Friedrich A. Kittler

Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900

TRANSLATED BY MICHAEL METTEER, WITH CHRIS CULLENS

FOREWORD BY DAVID E. WELLBERY

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Foreword

DAVID E. WELLBERY

Post-Hermeneutic Criticism

Fashion, Georg Simmel once remarked, is distinguished from history by the fact that its changes are without substance. Whether ties are thick or thin, collars loose or buttoned down, sets no preconditions for subsequent development except for the empty or nonsubstantial one that what follows be different. Alterations of fashion are without consequence, mere signals of the new, empty of emergence. The remark is a sort of ideological crystal that assembles the tacit axiology of our fashion talk—surface versus depth, sign versus meaning, semblance versus seriousness, repetition versus growth—into symmetrically juxtaposed facets. It miniaturizes a code, reduces the already said, the already thought, the always already known, to the bounded framework of a sentence. Hence its evidentiary force, its effect of perceptual immediacy.

The axiology at work in Simmel's aperçu has recently become audible in the discussion of post-structuralism within American criticism. With increasing frequency one hears or reads the claim: the fashion of post-structuralism has worn thin (like last year's coat), has lost its appeal, is no longer in. This diagnosis betrays, I believe, a good deal about the present state of critical discussion in the United States. The claim that post-structuralism is going out of style serves to contain, in the tactical sense of the term, the disruptive and transformative potential of post-structuralist thought, to render it inconsequential. The prognosis of demise is a wish-fulfillment fantasy: the wish, precisely, that post-structuralism made (and makes) no real difference, that its intervention on the American critical

scene was as ephemeral as last year's Paris designs. At last we can exchange this vocabulary for a new one, and keep on doing—what else?—what we were doing all along.

Of course, even where the instruments and strategies of post-structuralist thought have been enthusiastically adopted, they have often served as a modish disguise. Thus the reception and broad dissemination of Derrida in the United States has taken shape as a blending of New-Critical immanent interpretation, on the one hand, with a negative theology of the literary work in which texts figure as the hopefully hopeless allegory of their own failure, on the other. The difficult term *deconstruction* has become a laxly used synonym for negative critique. Advocacy of this sort, held in thrall to fascination, is merely the inverse of the accusation of fashionableness. Information, according to Gregory Bateson's definition, is a difference that makes a difference. By consigning post-structuralism to the realm of fashion, American literary criticism has systematically refused to be informed.

A literary criticism informed by post-structuralism: what would be its protocols, its theoretical objects, its aims? The American critical debate has refused to work through this question in any practical way. By keeping post-structuralism at a distance, by assigning it the status of an exotic fashion, American criticism has avoided the experience of post-structuralism, in Hegel's sense of experience as a transformative sufferance in which not merely consciousness changes, but also its objects and its criteria of truth. For this reason, the American publication of Friedrich Kittler's book *Discourse Networks, 1800/1900* is particularly propitious. What distinguishes this book above all is that it is thoroughly informed by post-structuralism; it has suffered through the difference that post-structuralism makes. Kittler's book is not about post-structuralism, does not take post-structuralism as its theme. Rather, it presupposes post-structuralist thought, makes that thought the operating equipment, the hardware, with which it sets out to accomplish its own research program. In *Discourse Networks*, post-structuralism becomes a working vocabulary, a set of instruments productive of knowledge.

That this transformation should occur in Germany is not without its paradoxes. On occasion the resistance to post-structuralism within the German discussion has been organized around the fashion topos mentioned above, echoing with phrases such as "the Parisian philosophy à la mode" (Manfred Frank) cultural anxieties and animosities that go back at least to the eighteenth century. But far more significant as a barrier to authentic engagement with post-structuralist thought has been the predominant role of hermeneutics in defining research agendas within the so-called "sciences of the spirit" (*Geisteswissenschaften*). Hermeneutics,

of course, is no German monopoly, as the distinguished work of Paul Ricoeur and Emilio Betti demonstrates, but nowhere, I think, has it so exclusively set the framework for discussion as in the Federal Republic, where, since the publication of Hans-Georg Gadamer's monumental *Truth and Method* in 1960, hermeneutic terminology has become the koine of intellectual work. Within literary studies the Constance School of reception theory has been the most influential tributary of Gadamer's work, but literary sociology, as in the case of Peter Bürger's institutional theory, has also drawn on hermeneutic motifs. Even the neo-Marxist Frankfurt School, in its redaction as a theory of communication and understanding (in, for example, the work of Jürgen Habermas), has adopted major presuppositions of the hermeneutic position. This breadth of appeal, moreover, is built into hermeneutic theory itself, which conceives of interpretation as our stance in being: we cannot but interpret, we are what we are by virtue of acts of interpretation. Hence the "universality claim" (*Universalitätsanspruch*) of hermeneutics, its claim to the position of queen of the sciences.

Given this hermeneutic hegemony, one might naturally expect that the importation of post-structuralism into the German context would elicit attempts at ameliorative appropriation. Precisely this occurs, for example, in Manfred Frank's book on Friedrich Schleiermacher (*The Individual Universal*, 1977), which purports to rediscover major tenets of Derrida's thought in the work of the father of Romantic hermeneutics. But a second type of response is equally imaginable, a response that actualizes aspects of post-structuralist thought incommensurate with the hermeneutic paradigm, and this is the direction that Kittler's book takes. Thus, *Discourse Networks* reveals more clearly than has been the case in the American discussion up to now that a literary criticism informed by post-structuralism is, in fact, a post-hermeneutic criticism. It abandons the language game and form of life defined by the hermeneutic canons of justification and enters into domains of inquiry inaccessible to acts of appropriative understanding. Post-hermeneutic criticism, to put the matter briefly, stops making sense.

Nietzsche once punned on Schleiermacher's name by literalizing it: the father of hermeneutics, he asserted, was really a veil maker (*Schleier-Macher*). Kittler, attending no less intensely than Nietzsche to the power of the letter, tears the veil away from hermeneutics and dispels its aura, its shimmering suggestion of sacral authority. This dismantling of hermeneutics follows two tightly interwoven strands of argument, the first of which is historical or, more accurately, genealogical—in the Nietzschean sense of the term. Under the optic of genealogical analysis, the universality claim of hermeneutics evaporates and hermeneutics is exposed in its

situational boundedness, its particularity. Hermeneutic understanding is not at all what human beings always do with written or spoken texts, it is not a foundational condition for the processing of significant marks. Rather, it is a contingent phenomenon within the evolution of discursive practices in Europe; it rests on a host of preconditions such as alphabetization, the expansion of book production, the organization of the modern university, the emergence of the civil service; it presupposes specific forms of socialization to which in turn it contributes; and it is linked with other, equally contingent discourses such as those of pedagogy and poetry (*Dichtung*). Finally, hermeneutics draws on and ratifies a specific rendering of linguistic materiality, the myth of the silent inner voice that Derrida has described as foundational for the modern philosophy of the subject. In Kittler's analysis, however, this myth appears less as a philosophical hallucination than as a function of instructional practices and technologies. Far from being our natural or human condition, hermeneutics merely results from a specifically trained coordination of children's eyes, ears, and vocal organs. It is a discipline of the body.

The genealogy of hermeneutics cannot itself be written in the hermeneutic manner; it cannot stylize itself (as hermeneutics inevitably does) as a resuscitation of the living spirit from the tomb of the letter. Rather than eliminating the truth of hermeneutics, Kittler describes it from the outside, as an observer of the system and not as its interpreter. What distinguishes his account of the emergence and functioning of hermeneutics from all the narratives constructed on hermeneutic presuppositions, in other words, is that it is the story of a finitude. At the end of the introduction to his *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, Hegel writes that there is really no historical past: everything that was true and substantial in history lives in an eternal present, which is the element of historical-philosophical thought. Kittler's historiography rejects precisely this claim. The discourse network of 1800 within which hermeneutics comes into being is a passing phenomenon, radically finite, and it contains no truth or substance that would preserve it from the erosion of time. Man, Foucault writes at the end of *The Order of Things*, is a figure inscribed in the sand at the ocean's edge, destined to be effaced by the waves of the future. Kittler's analysis provides the corollary of this claim: hermeneutic humanism is a finite and contingent inscription, written on the background of a granular noise and powerless against time's turbulence.

Despite this theoretical acceptance of finitude, however, Kittler's genealogy of hermeneutics is nonetheless a history of the present, a narrative of how our current practices of academic literary study came to be. For there can be no doubt that our entire system of literary education and scholarship continues to be defined by the hermeneutic language game

and by the form of life within which that language game functions. This applies to Anglo-American literary culture as well as to the German context, even though the former has relied less on an explicitly formulated hermeneutic theory. On both sides of the Atlantic the presupposition of sense remains intact, the heyday of meaning (Ian Hacking) continues, and the task of literary education is still the formation of the individual universal that the discourse network of 1800 called into being. The thrust of Kittler's analysis is to show that as long as we continue to operate within the hermeneutic paradigm we are paying homage to a form of language processing long since deceased. Gadamer's *Truth and Method* is indeed a monument, a kind of memorial that holds the present in thrall to an ancient (but really not so ancient) law. Rather than breaking new ground, the hermeneutic turn of the 1960's appears from Kittler's perspective to be a restabilization, a defensive shield that protects the inherited discourse network against social and cultural mutations threatening to render hermeneutics obsolete. Moreover, it is not the first such apotropaic maneuver: already at the turn of the century Wilhelm Dilthey had erected a hermeneutics of vital expressivity that succeeded in barring the forces of modernity—those forces Kittler describes in the second section of his book (1900)—from the temple of the history of spirit (*Geistesgeschichte*). It is no accident that Dilthey's defensive action, as recent research has shown, is accomplished by suppressing Nietzsche, a suppression that continues in Gadamer and Habermas. Hermeneutics maintains its ghostly afterlife by refusing to hear the verdict pronounced upon it by the solitary of Sils-Maria.

Kittler's genealogy of hermeneutics is intertwined, as I mentioned, with a second strand of argumentation. One might call this the properly theoretical dimension of Kittler's book were it not for the fact that theory here has so thoroughly passed over into practice that it is hardly distinguishable as a separate component. Nevertheless, one can abstract from Kittler's text certain theoretical presuppositions that serve to enable his critical enterprise. These premises represent a remarkable condensation of the theoretical work accomplished by the post-structuralists, especially Derrida, Foucault, and Lacan. Indeed, one of the most striking features of Kittler's book compared with even the finest American adaptations of post-structuralist thought as well as with the work of the post-structuralists themselves is the absence of partisanship and schoolishness that characterizes its theoretical stance. It is as if the three variants of post-structuralist thinking had shed here the contentiousness of their individual articulations and entered into the anonymity of an episteme. Kittler's work cannot be classified as Derridean, Foucauldian, or Lacanian; rather, it grounds itself on what might be termed the joint achievement of

the three. Perhaps this is the major methodological innovation of Kittler's book. By eliciting from the divergent elaborations of post-structuralist thought a collective epistemological apparatus, Kittler establishes a positive research program for a post-hermeneutic criticism.

The first component of this program—the premise that determines its overall perspective—might be termed the "presupposition of exteriority." The task of Kittler's critical investigation, in other words, is not to reabsorb the scattered utterances and inscriptions of the past into an inwardness that would endow them with meaning, be this inwardness the reflexivity of the subject as in Romantic hermeneutics or the reflexivity of language itself as in Gadamer. Rather, he practices what Foucault, in an early essay on Maurice Blanchot, called the "thinking of the outside," the thinking of language as a domain recalcitrant to internalization. Later in his career, Foucault named this domain "discourse" and set out to develop a lexicon of exteriority—series, event, discontinuity, materiality—with which to describe it. Kittler's discourse analysis follows the Foucauldian lead in that it seeks to delineate the apparatuses of power, storage, transmission, training, reproduction, and so forth that make up the conditions of factual discursive occurrences. The object of study is not what is said or written but the fact—the brute and often brutal fact—that it is said, that this and not rather something else is inscribed.

Inscription, in its contingent facticity and exteriority, is the irreducible given of Kittler's analysis, as the original German title of his book—*Aufschreibesysteme*—makes evident. That title, a neologism invented by Dr. Schreber, can be most literally translated as "systems of writing down" or "notation systems." It refers to a level of material deployment that is prior to questions of meaning. At stake here are the constraints that select an array of marks from the noisy reservoir of all possible written constellations, paths and media of transmission, or mechanisms of memory. A notation system or, as we have chosen to translate, a discourse network has the exterior character—the outsideness—of a technology. In Kittler's view, such technologies are not mere instruments with which "man" produces his meanings; they cannot be grounded in a philosophical anthropology. Rather, they set the framework within which something like "meaning," indeed, something like "man," become possible at all.

Writing (or arché-writing) as the condition of possibility of metaphysical conceptuality: this, of course, is a major tenet of Derrida's work. In Lacan, the cognate notion is that our existence is a function of our relation to the signifier. Kittler concretizes this post-structuralist theme by situating his analysis not at the level of writing or the signifier in general, but rather at the level of the historically specific machineries—scriptural and otherwise—that in their various arrangements organize information processing. His post-hermeneutic criticism, in other words, renders explicit and productive the tendency toward a radical historicism that is in fact immanent to the work of all the post-structuralist thinkers. To be sure, this historicism is no longer the narrative of a subject—a hero of knowledge, labor, or liberty—in the manner of the master plots of modernity; nor is it a particularist anamnesis of the lived past such as the so-called new historicism pursues. Like Foucault's, Kittler's historiography has a systematic thrust, tends toward the delineation of types. These types, denoted simply by the dates 1800 and 1900, are the discourse networks—the linkages of power, technologies, signifying marks, and bodies—that have orchestrated European culture for the past two hundred years.

The presupposition of exteriority, I claimed, determines the overall perspective of Kittler's post-hermeneutic criticism. The field within which that criticism operates, its domain of inquiry, is carved out by a second major premise, which I shall call the "presupposition of mediality." Here too Kittler develops insights that emerged within post-structuralism, for instance, in the investigations of the cinematic apparatus carried out by Christian Metz and Jean-Louis Baudry, investigations themselves strongly influenced by the Lacanian notion of the unconscious as a machine. Of course, the studies of Metz and Baudry are concerned with the medium of film alone, and it is principally in the area of film studies that, in both Europe and the United States, the concept of medium is broadly employed. The decisive methodological step undertaken by Kittler is to generalize the concept of medium, to apply it to all domains of cultural exchange. Whatever the historical field we are dealing with, in Kittler's view, we are dealing with media as determined by the technological possibilities of the epoch in question. Mediality is the general condition within which, under specific circumstances, something like "poetry" or "literature" can take shape. Post-hermeneutic literary history (or criticism), therefore, becomes a sub-branch of media studies.

This reclassification of literary criticism necessarily elicits a rethinking of its object of study. First and most obviously, if literature is medially constituted—that is, if it is a means for the processing, storage, and transmission of data—then its character will change historically according to the material and technical resources at its disposal. And it will likewise change historically according to the alternative medial possibilities with which it competes. In this regard, too, Kittler's work leads to a radical historicism that finally dissolves the universality of the concept of literature. Moreover, this dissolution does not bear merely on distant epochs such as the medieval period, where the question of orality versus literacy

has long been a focus of research. It operates in our own historical backyard, severing, as Kittler shows, Romantic "poetry" (produced under the monopoly of print and universal alphabetization) from modern "literature" (where writing enters into competition with the technical media of phonograph and film). From this perspective, the typewriter, still a component of our historical a priori, can be seen to initiate a fundamental mutation in the mode of existence of language.

But the notion of mediality recasts our notion of literature in another sense. As soon as we conceive of literature as medially instantiated, then we must view its meaning as the product of a selection and rarefaction. All media of transmission require a material channel, and the characteristic of every material channel is that, beyond—and, as it were, against—the information it carries, it produces noise and nonsense. What we call literature, in other words, stands in an essential (and again, historically variable) relation to a non-meaning, which it must exclude. It is defined not by what it means, but by the difference between meaning and non-meaning, information and noise, that its medial possibilities set into place. This difference, obviously, is inaccessible to hermeneutics. It is the privileged locus, however, of post-hermeneutic thought.

A criticism oriented by the presuppositions of exteriority and mediality has no place for creative human subjects, allows no room to psychology and its internalizations, refuses to anchor itself in a notion of universal human being. This non-anthropological bent of Kittler's work will seem disturbing to many readers of the book, who will rightly ask: What is the interest that motivates this critical enterprise? Where are its bonds of solidarity? An answer to these questions, I believe, is implied by the third premise of post-hermeneutic criticism, the premise that defines not its analytical perspective (exteriority), nor its domain of study (mediality), but rather its point of reference and focus of concern. I call this premise the "presupposition of corporeality."

The reason that the concept of corporeality defines the point of reference for post-hermeneutic criticism is clear. The body is the site upon which the various technologies of our culture inscribe themselves, the connecting link to which and from which our medial means of processing, storage, and transmission run. Indeed, in its nervous system, the body itself is a medial apparatus and an elaborate technology. But it is also radically historical in the sense that it is shaped and reshaped by the networks to which it is conjoined. The forerunner of this thinking in terms of corporeality, of course, is Nietzsche, whose philosophy follows, as he put it, the body's guiding thread and whose aesthetics, as he often insisted, is a physiology. Among the post-structuralists, Foucault cleaves most closely to this aspect of the Nietzschean program, especially in his

work on the history of punishment and on sexuality. But in Lacan, too, for whom subject formation takes place at the intersection of the body and the signifier, and in Derrida, whose reading of Freud focuses on the question of intra-psychic inscription, the theme of corporeality is insistent. One widespread reading of post-structuralism claims that it eliminates the concept of the subject. It would be more accurate to say that it replaces that concept with that of the body, a transformation which disperses (bodies are multiple), complexifies (bodies are layered systems), and historicizes (bodies are finite and contingent products) subjectivity rather than exchanging it for a simple absence.

The presupposition of corporeality has two major methodological consequences for post-hermeneutic criticism. The first is that the question of agency recedes into the background. The body is not first and foremost an agent or actor, and in order to become one it must suffer a restriction of its possibilities: the attribution of agency is a reduction of complexity. As a result, culture is no longer viewed as a drama in which actors carry out their various projects. Rather, the focus of analysis shifts to the processes that make that drama possible: to the writing of the script, the rehearsals and memorizations, the orders that emanate from the directorial authority. This (in my view) important conceptual shift can be formulated somewhat less metaphorically as follows: post-hermeneutic criticism replaces the foundational notion of praxis (the materialist version of subjective agency) with that of training. Culture is just that: the regimen that bodies pass through; the reduction of randomness, impulse, forgetfulness; the domestication of an animal, as Nietzsche claimed, to the point where it can make, and hold to, a promise.

The second methodological consequence of the presupposition of corporeality is that the sufferance of the body, its essential pathos, becomes a privileged locus for the analysis of discourse networks in terms of both their systematic character and their effectivity. In other words, the point at which discourse networks reveal most sharply their specific impress is in the pathologies they produce. Just as post-hermeneutic criticism focuses on the difference between information and noise, sense and nonsense, that defines every medium, so too it attends to the difference between normal behavior and aberrance (including madness) that lends every cultural formation its identity. The victims who people Kittler's book—the Bettinas, the Günderodes, the Nietzsches, the Schrebers—speak the truth of the culture they suffer. Whoever would look for the bonds of solidarity that orient Kittler's investigation will find them here: in its unmistakable compassion for the pathos of the body in pain. Hermeneutics would appropriate this corporeal singularity in the construction of a meaning. Post-hermeneutic criticism, however, draws its respon-

sibility precisely from the unassimilable otherness of the singular and mortal body. This is the ethical reason it stops making sense.

Romanticism

—Ach, ich bin des Treibens müde. *Goethe*

German literary historiography normally distinguishes between Classicism (*Klassik*) and Romanticism (*Romantik*) as two differently oriented movements in literary and cultural history around the turn of the nineteenth century. The former term is more restricted in its temporal scope and cast of players insofar as it refers principally to the joint endeavors of Goethe, Friedrich Schiller, Wilhelm von Humboldt, and a few other figures during the last decade of the eighteenth century, whereas Romanticism extends well into the nineteenth century and includes a large number of writers, from Friedrich and August Wilhelm Schlegel, Novalis, Ludwig Tieck, and the philosophers Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich Schelling to Joseph von Eichendorff, Clemens Brentano, and E. T. A. Hoffmann, to mention only some of the major names. In Hegel, the two movements are sometimes thought to converge, or find their dialectical synthesis. Since the lives and works of most of the writers mentioned fall within Goethe's life span (1749–1832), and since Goethe's cultural esteem came to exceed that of all his contemporaries, the entire period is often called the Age of Goethe.

In Anglo-American historiography, however, such distinctions are unknown. The entire period in question is simply called Romanticism, and Goethe, insofar as he is acknowledged, is viewed not merely as a contemporary, but as an affine poet and intellect to Wordsworth. For this reason, the first part of Kittler's book fits well with the scholarship produced in the English-speaking world. Beneath the title "1800" it collectively treats most of the Classical and Romantic writers mentioned as participating in a common enterprise, or rather a common discourse network. It is a study—although it doesn't employ the term—of the German variant of European Romanticism.

What is the view of Romanticism that emerges from Kittler's posthermeneutic reading? To answer this question let us first imagine another sort of reading, let us imagine, in fact, a book about Romanticism that carries the title *The Ideology of Romanticism*. This book would be a critical study of Romanticism in the sense that it doesn't—as indeed Kittler's book doesn't—consider as fundamentally true the tenets of Romantic writing. Rather, as its title indicates, it sets out to demonstrate that these tenets involve an ideological mystification, that they cover up something, that they are delusions from which we must free ourselves. According to our fictional book, the center of the Romantic ideology is the extravagant view of art it propagates: the view that art is an autonomous sphere in which, above and beyond the social and political clashes of historical reality, something like a totalization of human experience occurs. The Romantic doctrine of artistic autonomy, together with cognate notions such as genius, organic form, creative imagination, is a flight from reality, a denial of the social functions of art, a sublimated projection unaware of the rifted world from which it springs.

Of course, no such book exists that argues its case quite this simply, but the caricature I have sketched can nevertheless be applied to a number of studies published during the seventies in Germany (when the question of artistic autonomy was intensely discussed) and no doubt to certain works produced within Anglo-American scholarship as well. The point of my little fiction, however, was not to open a discussion of research on Romanticism, but to provide a reasonably recognizable contrasting image to the critical approach charted in Kittler's reading. The first feature that emerges in this regard is that Kittler nowhere employs the notion of ideology. He dismisses the rather complicated apparatus that notion implies: the opposition between reality and its distorted representation, the theory of ideational sublimation, the distinction between mental and material production, the notions of expression and projection. His theory of Romanticism is not that of an alternate world that exists alongside the authentic world of social forces and forms of organization, and adamantly not that of a superstructural configuration produced by and yet dissimulating the nature of its infrastructure. On the contrary, he takes the Romantic texts he analyzes quite literally, he reads them as a certain technology of the letter. There are no hidden truths to be uncovered here, no depths beneath the texts that it is our task to appropriate. Everything lies on the surface, precisely because this surface materiality of the texts themselves—their inscription within a discourse network—is the site of their historical efficacy.

Another way of marking this difference between traditional ideological analysis and Kittler's discourse analysis is to say that in the latter the concept of the social function of literature undergoes a fundamental transformation. As in the sociological theory of Niklas Luhmann, the notion of society itself is abandoned in favor of an investigation of interacting subsystems endowed with their particular technologies and protocols. This shift in focus from a totalizing concept of society to an analysis of specific subsystems brings with it a tremendous gain in analytical precision and concreteness. Indeed, one might even claim that the old talk of "society" and "social function" in literary criticism did no cognitive work at all. "Society" was simply the marker of correct political senti-

ment, the membership card to a particular discursive fellowship. Be this as it may, the decisive methodological point is clear enough: for Kittler there is no longer any totalizing term—say, "bourgeois society"—that can serve as an explanans for individual and local cultural phenomena. These are, quite positivistically, what they are: data selected and steered by their commands and addresses. Kittler's innovation is to replace the traditional causal-expressive model of sociological explanation with a cybernetic one.

Romanticism, then, is a certain technology of the letter. What limits this technology and therefore renders it historically describable is the documented existence of other technologies, most notably that of modernism, described in the second section of Kittler's book. The differences between the two discourse networks (1800/1900) provide the epistemological lever that enables each to be viewed from the outside. Of course, this systemic comparison is burdened by the linearity of the medium "book" in which it is carried out: in order to see the various functions described in the first part of the book as functions—that is, as variable and substitutable—the reader should ideally have read the second part, and vice versa. Kittler solves this problem in two ways. First, his description of the Romantic discourse network is interlaced with comparative remarks that anticipate the findings of the modernism section. Secondly, he develops his analysis of Romanticism through an implicit juxtaposition with an anterior system, which he calls the Republic of Scholars.

This prior discourse network does not receive a full and detailed characterization, but its contours should be relatively familiar to the reader. We are dealing here with the system of learning that developed in early modern Europe in the wake of printing, a system in which knowledge was defined in terms of authority and erudition, in which the doctrine of rhetoric governed discursive production, in which patterns of communication followed the lines of social stratification, in which books circulated in a process of limitless citation, variation, and translation, in which universities were not yet state institutions and the learned constituted a special (often itinerant) class with unique privileges, and in which the concept of literature embraced virtually all of what was written. The breakdown of this system occurred gradually, beginning with Descartes' rejection of erudition and rhetoric and his simultaneous grounding of the truth of discourse in the inwardness of the ego in the *Discourse on Method*; and it extended across the first three-quarters of the eighteenth century that are generally referred to as the Enlightenment. Kittler, for economic reasons, leaves this period of disintegration and reorganization out of his account and draws his retrospective comparisons solely between Romanticism and the old res publica litteraria.

The strategy of periodization leads us to a second comparison, for the book most similar to Kittler's *Discourse Networks*, the paradigm of its genre, is clearly Foucault's archaeology of the human sciences, *The Order of Things*. In that study, Foucault contrasts three successive epistemic systems within which European culture has thought the domains of life, labor, and language. At the close of his study, Foucault speculates on the end of the third of these epistemes (which he calls "modern"), an end that coincides with the end of "man" as the central figure of knowledge. What I referred to above as the Enlightenment is discussed in detail by Foucault under the rubric of the "classical" episteme, a system of knowledge preceded in his account by the "Renaissance." Thus, Kittler's vaguely sketched Republic of Scholars correlates to Foucault's Renaissance and classical epistemes, his "1800" to Foucault's modern system, and his "1900" to Foucault's roughly sketched postmodernism. Where Foucault develops a rigorous analysis of two distinct "premodern" configurations of knowledge, Kittler operates with a nebulous, but generally accessible characterization of the older discursive formation. By contrast, where Foucault leaves things in a speculative haze, Kittler unfolds a detailed investigation. For the latter, in other words, the "postmodern" period (my term of convenience, not Foucault's or Kittler's) is not a future about to break in upon us, it has already occurred—during the thirty or so years surrounding the turn of the twentieth century. Foucault's and Kittler's periodizations exactly coincide (and this overlap is legible in Kittler's references to Foucault's work) with regard to the phase the former calls "modern" and the latter—without connotational baggage—"1800." This is likewise the phase traditional literary historiography refers to as Romanticism.

Further comparisons of Foucault's investigation of the Romantic period with that developed in Kittler's *Discourse Networks* would not be very fruitful here. Their respective inquiries into this period evidently bear on different objects and employ divergent modes of analysis. Foucault discusses cleanly circumscribed scientific disciplines; his orientation is principally semantic in character. Kittler, taking "literary" texts as his point of departure, considers a wider array of discourses and pursues a more pragmatic line of inquiry. But the general methodological tenet they hold in common nevertheless deserves emphasis. In both Foucault and Kittler, the Romantic period is delimited not genetically, not in terms of what it came from and what it developed into, but rather systemically, that is to say, in terms of differences that set it off from other historically describable systems. Romanticism, in the work of both writers, is a model, a product of analytic construction. Historiography here, even as it accounts for diachrony, sheds its traditional dependence on narrative linearity.

Beyond the matter of periodization, however, Foucault and Kittler share a further strategy—a strategy for the presentation of their respective arguments—that can lead us back to the specifics of Kittler's description of the Romantic technology of the letter. No reader of *The Order of Things* will forget the discussion of *Las Meninas* with which the book opens. There Foucault uses the painting as a kind of paradigmatic scene in terms of which to outline the various parameters of the classical episteme. It is as if Velasquez's masterpiece condensed all the elements and relations that Foucault's meticulous analysis of classical representation later unfolds across some hundred pages. Kittler begins his discussion of Romanticism with a similar primal scene, the "Scholar's Tragedy" that opens Goethe's *Faust*. In his construction, the drama played out across Faust's series of readings and writings—the Nostradamus manuscript, the evocation of the Earth Spirit, the translation from the Gospel of John, and finally Faust's signing the pact with Mephistopheles—enacts nothing other than the collapse of the Republic of Scholars and the emergence, out of this obsolete system, of the Romantic discourse network. Perhaps it was for the sake of this example that Kittler chose to use the older system of erudition, the res publica litteraria, rather than the classical episteme of transparent representation as the contrasting configuration to Romanticism. For Goethe sets his drama in the distant past of humanism and reformation; Faust is a contemporary of Luther, whose translation of the Bible he repeats. As Kittler shows, however, this repetition occurs with a difference: Luther's interpretive dictum of "sola scriptura" is displaced by a hermeneutics that moves beyond, beneath, and before the letter in order to seize the seminal act—the pure movement of origination—that produced the Word.

One of Kittler's many allusions can reveal the profile of the strategy organizing his reading of *Faust*. In the famous introductory sentences to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant delimits his project by distinguishing between "beginnings" (chronological and empirical) and "origins" (achronological and transcendental). The latter, designated by the German verb *entspringen* ("originate"), turn out to have their own ultimate origin in the free act of auto-constitution that characterizes the transcendental ego, the sheerly active *Ich* that becomes the central philosopheme of post-Kantian Romantic thought. Faust arrives at this pure act prior to all language and externality in his translation of John, when he finally writes: "In the beginning was the Act." Faust's free translation, in other words, replaces, as does Idealist philosophy in general, the divine institution of the Word and the Law with the freedom of originary, generative subjectivity. The reason this complex is important to Kittler's analysis becomes clear when we consider the other element (which is also the

element of the Other) in Kant's enabling opposition. To designate beginnings in the domain of empiricity—a domain that from the transcendental perspective is secondary and derivative—Kant uses the verb *anheben* ("commence" or "begin"). Precisely this word, today somewhat antiquated and therefore conspicuous as an allusion, determines the predicate of Kittler's first sentence, which opens his reading of the Faustian primal scene: "Die Deutsche Dichtung hebt an mit einem Seufzer." ("German Poetry begins with a sigh.") This citation of the Kantian verb does not merely signal that the analysis to follow is empirical and historical as opposed to transcendental in orientation. That would merely confirm the Kantian opposition and leave intact the hermeneutics resting on that opposition. What Kittler's reading shows, rather, is that the scene in which the origin is imagined is not an origin at all. The origin—the pristine moment of auto-constitution—itself derives from a non-origin, from a beginning that is intrinsically plural, empirical, and other. This beginning is the system of forces and relations that make up the Romantic discourse network.

The Romantic reverie of the origin—one variant of which is hermeneutics—is not a universal dream. It does not emerge from the inwardness of an unconscious whose actants (say Mother, Father, Child) are everywhere the same. Nor does it play out the drama of an ahistorical subject's initiation into an equally ahistorical "language" or regime of the signifier. Rather, it is a function of historically specific discursive technologies. This is the point where Kittler's reading of Romanticism departs from psychoanalysis, with which it nevertheless shares several motifs. In order to conceptualize this difference I would offer the following hypothesis. While Kittler accepts the Lacanian dictum that the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, he reads this formula from the standpoint of Foucault. That is to say, the term *discourse* no longer refers, as in Lacan's rendering, to the linguistic and therefore abstract notion of extended speech, but rather to positive modes of existence of language as shaped by institutions of pedagogy, technical means of reproduction, storage and transfer, available strategies of interpretation, and so on. Likewise the Lacanian Other is for Kittler not the general and sovereign instance of the one Law, but rather (and again, with Foucault) the network of forces and resistances, commands and addresses, that constitute historically specific configurations of domination. If the Romantic dream conforms in several of its features to the psychoanalytic family scenario, then, it is merely because the psychoanalytic script itself was written in reference to this historical field.

To see how this methodological fusion of Foucault and Lacan is worked out concretely, let us return to the primal scene of Romantic writing.

Faust's translation of John, his hermeneutic reappropriation of the origin, is a compensatory action. It fills a "lack" or "deficiency" (Goethe's word is *Mangel*), which itself is figured in liquid terms ("thirst"; a "drying up" of the "stream" that "springs forth" within his own "breast"). The desire, the inner trouble and turbulence that propels his writing and that will find its satisfaction and consolation (*getrost*) in the inscription of the originary deed preceding all language, is nothing other than Faust's separation from Nature herself. Romantic writing returns to the lost natural origin by translating Nature's wordless speech. Furthermore, as the semantics of "liquidity" reveals, this Nature is itself a figuration of the Mother. Faust's quest for the transcendental signified, the originary act and meaning from which language springs, follows a beckoning maternal imago. As Kittler points out, this logic of Faustian desire provides the link to the "Gretchen Tragedy" that in *Faust I* succeeds upon the "Scholar's Tragedy": Faust's singular beloved Gretchen is Mother and Madonna in one, another representative of the natural-maternal source. And *Faust II* remains faithful to this paradigm, culminating as it does in the apotheosis of the "Eternal Feminine" that orients our striving. To begin with the Faustian primal scene, as Kittler does, is to broach a reading of Romantic desire and writing as fixation on the imago of the Mother.

Kittler's elaboration of this reading across the first part of *Discourse Networks*, however, does not abide within the confines of psychoanalytic literary theory. He rejects a strictly psychoanalytic reading of the Romantic complex on the grounds that it would be hermeneutic and tautological. That is to say, insofar as it endeavors to return the text to its origin in the phantasm of the mother-child dyad, and insofar as it conceives this phantasm as the latent meaning of the text, the psychoanalytic interpretation of Romanticism repeats the fundamental gesture of hermeneutics. Moreover, a hermeneutic reading of texts that institute hermeneutic reading (as does the Faustian primal scene) is merely a tautological rewriting of those texts. Psychoanalysis, with its insistence on the Mother as a primary interpretive datum, remains immanent within the Romantic discourse system, remains, let us say, applied Romanticism. Indeed, the claim that the Mother is the origin repeats Romanticism's own most insistent asseveration. The methodological task, then, is to take up a position external to psychoanalysis while accounting for the (semantic) pertinence of a psychoanalytic reading.

Such a step to the outside is accomplished through the above-mentioned fusion of Lacan and Foucault. By bending the Lacanian concepts of discourse and Other in the direction of a Foucauldian "thinking of the outside," Kittler arrives at a thesis on Romanticism that avoids the trap of hermeneutic tautology. With all due precautions regarding oversimplification, I would formulate this thesis as follows: Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production. Before the phantasm of the Mother and before the attachment of desire to this phantasm, in other words, there is a discursive network, and both phantasm and desire are functions of and within this network. The Romantic (and psychoanalytic) origin derives from a beginning, from a network of technologies themselves empirical, historical and other.

Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production. The demonstration and concretization of this thesis in the first part of *Discourse Networks* takes us into regions entirely foreign to traditional literary criticism. Kittler begins with the new pedagogy of the late eighteenth century, a discourse that addressed itself to mothers and thereby constituted the Mother as the agency of primary socialization. It is the Mother who manages the child's initiation into the cultural techniques of reading and writing, and in doing so invests this initiation with an aura of erotic pleasure. This pleasure clings especially to the maternal voice, a kind of aural envelope that binds the mother-child dyad in a pre-articulate unity. Hence the Romantic fascination for a primary orality, for an inner voice, for a speechless transcendental speech. But orality is not merely a dream, it is a technological reality: the reforms initiated by the Bavarian school official Heinrich Stephani (1761–1850) produced this orality as an effect of didactic procedures. Stephani's method of teaching children reading and writing by teaching them the sounds the letters mark, however self-evident it may seem to us today, was in fact a discursive event of major proportions. It produced not merely a new conception, but a new and effective organization of linguistic materiality. Romanticism, it has long been held, rests on a revolution. For Kittler this is also the case. The revolution in question, however, is no longer the French one so dear to the hermeneutics of liberty, but rather the revolution of the European alphabet that occurred with its oralization around 1800.

Primary orality, the Mother, the self-presence of the origin: these are not merely sublimations or philosophical hallucinations, they are discursive facts, nodal points in a positive and empirical discursive network, functions in a system of relays and commands that has no center or origin. As such they do not disguise a reality that is anterior to them and from which they would spring; they produce reality by linking bodies (e.g., the eyes and ears and hands of children) to the letter and to instances of power. Soon this system develops its own theory (a linguistics of the root and the verb), its own imaginary (Poetry as translation of the language of nature), its own protocols of reading (the Romantic hermeneutics of the signified). It realizes itself across institutional reforms

(from primary schools to university lecture halls), it is codified in laws (the Universal Prussian Law of 1794 mandates both authorial copyright and maternal breast feeding), it shapes careers (as the new genre of the Bildungsroman reveals). These aspects of the Romantic discourse network are described in great detail in Kittler's study: the ABC books that lead children from primal sounds (*ma*) to primal signifieds (*Mama*), the university reforms that institute Faustian hermeneutics, and especially the literary texts at once programmed by the discourse network in which they are written and programming their readers as subjects of that discourse. All of these subsystems, in their specific dispersion and paths of connection, are what is meant by the thesis: Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discourse.

I have stressed the "maternal" strand in Kittler's reading of Romanticism in order to highlight the specifics of his method. As the reader of *Discourse Networks* will soon discover, however, the thesis I have summarized is in fact only one component in a much more complicated construction. Romanticism is also the institutionalization of authorship, the emergence of a pragmatics of universal poetic address, the monopoly of writing as a medium for the storage and transfer of kinaesthetic data. In particular, my discussion has ignored the commands so central to Kittler's reading, that area in which his Foucauldian reworking of the Lacanian Other assumes prominence. After all, Faust's translation is guided not only by his yearning for the Mother, but also by the poodle present in his chamber. This poodle soon reveals himself as Mephistopheles, the spirit (*Geist*) with whom Faust joins in the infernal pact that determines the remainder of the drama. Starting from this pact, and in particular from the signature that makes it binding, Kittler unfolds an analysis of the imperatives and obligations that the discourse network of 1800 dispenses. The Romantic subject is not merely a subject tethered to the imago of the Mother, it is a subject functioning within a specific constellation of powers. It is a bureaucratic subject, a civil servant (state-employed teacher, university professor, jurist, secretary, etc.), and, as such, a subject engaged in particular ways with the production and interpretation of written material. Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production, to be sure; but it is also the discursive production and distribution of bureaucratic governance. Furthermore, these two aspects, even as they mark off exclusive realms, are fully solidary with one another and mutually sustaining. Romanticism is a discourse network organized as a productive tension between Mother and State.

Everything begins with Goethe's *Faust*, and there too everything ends. Gretchen, pressed into service as maternal imago, murders her mother

and child. This crime (against motherhood) earns her madness and, according to the judgment of Mephistopheles, who speaks for the State, execution. Faust, who had found in her the source of his desire and aspirations, goes on to a magical invocation of classical Greece and a philological-poetic marriage to Helen of Troy. In Kittler's reading, this is not a fiction, but a program. His study of Romanticism closes with the case of Karoline von Günderode, the beloved of the classical philologist Friedrich Creuzer. For Creuzer, she was the inner voice that guided his researches, the secret addressee of his translations from the classical sources. Pressed into service as maternal imago—a discursive impress that bars her from speech—Karoline drowns herself in the Rhine. The Rhine, it is often said, is the most Romantic of German rivers.

Modernism

Sehen Sie, mein Herr, ein Komma! *Hölderlin*

Styles are necessarily various. There is, as Derrida showed in his study of Nietzsche (*Spurs*), no one style, but inevitably many. Derived from the notion of stylus, or writing instrument, the concept of style designates a labor of differential inscription that is both prior and irreducible to meaning.

This point marks a difficulty for the English reader of *Discourse Networks*. In order to register stylistic effects, a reader must be in a position to note differences from other styles. For the German reader of Kittler's book this is an easy task. His or her reading eye and inner ear have been trained to follow the syntactic-rhetorical ductus of German intellectual writing. Such writing is characterizable (I am simplifying, of course) as Hegelian suada: elaborate grammatical constructions, antithetical periods, conceptual reversals, nominalized adjectives—in short, dialectical resolutions. Above all, what distinguishes this style (which both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche derided in vain) is a certain superior distance from the language of everyday life. The brevity and choppiness of mundane talk, as well as its factual references and concreteness, are dissolved in a nimbus of generality. From Dryden to the present, by contrast, English prose has maintained a closeness to the patois of mundane social intercourse. The English intellectual style is inflected more by conversational affability than by the constraints of philosophical abstraction; its home is the practical sphere of commerce rather than the isolated study. For this reason, the difference that Kittler's style makes is lost in translation. His prose is written against the language of dialectical resolution. It is characterized by syntactic concision, by a certain "hardness" and concreteness of diction; it has the literalness sometimes of "lower" (or informal) collo-

quial exchange, sometimes of the technical language of engineers; its sentences often attain the compactness of a telegram message, or a command. Rendered in English, this stylistic profile necessarily loses its sharpness and tends to disappear in a sea of ordinary talk.

What won't disappear, however, is the stylization of the book as a whole, its precision and symmetry. Two sections, entitled only by dates. Two epigraphs, both mathematical equations. (The first of these, by the way, can be interpreted as an algorithm of "growth," the movement of progressive augmentation that characterizes the discourse network of 1800. The second formalizes the pulse of differential alternation that permeates the modernist discourse network.) Part I begins with a primal writing scene, Faust in his study destroying the discourse system of the Republic of Scholars and inventing Romantic hermeneutics. Part II likewise opens with a primal writing scene, but this time it is Nietzsche with pen (and later typewriter) in hand, and this time it is the Romantic discourse network that crashes to the ground in order to make room for the intransitive scriptural practice of modernism. At the same time, the Faustian opening of Part I points forward to the conclusion of the entire book, the "systematic reversal" of Romantic writing in Valéry's redaction of Goethe, *'My Faust.'* With regard to their internal articulation, the two parts are also strictly correlated: in both cases an introit (Faust versus Nietzsche) followed by three large, symmetrically divided subsections. In short, the design of the book is so deliberate as to suggest mathematical formalization or musical seriality. The musical analogy holds for Kittler's style of argumentation as well, which deploys across its linearity a system of recurring leitmotifs (e.g., the sigh "oh" [German "*ach*"]). *Discourse Networks* is a constructivist assemblage, a model for a chess game, a machine diagram. This compositional strategy suits well the book's post-hermeneutic critical practice.

And it suits equally well Kittler's allegiance with modernism, an allegiance that derives not from uncritical advocacy, but rather from the sober recognition that modernism—the discourse network of 1900—has defined the state of the art(s) as it exists today. What Kittler's analysis of modernism reveals, in other words, is that the thirty or so years that revolve around the axis 1900 have decisively altered our epistemological situation (perhaps by rendering it post-epistemological); that intellectual work today, in its most advanced inquiries, has its roots in the modernist transformation of discourse; that we are postmodern in the sense that the modernist intervention is irrevocable. This also is the indirect lesson of post-structuralism: Foucault develops his genealogical method through a reading of Nietzsche, Derrida his theory of arche-writing through a reading of Saussure, and Lacan his version of psychoanalysis through a

reading—an endless reading—of Freud. Nietzsche, Saussure, and Freud all play a significant role in Kittler's discussion of modernism as well, but not (and this is decisive) as authors and authorities. In *Discourse Networks* the three figures of the Modernist theoretical triumvirate lose their individuality and are reabsorbed into a circumambient system. Our historiography of post-structuralism has been up till now mere intellectual history, a story of thinkers and their ideas. Kittler's book is the first to break with this antiquated paradigm and to reveal the discursive beginnings of our contemporaneity.

Our contemporaneity: the possessive here is meant to refer to Anglo-American readers of the 1990's, who will find in the modernism section of Kittler's book much more that is recognizably their "own" than in the 1800 portion. The first part of the book, I said, is a study of the German variant of European Romanticism, and with few exceptions the textual examples there come from the German-speaking lands. This means that a considerable labor of translation and transposition will be required of the reader who wants to think through, for instance, the implications of Kittler's investigation for English Romanticism. How does the English history of pedagogy compare with the German developments described by Kittler? Does the somewhat earlier establishment of copyright in England inflect the concept of authorship differently than in Germany? Is there an English process analogous to the German statification of the university? Of course, research on English Romanticism has long stressed German influences (especially with regard to Coleridge). Perhaps Kittler's book will incite a rereading of those borrowings and adaptations in terms of specific discursive conditions. Perhaps too it will prompt the so-called new historicists, who are increasingly turning to Romanticism after having plowed the fields of Renaissance and eighteenth-century research, to ask themselves what their object of study actually is.

The fact that the modernism section of *Discourse Networks* is more international in its range than the first section derives from the nature (or non-nature) of the modernist discourse network it describes. At one point Kittler cites the dissertation of the postal inspector and expressionist poet August Stramm on the "empirical law of the production of correspondence according to which every letter sent from one country to a second elicits a similar mailing from the second to the first." Stramm is writing about the economy of the world postal system, which, by the beginning of the twentieth century, had a real institutional existence, with codified agreements bearing, for example, on rate equivalences. In other words, the exponential explosion and acceleration of international communication Stramm's remark documents is a defining historical feature of modernist discourse. (In *Ulysse grammaphone*, a book written after *Dis-*

course Networks and, as it were, in its wake, Derrida demonstrates the effects of this discursive fact on Joyce's novel.) It is no accident, then, that Kittler's investigation of modernism ranges across national borders, that its onomastic repertoire includes Mallarmé, Villiers de l'Isle-Adam, and Proust in addition to Nietzsche, Benn, and Kafka; Edison, James, and Stein in addition to Lumière, Bergson, and Salomé; Rilke along with Valéry. Communication in Romanticism, of course, also had its international aspect, but it was not technically and institutionally international in the same way as with modernism: its framework remained that defined by the nation state. Hence the Romantic cultivation of national literary tradition; hence the modernist inmixing of traditions and languages (e.g., in Pound). The general point here is not unimportant for comparatist studies: the reference of the term *international* is a function of historically variable technologies of postal transport. As Goethe already recognized, "world literature" (*Weltliteratur*, the late Goethean coinage often thought to be the forerunner of "comparative literature") has its condition of possibility in *Verkehr*, in commerce, exchange, communication.

The noise of all those letters and telegrams noted by Stramm is the same noise K., the protagonist-letter of Kafka's novel, hears in the telephone lines when he attempts to call the castle. It is (technically, not metaphorically speaking) the noise of modernism. Romantic discourse had its "origin" in the pure inwardness of the maternal voice, a voice created by pedagogical reforms such as Stephani's oralization of the alphabet. The modernist exchange of letters likewise has its technical coupling between body and signifier, a coupling produced not by philanthropic pedagogues, but by the science of psychophysics (which soon found its pedagogical application). Hermann Ebbinghaus's memory experiments of the 1880's, in which the new discipline emerges, mark, in Kittler's analysis, a discursive event, a mutation of linguistic materiality. Readers of *Discourse Networks* will encounter here perhaps the most indigestible aspect of Kittler's argument, insofar as the inherited conception of literary modernism has systematically excluded a serious engagement with the historical accomplishments of positivism. Kittler's demonstration, however, is so compelling that one is led to suspect that the traditional exclusion (and even scapegoating) of positivism was in fact an attempt to save Romantic-hermeneutic discourse from the cultural forces that were dismantling it. What better way to do this than by making modernism itself a matter of ideas and worldviews? I have already mentioned Dilthey's suppression of Nietzsche in this connection, of the Nietzsche, that is, who devoted the little reading time his near-blindness allowed him to treatises in physiology and whose theory of violent memory inscription becomes, as Kittler shows, an experimental reality in the work of Ebbinghaus. The

"literary" or "humanist" reading of Freud, which inevitably accentuates his transcendence of biologism, is likewise relevant here. Psychoanalysis has its conditions of possibility in the discursive field opened up in psychophysics. The unified and unifying *Geist* of Hegel has long been replaced by the functional multiplicity of Broca's brain and maintains its ghostly afterlife only in hermeneutic philosophy and literary criticism.

Ebbinghaus's experiment, in its basic outlines, is quite simple. In order to measure memory he lets pass before his eye a series of nonsense syllables and counts the number of passes required for the memorization of combinations of these syllables. In this procedure Kittler discloses the complexity of a discursive beginning. There is first of all the body of the experimental subject: stripped of the cultural equipment of subjectivity, it has become a physiological surface upon which the syllables—once, twice, or several times—are inscribed. Secondly, there is the source from which the syllables emerge: not books, not the maternal voice, but a mechanism for the production of random configurations. Having passed across Ebbinghaus's field of vision, having engendered there their instantaneous shocks, these syllables return to a storage mechanism of similar construction. Finally, there is the form of language the system employs, a language without syntactic coherence or semantic content, mere letters in their materiality and in the differential pulse of their alternation. The experiment, in short, institutes language as writing, a system of inscribed differences emerging as a selection from a reservoir of nonsense, etching their differences on the body's surface, and returning to the murmur of the source. The situation of Postal Inspector Stramm is no different: the noise of letters and telegrams out of which some few pass across his desk in order to be reabsorbed in the turbulent sea of communication from which they had come. And neither the postal nor the experimental observer is there to interpret, but merely to count and quantify, to measure either for economic or scientific purposes, the differential values of the selections that confront him. According to Nietzsche, qualities are in fact quantitative differences of force. This is the view that Ebbinghaus's experiment proves.

Psychophysics takes language to a point where it stops making sense, or rather, it shows that all sense making has its frontiers (and therefore its definition) in domains of nonsense and in automatized operations that no longer belong to a subjective authority. On the margins of language use there proliferate a host of breakdowns: dyslexias, aphasias, agraphisms, asymbolisms; the strict division between normal and pathological is transformed into a gradient of standards; intentional agency is dispersed in a system of organic and nervous functions. Speech no longer has its norm in the meaningful utterance of an authorial subject. It has become a

selection and rarefaction embodying what cyberneticians call the order-from-noise principle. In short, the modernist discourse network unravels language, reduces its wholeness and centeredness to a tangle of nervous, sensory-motor threads, to a scatter of differential marks.

The precondition of this unweaving is the minimal experimental condition of psychophysics: that writing, as writing, be written down. In order for this detachment of writing from subjectivity to occur, however, inscription had to become mechanized, and this happens with the typewriter. The typewriter, Heidegger noted, alters our relationship to being: it takes language away from the hand, which—and here Heidegger is faithful, as so often, to Aristotle—distinguishes "man." Kittler, without sharing the philosopher's nostalgia, renders this Heideggerian intuition historically concrete. The typewriter frees writing from the control of the eye and of consciousness; it institutes spacing as the precondition of differentiation; it stores a reservoir of signifiers that strike the page much as Ebbinghaus's syllables strike the body's sensory surface. Nietzsche's notion of moral inscription is modeled on the typewriter, one of the earliest versions of which he owned and used. Saussure's linguistics, in Derrida's reading a linguistics of arche-writing, has its technological correlate in the typewriter. Freud's psychic apparatus, as he called it, is a writing machine. Moreover, as Kittler shows, the literacy production of the era is no less dependent, in conception and practice, on the new technology of the letter. Mallarmé calls for the disappearance of the elocutionary subject and derives poetry from the 26 letters of the alphabet and the spaces between them. Kafka's instruments of torture are writing machines. Morgenstern develops a poetics of autonomous punctuation. Like psychophysics (for which it is a technological precondition as well), the typewriter alters the status of discourse and repositions literature, science, and theory. The end of "man" postulated by Foucault is brought on by a mechanism that writes writing.

One way of formulating the discursive effect of psychophysics and the typewriter is to say that only with them does language become perceptible as a medium. But it is not the medial technology of the typewriter alone that makes this perception possible. The development of this technology around 1900 is co-emergent with other medial technologies, in particular the gramophone and film, both of which figure centrally in the Modernism section of *Discourse Networks*. Note the structural similarity of the three: just as the typewriter allows for the processing of scriptural differences that pass beneath the threshold of consciousness, so too film records data of the visual unconscious (as Benjamin noted) in discrete frames that cannot themselves be perceived in the film image; and

so too the gramophone records and renders reproducible differences of vibrational frequency that escape conscious audition. The technological dissolution of the noematic world (the world of intentionality) in each of the three media has its counterpart, moreover, in the distribution of the possibilities of information processing among them. Kittler's thesis in this regard is especially provocative. In his view, the three Lacanian registers—the symbolic, the imaginary, and the real—are effects of medial specialization. Writing conveys the differences of the symbolic order; film, with its simulation of visual presence, transmits imaginary contents; and the phonograph allows for the technical recording of the real. The writers who around 1900 transformed literature into an intransitive practice of writing (quite literally "literature") had systematic rather than thematic reasons for doing so. In the modernist landscape of medial specialization, writing is one medium among others, with its own limitations and possibilities, and the writer a media specialist, a professional of the letter.

Kittler's argument regarding the medial constellation of modernism deserves accentuation. The emergence of technological media around 1900 represents a decisive historical and discursive caesura that alters the structure, placement, and function of cultural production. The only critic or theoretician I know who views the historical significance of the media in a similarly radical way is Walter Benjamin. In his brief and rightfully famous essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," Benjamin argues that modernism is the destruction of aura, that is, of the sacral distance and otherness of the art work stemming from its singularity. With film, a mode of artistic creation comes into being that, from the beginning, is fashioned as reproducible. The film knows no authentic singular instance, has no original, and for this reason it marks the historical emancipation of art from its mythic-religious roots.

Readers familiar with Benjamin's essay (and with his Baudelaire studies that deal with related issues) will recognize the similarities between his work and Kittler's *Discourse Networks*. To cite merely two examples: both critics strongly emphasize the importance of "shocks," of unforeseeable and instantaneous perturbations, as a key component of experience in modernism; both stress the connection between film, the distracted form of attention it elicits, and the "popularity" or "mass-oriented" nature of its contents. Of course, a detailed comparison between Benjamin and Kittler would have to distinguish these points of similarity more sharply (by asking, for example, what the specific source of the "shocks" in each case is) and develop others as well (e.g., the link in both writers between media and the unconscious). I shall leave this task to the reader, however,

and emphasize here merely one major difference between Benjamin and Kittler that strikes me as methodologically crucial. There is in Kittler's analysis of the emergence and significance of technical media no sense of an overriding narrative that event would instantiate. Like Benjamin, Kittler sees the modernist intervention as a break or rupture, but he refuses to invest this transformation with the historico-philosophical meaning of "emancipation." Benjamin's end-of-art thesis, in other words, rests on a diegetic scaffold that remains essentially Hegelian. Kittler is an evolutionist in the sense that he attributes no a priori directionality to historical change. The medialization of modernist discourse is a contingent event, an historical clinamen, not the realization of a project unfolding across the centuries.

In my discussion of the Romanticism section of *Discourse Networks*, I focused on the thesis that Romanticism is the discursive production of the Mother as the source of discursive production. Here too I have restricted my remarks to a single thread of Kittler's construction, the question of linguistic materiality and mediality. Much more than this, however, awaits the reader: for example, a discussion of the emergence of singularity (contra Benjamin) as a recordable datum, of the symmetrical and competitive positions of psychoanalysis and literature within the modernist discourse network, of the impossibility of translation and the constraints of medial transposition. As I mentioned, the *Las Meninas* of Kittler's construction is the Nietzschean writing scene that opens the 1900 section and which leads into a reading of Nietzsche's entire work as a paradigm of modernism.

I shall let these aspects of Kittler's analysis stand without commentary in order to mention briefly one final point. The discursive production of the Mother in Romantic discourse subsumed women in the prototype of the one Woman, the infinitely productive silence that is the source and ideal recipient of male poetic speech. One could speak here of a monosexualization of gender: the one Woman—the Mother—is essentially a narcissistic prop for male identity formation. The modernist discourse network institutes a linguistic materiality no longer grounded in the maternal voice and thereby makes possible what Romantic discourse could only acknowledge as an empirical deficiency: the plurality of women. Modernism, in other words, fundamentally restructures the triangular relation among men, women, and language, and therefore the relations between women and men. Especially revealing in this regard is Kittler's discussion of the emergence of the secretary/typist, of the medial mediation of writers' amorous attachments, of the modernist rediscovery of premodern women writers, of the role of women in psychoanalysis. But perhaps the most intriguing aspect of his analysis is this: whereas the Romantic discourse network monosexualizes gender, modernist discourse discloses a sexual difference that resists homogenization. The relation between the sexes, Nietzsche wrote, is essentially agonistic. This agon, in Kittler's view, is an effect of the discourse network that defines our contemporaneity.

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