says Heidegger, *zum Beispiel*. We cannot take for granted that we know what's going on rhetorically when Heidegger introduces this as an example that seems to open up a space of infinite possibilities and substitutions—because technology's arsenal is vast and unpredictable, and an example is never just one. Heidegger himself is aware of the precarity of his utterance, as he endows *Rundfunk* with quotation marks and mobilizes its technological verve by underscoring its exemplarity. The vampiric marks of quotational distancing set up a strange rapport between *Rundfunk* and *Welt*, as though radio's technological intervention in the world dissociated the latter from itself, making world, submitted to the groundless regime of wireless transmission, somewhat less "real," a displaced simulation, henceforth requiring the distorting antennae set up by Heidegger's strategic placement of quote signs. In a Kittlerian sense, quotations are part of Dracula's repertory of sucking substance from any kind of body including a textual one.

The radio, with or without quotation marks, becomes one of the manifold ways for Kittler of nearing the gods and subverting the registers of far and near by which Dasein's ordinary spatiality is marked. Considering the lack of foreseeability and assessability in terms of radio's destructiveness, one is pressed to answer the question prompted by Dasein's alleged agency in this regard, the *Vollzugscharakter* of its actions effecting the destruction of *Umwelt* by way of

utilizing a technological *nouveauté*. Is it indeed Dasein that implements *Rundfunk*? Is it not *Rundfunk* that turns Dasein into a broadcast system, stripping it of whatever imagined agency it might claim? For Kittler these questions are decisive. And the way one responds to them will profoundly affect the understanding of Heidegger's historic turn, the *Kehre* famously up- and resetting his off-track routes out of philosophy. Kittler contests the normative reading of Heidegger's turn. What's at stake is the unreadability of inversion—how do we read a theoretical turnaround? What does it mean to reorient oneself in thinking?

Cutting a long story short, we might get to the gist of Kittler's own redirection toward Greece during his final years by paying close attention to the way he reads the overturning upheaval undergone by Heidegger's early work: "Heidegger's turn [*Kehre*] is the insight that all modes [*Spielarten*] of transcendental philosophy—whether they take their point of departure in the subject or in Dasein—founder upon the facticity of high-tech media."²⁰ Heidegger's turn marks the spot where philosophy becomes unable to deny the subjective ungovernability of hardware any longer. That's how Kittler views it. Dasein's agency in coming to grips with the technological infiltration of its surrounding world, or any mere phantasy thereof, collapses under the factual evidence of technology's role in the revelation of Being. Sure enough, this insight of Heidegger's had everything to do with his epochal farewell to humanism, on the grounds of which Kittler found new ways of nearing the mentor: man's relation to technology no longer is that of mastery.

Kittler's narrative runs like this: Almost as though driven by an *ur*-Kittlerian impulse, Heidegger's fateful turnaround has endowed Being with its own history, grounding it in the inescapable material evidentiality of a medial environment rigorously exceeding the powers of man. Even though philosophical practice had ill-fatedly delivered technology over to the conceptual abyss of metaphysical oblivion, τέχνη (often translated as "craft" or "art") had nonetheless continued silently to carry out and execute its propelling force up to the moment of philosophy's inversion, when the eventual acknowledgment of technology's generative relation to Being and its history became unavoidable. And the very place where all this happens is the Heideggerian text: "In other words, Technology itself makes (with Heidegger) the History of Being."²¹ Perhaps unknowingly, Kittler's formulation provokes our allegorical ears and invites us to dwell on the conspicuous use of the preposition *mit* (with)—designating a fateful *Mitsein* (Being-with) that entangles the proper name of Heidegger with the historicification of Being. If Being's unfolding within and throughout a technologically formatted historical development marks philosophy's turning-away from its subjectivist delusions, why does *Seinsgeschichte* need the *Mithilfe* (assistance) of a parenthesized Heidegger to come about? And

why does it seem as though Heidegger can take over precisely where Dasein becomes stripped of its ability to *vollziehen*—transforming the philosopher into something like a philosophical engineer who supervises, if not implements, Being's own being-in-the-making?

THE ESSENCE OF TECHNOLOGY

In order to unravel the problem of Being's historicification, we need to understand what happens when Kittler installs *technology* at the generative centers of *Seinsgeschichte's* manifestation. His lectures on cultural science give us an important hint in this direction. Once again following the lead of *Being and Time*, Kittler tracks the reshaping of Being as set in motion by the machinization of *Zeitmessung* (timekeeping) and arrives at the following assertion: "Clocks are ontic devices, which means that they are subject to fundamental ontology, yet they nonetheless bring about [*zeitigen*] historically differentiated ontologies."²² Seemingly benign, the almost tautological sentence nevertheless turns out to carry the potential radically to upend the whole Heideggerian enterprise.

A short-cut rendition of what is said here might hold that, according to Kittler, the technical object yields, opens, and multiplies the thinking of Being. A more thoroughgoing and patient approach, however, first would have to take into consideration the pun animating the sentence's rhetorical verve. It's not per accident that Kittler decides on deploying the verb *zeitigen* (to yield, bring forth, result in, or, bring about—setting up a provocative relation to Dasein's alleged ability to "bring about" the destruction of world by broadcasting it) when discussing the technologized quantification of time. What about this enigmatic relation between *Zeit* and *zeitigen*, time and a temporally marked mode of creation? What does the act of bringing-about have to do with temporality and technology? Translated with some audacity, privileging the pun's semantic force, Kittler's sentence reads as follows: *Timekeepers are timing temporally differentiated ontologies*. The semantic horizon circumscribed by the verb *zeitigen* points to the conjunction between ontology and historicity—*Sein* and *Zeit*—that had elicited Kittler's attention. Stemming from the Middle High German word *zītigen* ("to ripen"), *zeitigen*, anything but an aimless buzz, designates the teleological movement of a temporal evolution, indicating a determined focus on effect and outcome, making for a strong, if strange, case of poietic bearing (an apple tree, for instance *zeitigt Früchte*, "it bears fruit").

Kittler's assessment therefore posits the philosophical primacy of the technological artifact over its conceptual frame and holds that ontic machines "bear" historically different ontologies. That, however, is Heidegger turned upside down. If technological devices can generate ontology and its historical differentiation,

the ontic outdoes the ontological. The philosophical implications of such a claim could not be more severe as it unambiguously insists on the inescapable submission of thinking to the machine. It's the apparatus, the technological artifact and mere *Zeug*, that *brings about* ontology—the manifoldness of ontologies, their sheer difference at play in the formation and structuring of Being's historical unfolding. Rhetorically tenacious and resolved, Kittler's underscoring of ontology's dependence on the technological artifact poses an important question to which I would like to attempt a response. In view of its revaluation of the ontic, at what point does Kittler's reading become simply unjustifiable if we are to take Heidegger's concept of *technology* seriously? Something quite drastic befalls or passes through Heidegger as his reflection feeds into Kittler's machinery of reappropriating and technologically alienating the "idea" that Being has a history.²³ At what point does the appropriating gesture break off into indefensible violence—all the professed adoration notwithstanding?

A few lines further down, the passage on timekeeping continues: "The clocks of time make it necessary to write a history of presence and absence itself. That's what, ever since Heidegger's turn, we call the History of Being."²⁴ Yet, is it in fact machines that make the historicification of Being a necessity? What Kittler refuses to read, no doubt stubbornly, is the *essentializing* track pursued by Heidegger's post-turn concept of technology. Let me recall the main premise of Heidegger's technology essay: "Technology is not equivalent to the essence of technology. . . . Likewise, the essence of technology is by no means anything technological [*So ist denn auch das Wesen der Technik ganz und gar nichts Technisches*]."²⁵ By no means: "ganz und gar nicht." Given Kittler's emphasis on media's generative sway over everything nontechnological, a statement like that is impossible to compute under a Kittlerian regime. What is Heidegger saying? There is an important difference between thinking the concept of technology and totalizing technological artifacts; in order to grasp the essence of technology, thinking needs to go beyond the technological object.²⁶ Technology, in its essential expression, which is to say, in the way it reveals Being, cannot disclose itself to us if our understanding is conditioned solely by technological media.²⁷ We are therefore required to relinquish the ontic level of technology—a capital fallacy for any good Kittlerian.²⁸

According to Kittler's construal of ontology, thinking needs to be technologically configured in order to grasp the concept of media—that is, in order for it to grasp *anything*. Heidegger, however, seeks to isolate a place for thinking, no doubt menaced but not yet permeated by the technological intrusion.²⁹ The "historical" revelation of Being opens up the space for the technological artifact to arrange and undo our historical manifestation. This is why science—what Heidegger terms "the theory of the real"—remains unable to grasp its

own essence, which ultimately coincides with the essence of technology, as it inevitably remains subject to the encroachment of technology. In order to save a possibility for thinking, Heidegger is prompted to isolate what he views as the technologically purified realm of *Besinnung* (reflection), thus positing Being as that which enables the manifestation of technological artifacts without itself having to rely on them. Reflection seeks to open a way of engaging the essence of technology *without* assuming a fundamental *Gegenständigkeit* (objectness) of the material world—that is, without submitting itself to the technological calibration of reality.³⁰

Whether *Seinsgeschichte* turns out to be motored by technology or not, what Heidegger's post-turn thinking introduces is the question concerning the possibility of Being's historicity itself. In his 1962 lecture on "Time and Being," Heidegger holds: "What is history-like in the history of Being [*das Geschichtsartige der Geschichte des Seins*] is obviously determined by the way in which Being takes place and by this alone. . . . [T]his means the way in which It gives Being [*die Weise, in der Es Sein gibt*]."³¹ Being is determined by an anonymous act of giving. The *Es* of *Es gibt* remains unspecified and ungraspable as it designates a strange *otherwise than Being*, be it Levinasian in nature or not, performing a gesture of bestowal that *precedes* Being and thus technology.³² Prior to any ontic staging of technology, the *Es gibt* has to enable and ground *τέχνη* as a poetical mode of bringing forth *Sein*. The gift of *Es gibt* opens the horizon of *Seinsgeschichte* whose current epoch, in turn, can only be understood as technologically constituted. We cannot speak about hardware and its forceful calibration of *Seinsgeschichte* unless Being is already and immemorally bestowed. Technology can appear as the *maker* of Being's history only to the extent that Being, in its *Geschichtsartigkeit* or history-likeness, is *given*. The history of Being may culminate in technology—yet the sheer possibility of such history technology cannot grasp. In other words, technology *makes* history only insofar as it's already *in* history.³³

What more is there to say? Kittler's legacy remains to be determined for its singular richness and the audacity with which he distorts, often to good purpose, highly invested philosophical traditions. Unlike so many scholars, Kittler has occupied at once the position of renegade and institutional authority. The meaning that his passage gave to the German university, to the literary, philosophical, and military histories with which he must be associated, still needs to be deciphered. There are many metonymies and allegorical scenes of inscription to which Kittler's name will continue to be assigned. But let me return to my impulsively set installation, one signed by him: once Friedrich A. Kittler took out Heidegger's garbage—what a proud trash-bearer he was! Perhaps this moment that he recounts with some cheekiness was for him a necessity,

part of a releasement. In a Nietzschean heave, he was no doubt getting rid of something—if only to recycle and refashion a moment in Heidegger's endeavor to sort out technology in regard to Being. Kittler's appropriation has transformed Heidegger into the thinker of hardware—the task of thinking into an exploration of hardware formations that *bring about* the history of Being, making for an interpretation of the *turn* that turns the turner upside down. Despite his protestations and declarations, Kittler, it turns out, never stopped keeping Heidegger at arm's length, maintaining the ironic distance that typically distinguishes the rogue disciple, something he never really wanted or expected to be. Thriving on deliberate misprision, Kittler's technological grounding of Heidegger's post-turn oeuvre is bound up with the strategic effacement of some of Heidegger's core insights and prefers to miss the latter's imperative to de-ontify the concept of technology. In effect, Heidegger's articulated queasiness about the machine landed in the *Abfall* (trash) that marks Kittler's own *Abfall*, the renunciatory falling-away from the mentor's legacy. *You'll never get me to badmouth Heidegger.*

NOTES

1. John Armitage, "From Discourse Networks to Cultural Mathematics: An Interview with Friedrich Kittler," *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 7–8 (2006): 20.
2. Friedrich Kittler and Stefan Banz, *Platz der Luftbrücke: Ein Gespräch mit Stefan Banz* (Nuremberg, Germany: Verlag für moderne Kunst, 2012), 60.
3. Armitage, "From Discourse Networks," 20.
4. Friedrich Kittler, *Eine Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft* (Munich: Fink, 2000), 221.
5. E. Khayyat, "The Humility of Thought: An Interview with Friedrich A. Kittler," *boundary 2* 39, no. 3 (2012): 8.
6. Friedrich Kittler, "Meine Theorie ist gar nicht so lebensverbunden, um über alles zu reden: Gespräch mit Peter Weibel," in *Short Cuts* (Frankfurt am Main: Zweitausendeins, 2002), 84.
7. Michel Foucault, "Final Interview," *Raritan* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1985): 8. In 2003, the German publishing house Metzler put together a *Heidegger-Handbuch* containing a short article titled "Heidegger und die Medien- und Technikgeschichte," authored by none other than Friedrich Kittler. The text opens, though without proper allocation or documentation, with the mentioned quote from Foucault, reproduced in French. See Friedrich Kittler, "Heidegger und die Medien- und Technikgeschichte. Oder: Heidegger vor uns," in *Heidegger-Handbuch: Leben—Werk—Wirkung*, ed. Dieter Thomä (Stuttgart: Metzler, 2003), 500.
8. Friedrich Kittler, "Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900: Vorwort," *Zeitschrift für Medienwissenschaft* 6, no. 1 (2012), 117–26, translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young as "Unpublished Preface to *Discourse Networks*," *Grey Room* 63 (Spring 2016): 90–107. This short text, which the author himself never published, represents Kittler's means of intervening

in the now illustrious, yet, back then, quite threatening and tiresome debate about whether his *Habilitationschrift* formed a ground-breaking achievement that actually accomplished a fundamental reform of German academia in instigating the novel discipline of media history—or merely the unintelligible ramblings of a Schreberian basket case. In conversation with John Armitage, he states the following: “So my choice of *Aufschreibesysteme 1800/1900* as the title of my book was considered quite unusual at the time, if not a little provocative, since it was not the done thing to take the title of a tenure track book from the text of a madman” (“From Discourse Networks,” 18).

9. Martin Heidegger, *Parmenides*, trans. André Schuwer and Richard Rojcewicz (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 81.

10. Khayyat, “Humility of Thought,” 18.

11. Kittler’s late pro-Heideggerian campaign knows the potential exception of a witty talk from 1996 in which Kittler launches a sustained critique of the hermeneutic and phenomenological tradition for “its attempt to separate philosophy from calculus and all its applications [*von der mathematischen Analysis samt ihren Anwendungen*].” Friedrich Kittler, “Thinking Colours and/or Machines,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 23, nos. 7–8 (2006): 46. Heidegger figures as main culprit throughout the article only to become redeemed by a final recuperative move: “The later Heidegger is more relevant when it comes to understanding universal machines than the Heidegger of *Being and Time*” (49). Kittler feels complicit with Heidegger’s later reflections on technology on account of their radical antisubjectivism and the contention that technology is no longer reducible to its tool-character. Nonetheless, he avoids a discussion of Heidegger’s disregard for hardware and an ontic construal of technology. In the final analysis, Kittler’s endeavor propagates the elimination of ontological difference. “Being,” if it is thinkable in Kittler, manifests as machinic process and material fact.

12. Friedrich Kittler, “Towards an Ontology of Media,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 26, nos. 2–3 (2009): 23. Kittler’s phrase “it’s only with Heidegger’s help” in this context ironically, if unintentionally, recalls Heidegger’s infamous *Spiegel* interview, entitled “Only a God Can Save Us.” I’m grateful to Toni Hildebrandt for this hint.

13. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 99.

14. “De-distancing means making distance disappear [*Verschwindenmachen der Ferne*], making the being at a distance of something disappear, bringing it near. Dasein is essentially de-distancing” (ibid., 97).

15. Kittler, “Towards an Ontology of Media,” 28.

16. Ibid., 26.

17. Friedrich A. Kittler, “Martin Heidegger, Media, and the Gods of Greece: De-severance Heralds the Approach of the Gods,” in *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2013), 291.

18. “Mit dem ‘Rundfunk’ zum Beispiel vollzieht das Dasein heute eine in ihrem Daseinssinn noch nicht übersichtbare Ent-fernung der ‘Welt’ auf dem Wege einer Erweiterung und Zerstörung der alltäglichen Umwelt.” Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98.

19. The radio, to be sure, is no neutral or innocent *Zeug*. I cannot, at this point, go into the historical implications of radio as the technological figure of a misguided politics, but let us not forget too quickly how the radio addicted an entire *national ear*, alternating between *Hören* and *Gehorsamkeit* the voice of the Führer and Wagner. Ronell emphasizes this when she writes: “The jouissance of the ear was felt by a whole nation, whether it was listening to Wagner or to the constant blare of the radio, which is said to have hypnotized a whole people, a tremendous national ear.” Avital Ronell, *The Telephone Book: Technology, Schizophrenia, Electric Speech* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 21.

20. Kittler, “Martin Heidegger, Media, and the Gods of Greece,” 296.

21. See Friedrich Kittler, “Martin Heidegger, Medien und die Götter Griechenlands: Ent-fernen heißt die Götter nähern,” in *Die Wahrheit der technischen Welt: Essays zur Genealogie der Gegenwart*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), 384. I’ve cited my own translation since Erik Butler’s version doesn’t seem to go far enough and chooses to trade in Kittler’s creational spin for a rhetorical recuperation. He translates: “In other words (which are Heidegger’s, too), technology [*Technik*] itself determines the History of Being.” Kittler, “Martin Heidegger, Media, and the Gods of Greece,” 297.

22. Kittler, *Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft*, 236.

23. See Alessandro Barberi, “Weil das Sein eine Geschichte hat: Ein Gespräch mit Friedrich A. Kittler,” *ÖZG* 11, no. 4 (2000): 109.

24. Kittler, *Kulturgeschichte der Kulturwissenschaft*, 236.

25. Heidegger, “Question Concerning Technology,” *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland, 1977), 4.

26. A curious movement in the above-mentioned belated foreword to his *Discourse Networks* shows Kittler turn his back on thinking when he states his conviction that technological thresholds “are not to be thought but only to be described [*nicht zu denken sondern nur zu beschreiben*].” Kittler, “Aufschreibesysteme: Vorwort,” 121. Winthrop-Young’s recently published translation decides to emphasize Kittler’s anti-hermeneutic disposition as he seems to have in mind Hans-Georg Gadamer rather than Heidegger when he formulates: “In order to arrive at empirically more valid results, Foucault’s findings have to be applied to these [technological] thresholds (*which need to be described rather than interpreted*).” Kittler, “Unpublished Preface,” 97; my emphasis.

27. Ronell sees this very clearly when she holds that, “according to Heidegger, we haven’t entered the age of machines or technology; rather, there are machines and technologies because it is the age of technology.” *Fighting Theory: Avital Ronell in Conversation with Anne Dufourmantelle*, trans. Catherine Porter (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 92.

28. In a recent article on Kittler’s and Heidegger’s relation to mathematics, Stephen Sale develops an argument that differs from my own. His conclusion holds: “Kittler’s teasing out of the ambiguity in Heidegger’s account of technology does offer the humanities a form of rapprochement with the sciences.” Although it could be argued that Kittler is well aware of the “ambiguity in Heidegger’s account of technology,” it

is the case that Kittler vehemently covers up this very ambiguity because it insists on ontological difference and thus on a concept of technology that goes beyond the material circumstance of hardware. Stephen Sale, "Thinking by Numbers: The Role of Mathematics in Kittler and Heidegger," in *Kittler Now: Current Perspectives in Kittler Studies*, ed. Stephen Sale and Laura Salisbury (Cambridge and Malden, UK: Polity, 2015), 44–70, 66.

29. Avital Ronell's work has expounded this circumstance in detail. Very early in her exploration of Heidegger's intricate relation to technology, Ronell emphasizes his intention to install a nontechnological "protected mode" for his approximation of Being: "The mark to be made here, the incision, indicates the surface of a weakly held limit between technology and Being. Technology, while by no means neutral, but a field of fascination, is viewed as potentially covering an authentic relation to Being. It is from this point onward that claims are made for a relation to Being more original than the technically assumed one." Ronell, *Telephone Book*, 19. It is precisely this limit, however weak, separating technology from Being that makes it possible for Heidegger to posit the possibility of thinking outside the realms of metaphysics and science (both of which realize the claims of *Ge-stell*). Thinking thinks *Ge-stell* without having to rely on a technological grid. Jacques Derrida, commemorating Paul de Man, also critically recalls the Heideggerian chasm between thinking and technology, and points out that there is no way for thinking to engage with technology's essence without both *Denken* and *Wesen* being constituted *technologically*: "[The] maintenance, in a Heideggerian manner, of a heterogeneity between the essence of technology and technology (which is, by the way, one of the most traditional gestures), between thinking memory and science, thinking memory and technicist writing [*l'écriture technicienne*], is precisely a protection against another abyssal risk, that of parasitic contamination, of an oppositional difference, etc." Jacques Derrida, *Memoires for Paul de Man*, trans. Cecile Lindsay et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 140.

30. See Martin Heidegger, "Science and Reflection," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York and London: Garland, 1977), 155–82.

31. Martin Heidegger, "Time and Being," in *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York, Hagerstown, San Francisco, London: Harper and Row, 1972), 8.

32. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1998), 4: "The *there* is fills the void left by the negation of Being."

33. "Technology is entrenched in our history." Heidegger, *Parmenides*, 86; my emphasis.

BONES OF CONTENTION

Friedrich Kittler's Recursive Realism

Chadwick T. Smith

"The sciences are on stage again," writes Friedrich Kittler, delivering the first sentence of "Man as a Drunken Town-Musician." Because his explicit goal in the text entails an attempt to write a revised scientific history of film, subtly cast words and the rhetorical effects of his language may go unnoticed: in this case, the word *again* almost disappears behind science's performance. In addition to restaging film's birth within the nineteenth-century efforts to formulate a science of motion, mathematically modeling the bones in the leg (instead of within the traditions of art or narrative), *again* implies a reformulation in terms of return or homecoming of sorts. We reach this home in the last sentence of Kittler's text, which closes a circuit that is paradigmatic for Kittler's essay, his later oeuvre. Looking forward from film to digital media at the end of his text, he avows: "On computer monitors . . . science steps onto the stage."¹ This text is a staging not only of a science but also of the very form of writing history to which he takes recourse, and is exemplary of a crucial concern—the suggestion that the human is a musician in its essence gestures toward the form of recursion that becomes critical for contemporary German media studies that followed in his "Homeric wake."

Presented in 2000 at the *Stages of Knowledge in the Sciences* conference at the Freie Universität Berlin, the title "Man as a Drunken Town-Musician" is a citation from Emil Du Bois-Reymond's *Natural Science and Fine Art*, the text that—coupled with Wilhelm and Eduard Weber's *Mechanics of the Human Walking Apparatus: An Anatomical-Physiological Investigation*—serves as the foundation of Kittler's essay. Building on these texts, his history of film opens with the equations that underpin the Webers' science of motion and ends with Du Bois-Reymond's commentary on the media technologies that result from them—