

39th E-Seminar of the EASA Media Anthropology Network
<http://www.media-anthropology.net>

Working Paper
”Friedrich Kittler - a media anthropology without the Man?”

by Jussi Parikka (University of Southampton)

Discussant
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28 February - 13 March 2012

Dr Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Welcome to the 39th Media Anthropology Network E-Seminar! Just to remind us all of how these things go, we open with the discussant's comments and give the author a chance to respond to those. Once the author has had a chance to respond, the seminar gets opened up to the floor and remains open for discussion for two weeks. This e-seminar will run from today until 13 March. I would like to thank Jussi Prikka for providing a very timely and interesting paper about Friedrich Kittler and to Gabriela Vargas-Cetina for taking on the role of discussant for this paper. I've pasted Gabriela's comments below and it's now over to Jussi to make some initial comments in response.

Hopefully you've all had a chance to download Jussi's paper, but if not I've put the link to the e-seminars page on the Media Anthropology website below.

Steve

28 February - 13 March 2012. Jussi Parikka (University of Southampton): Friedrich Kittler - a media anthropology without the Man?
<http://www.media-anthropology.net/index.php/e-seminars>

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (gabyvargasc@prodigy.net.mx)

Hello, and thanks to John, Steve and Nina for inviting me to stir a discussion around Friedrich Kittler, and thank you to Jussi Parikka for providing us with a provocative opening text. Kittler is a very influential figure in contemporary media studies, but anthropologists have not felt drawn to his work so far, probably because of his lack of theoretical sympathy for human will when it comes to machines and media. Winthrop-Young (2011:6) writes: “His work will strike many as profoundly asocial, even ahuman, especially when approached in a more idealistic spirit”. Parikka opens his text laughing at the fact that we are discussing Friedrich Kittler on an anthropology-based e-list; this is quite a paradox: While anthropology puts people at the center of all knowledge, Kittler believed that ‘man’ or ‘people’ are irrelevant outside their expressions through whatever media are or were at their disposal at any given point in time. Reviewing Kittler’s life and work, Winthrop-

Young (2011) tells us that he often referred to humans as ‘so-called-man’ or ‘little people’.

Why should anthropologists, then, be interested in Kittler’s work at all? In his text opening this e-seminar, Jussi Parikka has given us four good reasons and has invited us to put Kittler in the context of his contemporary theorists and writers. I think that two additional reasons are Kittler’s undeniable influence and importance in contemporary media theory, and the fact that new fields of inquiry, such as ‘media archeology’, are almost direct results of his theories and research methodology. If we want to understand contemporary media theory and emerging disciplines related to it, we have to read Kittler.

Unlike Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge, which we tend to associate with the MESSAGES inscribed on the media, archaeology for Kittler must be the archeology of media technologies, because, as he famously wrote, “Media determine our situation” (Kittler 1999[1986], xxxix) and “What remains of people is what media can store and communicate”(Ibid, xl). In their work on Kittler, Parikka and others have written about the diverging approaches deriving from either putting the media before the message, or putting the message before the media. The results in on our very understanding of history, archaeology, media studies and other social sciences are radically different (See Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, Poster 2001, Whintrop-Young 2006, 2011, Whintrop and Wutz 1999). According to Huhtamo and Parikka (2011), media studies in Germany, influenced by Kittler, have placed media as technology at the center, while scholars affiliating to what these authors call ‘the Anglo-American tradition’ have chosen to place media as the material result of thought and discourse. Perhaps, as they have suggested, the differences can be traced to Foucault, which could be read as placing either on discourse or on technology “the loci where knowledge is tied with cultural and social power” (Huhtamo and Parikka 2011, Kindle edition). In other words, when thinking of the relation between, on the one hand, culture and, on the other, media, we can either see media as a result of life and culture, or culture as a result of life AND media. Kittler, arguably, always chose this second option.

Anthropologists have, for decades, considered theoretical positions relatively similar to those of Kittler’s, even if less extreme. Kittler believed and argued that human knowledge is always the result of discourse networks, and that, before the advent of mechanical reproduction and electronic media, these networks systematically found expression in books and other technologies of coding (such as poems and songs, which were in fact, according to Kittler, mnemonic devices). Books, then, were systems of information coding and storage. The books and other written materials, in turn, necessarily had an impact on the thinking of those who read them and those who learned about them through others. Reading, pedagogy and the discussion of books are technologies, in the Foucauldian sense of mechanisms exerting effects over human consciousness. In this sense, the materiality of the books, as expression of discourse networks, to some extent conditioned the longevity of the coded discourse, and the development of newer discourse networks. Old, comprehensible codes, along with the new codes being developed, form the cultural context within which people understand the world (See Kittler 1990[1985] and 1999[1986]). We can recognize here, to some extent, Foucault’s concept of the episteme, and think of Benedict Anderson’s concept of print capitalism as somewhat related to Kittler’s technological view of writing and print. For Kittler, velocity and increased precision are the main driving forces for technological development: oral registers through mnemonics were slower and less exact than writing, which was slower and less precise than print. The advent of visual and sound recording, along with the development first

of typewriters, and later on, of computers, have made possible a more accurate coding and rendering of information.

Kittler is difficult to read, but his erudition and his detailed knowledge of many and very diverse technologies are mesmerizing. I have particularly enjoyed his constant references to fiction, popular music, films, poems and anecdotes from the lives of artists, writers and philosophers. I recommend his two books *Information Networks 1800/1900* and *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* as good starting points. *Information Networks 1800/1900* is a long essay on the idea of information coding, and in particular of reciting, reading and writing, as technologies. It also starts the discussion on recording and film as information devices. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* is an essay in three parts assembling a series of texts by other authors. These texts are most enjoyable, and they all register the wonder and impact of the new technologies, told by contemporary observers. While the section on film presents materials that have appeared often in other books and academic writings, the sections 'Typewriter' and 'Gramophone' are very engaging, informative and interesting for anyone working on media, music or information technologies. The section 'Typewriter' quickly moves from the impact of the typewriter on philosophy, fiction and academia, to descriptions of Turing machines, CPUs and ASCII.

A most striking under-argument running through *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* is the constant association of technologies with weapons, and technological development as a cycle that seems to take humanity constantly from peace to war and then from war to peace. The book ends with a description of the bombing of Hiroshima. Kittler's affinities with Thomas Pynchon and Paul Virilio become evident in this text: "Machines operating on the basis of recursive functions produce slow-motion studies not only of human thinking but also of human demise." In the last pages even fiction, in the form of spy novels spun to hide actual truths, becomes a war weapon. I wish Jussi Parikka during our seminar, and other theorists deriving their insights from Kittler's work elsewhere could comment more extensively on this dystopic side of Kittler's work, and on its implications for further theorizing in the field of media. Otherwise, future discussions could build upon Kittler's unexamined assumption that technological development is necessarily taking us to the end of history, understood as the final self-annihilation of humankind.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina
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Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (gabyvargasc@prodigy.net.mx)

Dear list, Thanks again to John, Steve, Phillip and Nina for their hard work to make this and other e-seminars possible. I have now received Jussi Parikka's response to my comments, which I paste here. Hope you all consider jumping in, so we can have a lively discussion.

Best,

Gabriela

Thank you Gabriela for the very insightful addition to my starting text – and indeed, thanks for letting me be part of this discussion!

You raise very good points, and give good insights; even reading Kittler is an experience; I think the reading experience reflects the methodology, of swiftly moving across arenas/disciplines/ from fiction to sciences. Hence, his way is indeed tracking a discourse network, which is an interesting concept. It is a translation from the German "Aufschreibesystem", literally: a system for writing down, an apparatus of inscription. This is adapted from his reading of D.P.Schreber's memoirs, but connotes also Kafka's Penal Colony short text: a punishment system which carves into the flesh the crime you did, literally inscribes it in you. This Schreber-Kafka-Nietzsche system is perhaps the best way to understand the "so-called-Man" of Kittler's...that we are constantly being inscribed into being in scientific, institutional and yes, military contexts.

This is often troubling for critics, his insistence on the importance of war. It's a strategic emphasis, that does not always bode well in relation to empirical evidence. He is keen to emphasize war as a driver for media technological development, which along broad lines we can see: think of the massive input into scientific R&D during WWII and how from that the computer gradually emerged! Well, besides that, he is keen to track the "inner life" of war as an experience emblematic of the modern anthropology of man (I am here using the term quite loosely, not being a trained anthropologist...); in a manner that Ernst Junger outlined, war is parallel to the other ways of mass mobilization of humans in modernity, from the factory to the experience in modern urban media contexts, to indeed war – a training of the senses, and drilling of the soul, to say it a bit more poetically.

When you say that perhaps Foucault was more interested in messages, I think German media

theorists from Kittler to Wolfgang Ernst (another media archaeologist) are keen to emphasize that Foucault already was less interested in messages – being a fierce critic of certain historical modes of knowledge – and more interested in infrastructures of knowledge, and discourse only through discursive, material practices. But it's his reliance indeed to the book, and archives in the traditional sense that bothered for instance Kittler; knowledge is not anymore inscribed only in books but in other media forms, as you outline: also technical media is now what offers for us the framework, conditions and epistemology of Man.

One more note:

one has to emphasize that we are so much discussing the earlier Kittler, still more famous – than the Kittler who talked more about love, erotics, and ancient Greece. Here we might find another kind of an emphasis, perhaps – but nothing less provocative. But I shall leave that only as a hint, and really looking forward how we can develop forward Kittler's weird media "anthropology" without the anthros...this is the best bit often; clashing disciplinary ideas, and using that clash to develop something new.

Cheers
Jussi

Mark Deuze (deuzemjp@yahoo.com)

dear Jussi, Gabriela, listers,

thanks for sharing this paper and the response(s)!

just a sidenote, inspired by the reference to Kafka's Penal Colony (which itself was a reflection of Schopenhauer's dismal view of life and the living if I am not mistaken):

Kafka's story can be read in dichotomous terms of man-machine inscription - or, as several folks have noticed, as a way of thinking about man becoming machine (and vice versa) - inasmuch the prisoner does when he or she becomes aware of what the machine is inscribing onto/into their body.

in other words: once we become aware what role materiality plays in the relationships between media and life, we inevitably find that we have completely fused with it.

such a 'vital materialism' is more than a synthesis of the idealism-materialism binary. and perhaps Kittler can be read as such?

yours sincerely,

Mark Deuze

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (gabyvargasc@prodigy.net.mx)

dear Mark

It could be argued that Kittler saw his own work as anti-humanist (see for example the interview on Theory, Culture and Society, <http://tcs.sagepub.com/content/23/7-8/17.abstract>. But we could (and should) consider Kittler's work away from his own ideas about what it meant and its full implications. Already, in *What's the Matter with the Internet *, Mark Poster has pointed out that Kittler is a romantic of media, and particularly of print media, and cannot (or could not, at this point) see beyond the media that 'constitute' him and his thinking.

I arrived at Kittler through Poster, and have found many of his ideas and examples intriguing and useful. For example, before reading Kittler I had never related the typewriter to the piano, but I found his suggestion most interesting and have pursued the search for literature that links them both. There seems to be no consensus, but at least historian Helga Nowotny sees a cultural (gendered) connection between the two:

http://books.google.com/books?id=ku_IbfMbKLMC&dq=piano+typewriter&source=gbs_navlinks_s.

The same has happened to me with references to spirits and the dead, and their possible manifestations through technology (after reading Kittler I have looked for and found entire books dedicated to this subject), or literature and particularly poetry as a form of knowledge-inscription (for example, Annie Proulx in *The Shipping News* suggest that seamen's songs contained accurate descriptions of Newfoundland's waters and their possible obstacles to boats).

I regret not being able to read German, because Kittler seems to have shifted his focus to questions more in the 'human' realm, such as love and eroticism. Jussi and others may have more to say on this facet of Kittler's, and hopefully they will here.

Jussi Parikka (jussi.parikka1976@gmail.com)

Dear Gabriela, Mark and others

just a brief note; hmm, was left thinking this interpretation of Kittler as romantic of print media, which to me, funnily enough combines two sides of him - and yet I believe Poster's characterisation does not entirely hit the nail on its head.

Firstly, he is romantic of media in the sense that he was trained as a romanticist - a typical graduate of germanistik, and working on Goethe, etc. But he started early on to focus on print media as, well, media - literature as media, something that was unheard of in those circles, and which lead to a lot of difficulties for him too. His take on print, and fine arts pre-technical media, was actually itself more influenced by his experiences with hardware and software and communication theory, than the other way round; the clearest formulation of this can be found in his *Optical Media* lectures, which propose rather anachronistically to approach past media through the "model" of Shannon and Weaver's non-semantic and mathematical theory!

Secondly, "the minimum precondition for this course was the ability to handle the Linux free c compiler 'gcc' with all flags and options on the command line." The words are Markus Krajewski's and reflect one of Kittler's courses from early 1990s. Kittler was more romantic of Linux than print media.

Indeed, still with Poster; when Poster seems to be saying that Kittler mourns the passing of the written word in the age of software, perhaps it is not the written word that is mourned so much as the access to production. If you are shielded off from "means of production" by a whole layer - for instance the graphical user interface which gradually hides the command line - you are left as a consumer of media. Kittler would not like this Marxian language I just used, but there is a funny similarity. In this sense he is a romanticist - but not of print media solely. There is an interesting point to be found in Kittler about technological competency that goes further than to literature. It goes to code as well as to hardware, to circuits as much as to the discourse networks that connected literature to technical media later.

As for that reflection bit that also Mark points towards; perhaps this is where McLuhan and Foucault are keys to Kittler; that what is closest to us is the imperceptible, the fish does not realize the water it is in, and technical media are already inside our heads in ways that make it difficult to find an outsider position - perhaps because such does not exist! Foucault had interesting ways to reroute "critique of the contemporary" through the past, and perhaps media archaeology works like that too? Although, Kittler himself denounced being a media archaeologist...

best wishes!
Jussi

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (gabyvargasc@prodigy.net.mx)

Hello all,

I just got the following note from Mark Poster:

Hi Gabriela, Jussi and others,

I cannot disagree with Jussi's statement except to say that, in characterizing Kittler as a romantic I was referring not to the corpus of his writing but only to "There is no software." And I meant it indicate the privilege he gives to the stand alone computer, continuing the tradition of the isolated writer. In other works Kittler analyzes the network and media in most interesting ways and I find most of his work invaluable for understanding media ecology.

Mark Poster

Jussi Parikka (jussi.parikka1976@gmail.com)

Hi Gabriela -- and thanks to Mark Poster!

Indeed, a good clarification, and makes sense; there is that romantic attitude towards the certain educated hacker-engineer-critic-figure which comes out across media in Kittler's approach; how the insistence on the lost text/authorship in *There is no software* translates to a surface-structure-level sort of understanding; and the idea how we need to dig deeper to get to the Source (and well, beyond source if we mean by it source code which is itself quite a surface level still). All this begs the question, if there is something very modern about Kittler's critical approach, where modern refers to a late 19th century mode of investigations from Nietzsche to Freud etc. (thinking of some epistemological frameworks of such thinkers).

Please pass on my thanks to Mark for his note!

best wishes
Jussi

Mark Pedelty (pedeltmh@umn.edu)

Thanks, Jussi, for the engaging and thought-provoking paper, and Gabriela for the insightful response. My apologies if I am jumping the gun; not sure if the floor is open for discussion, but will jump in nonetheless. Swore I was going to just add a question, but the preamble took over.

I was very intrigued by Gabriela's comments regarding Kittler's dystopian sense of media tech and the potential end of human agency, if not humanity in general. Despite decades of dealing with culture as a superorganic phenomenon (Kroeber's word choice), it is odd but accurate that it has become somewhat taboo to consider such theories, the idea that structures beyond human control overdetermine who and what we are as individuals and collectivities, even as a species (*homo digitalis*, etc.).

I wonder if that is partly due to the synchronic lens of cultural anthropology? Archaeologists, with their diachronic view of large scale social phenomena are more likely to recognize the patterning effects of institutions and ideologies far beyond the scope, scale, or control of individual or even collective human groups. The way you engage the "archeological" (in the Foucauldian sense) and empirical (archeology in the more literal sense?) of Kittler's work really helps us to understand his struggles to accommodate both a progressive view of humanity and the sneaking suspicion--made overt in his case--that it was increasingly irrelevant to how the world actually exists and functions.

It is a particularly difficult conundrum for those of us in the Left who want to imagine more egalitarian, just, and sustainable alternatives--emphasizing the role and potential of human agency--but also one of the reasons why matters of scale and power need to be considered, rather than side-stepped. For me, that is one of the valuable aspects of Kittler's work (and McLuhan, the oddly optimistic mirror to Kittler) when it comes to media and mediation. It is in facing such conundrums that new, and sometimes better, ideas tend to develop. Yet, I confess to being the technological pessimist. I would prefer to believe that communication tech were still human prosthetics (in the McLuhan sense), which implies human agency and control, but I fear that the reverse has been true

for some time. We are Borg. The human being's capacity for successfully accepting whatever system of enculturation we "belong" to-- including serving the needs of modern machines (corporations, cap states, global markets, media tech) through the faithful adoption of appropriate beliefs, institutional talking points, and behaviors--is truly remarkable.

A good anthropological read in this tradition is Jules Henry's prescient book, *Culture Against Man* (sic). Henry was way ahead of his time in linking the "pecuniary philosophy" of contemporary culture to tech, including entertainment tech, and work. As for popular culture, a good skit to illustrate the human conundrum is in Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, where Brian tells his followers: "You are all individuals," to which they obediently reply, in perfect unison, "We are all individuals!" One final voice replies: "I'm not."

Thanks for taking media anthropology into this taboo territory. Much of the discipline is still somewhat enamored by village-level assumptions of culture, creativity, and agency. Even when very well drawn and accurate in the interpersonal, community frame, I find myself wondering if some media anthropology is more simulation than explanation (ethnography as Epcot?). There is a palpable fear of invoking larger scale systems for fear of treading on sacred cultural ground, where we collectively agree, against fairly depressing evidence, that humans are still in control of their individual and collective destinies. Above all, your essay re Kittler asks us to expand our vision, regardless of media/tech perspective. It would be good to get to more accurate and holistic truths via critical ecology (a good model **for** the world), but I suspect Kittler's conundrum is more accurate as a model **of** the world.

Question: What do you see as the relationship between McLuhan and Kittler's theories of mediation?

Thanks, Jussi and Gabriela, for the nourishing brain food.

Regards,

Mark

Daniel Taghioff (danieltaghioff@yahoo.com)

Dear Mark and List

I need to post a response to a response, as I am not directly familiar with Kittler's work, but more so with debates on social agency.

Surely there is a problem with un-historicised approaches to social agency? The balance between determination by infrastructure or by the dynamics of the economy and determination by something that more resembles collective choice cannot be something that is invariate for human societies over time, can it?

So yes, it is important not to confuse village scale agency (to follow a phrase) with larger-scale

forms of agency, and yes it is important to take on board the persistence and momentums of social systems, but it is still, to paraphrase, to a great extent people who make history (if not their conditions), even if they do not always know the consequences of their choices, hence the environmental concept of the Anthropocene, the age where humans shape the biosphere.

Is this not a larger scale debate that takes on some of the issues on debates of Habitus? The central problem with Habitus is that once you know you are doing it, is it still a habit? You can say that institutions, infrastructure, your practical position within hegemony (you need to pay the mortgage etc...) constrain you even if you know what you are doing, but then these constraints are born of a collective habitus and set of infrastructures, where the same questions of awareness and the possibilities of shaping choices arise.

So is there any space within Kittler's work for people to become aware of the practices/habitus/infrastructures they are implicated with?

Rosa Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (rosa_gabriela_vargas-cetina@brown.edu)

Thank you, Mark and Daniel, for these excellent contributions. Yes, as you both point out, in anthropology we seem to be stuck at the village level in terms of thinking of agency. After the exchange with Jussi and Mark Poster (thank you, Prof. Poster!) I was left thinking of technoromanticism, as it was present not only in Goethe's **Faust** and Junger's **Heliopolis** and **Eumesville** (the only things I've ever read by Kittler's beloved authors), but also in M. McLuhan's **Gutenberg Galaxy** and **Understanding Media**.

Kittler makes me think of technology as a kind of stand-alone demiurge, which to some extent resembles Latour's actants: something that has agency at some level and influences human thought and action. While for Kittler 'technology' is the demiurge, Latour sees small things and small appliances taking on a life of themselves. Thinking specifically of the current debate around free access to academic journals, it is difficult to think of technology outside culture and ideology, either as an actant or as a stand-alone ontological force. Rather, the (collective) agency elements of online publication come from very cultural and harshly economic circumstances.

If the open and free access to all academic journals online view triumphs in the US and Europe, we will probably end up with a scenario where only those journals being able to afford keeping an internet presence will be online, while thousands of small journals will disappear from the internet. Scientists calling for completely free access understand this, and point to the fact that they only read and publish on major journals. Most of my favourite journals are not popular enough to command the regular, expensive support that would make it possible for them to be online outside the 'commercial aggregators'. To begin with, anthropology as a discipline does not have a high demand in terms of journal circulation (media studies, although a younger field, tends to have broader appeal than anthropology). Then we have the fact that anthropology's sub-fields are really minoritarian within that minority.

The existence of the technology to have online journals, then, does not necessarily mean that we will have all journals (or even a few journals) online. What would be the implications of having

only a few journals online, around the world? What would that do in terms of the constant challenge to hegemonic paradigms? How to think of online journal-related technology in terms of coding devices, if not through some kind of Darwinian model? There are, fortunately, other models. In the EU all European academic journals circulate within a shared university platform, across all European universities. In Latin America most journals online offer free access to their articles, but this is only possible because the universities and departments that publish them fully subsidize their publication online, and the journal aggregator engines are also subsidized, either by universities or governments, or some combination of UNESCO funds, public funding and university subsidy.

So, we would have to think of COLLECTIVE agency as a way to think of agency at all, today; if it was left to technology itself as a demiurge, we would not even have to have these kinds of debates or considerations. So, yes, I find Kittler's approach very modern, in the sense of a romantic conceptualization of technology (which comes to show that for me and for many others, perhaps including Jussi, 'modern' has a very romantic tinge), but I also find the debates on 'agency' very romantic and, as you say, rooted in village imagery. I think that agency in the 20th and 21st centuries has to be seen from the point of view of COLLECTIVE agency, even if, as Daniel points out, it is an agency we are not aware of. Some of us may consider these forms of agency 'bad agency', as when Canadian corporations decide to explode glaciers in the Arctic to get to the mineral riches underneath. I guess that in anthropology we don't have a good way to understand 'agency' outside 'what is understood as individual agency'. As we know, many cultures have no concept of individual agency, so maybe we can all take Kittler's writings as a reminder that our wishful thinking is just that. Where technology is going to take us (paid access vs. Free access to journals, in this case) is a COLLECTIVE decision. Maybe in anthropology we should think of 'we' as a noun we have NO control over, and start forgetting about individual choice. Which also begs the question: What are the cultural and global windows for individual choice? I think we are beginning to get to the anthropological questions.

Gabriela

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Dear All,

It's now Thursday so a little more than halfway through the e-seminar. We are, as always, having that lull in the middle of the seminar as people try to digest what's been said and figure out how to frame their own thoughts. I've been very impressed with the discussion so far and once again find myself feeling slightly out of my depth on the topic. I, like many people, I suspect, had never read anything by Kittler and didn't know that much about his contribution, so it's been a great opportunity for me to expand my understanding in this area. So with that admission of ignorance, I wonder if I might make a quick comment and query about one direction of the discussion.

Gabriela's latest comment on free and open access digital journals may pose a threat to journals dedicated to minority disciplines (and the even more minoritarian sub-disciplines). There is a certain compelling argument there, but I wonder if what we might be looking at is a shift in how

scholars in smaller disciplines wind up communicating. My students read blogs the way I read journals and while there are lots of blogs out there that are thoroughly respectable and have very high standards, I persistently scold students for citing blogs in their essays. I tell them that they must learn the revered canon of our discipline, but if much of the productive research is being disseminated outside of journals using not only ICT, but different formats for representing the research, then perhaps there will come a time when the revered canon isn't found in journals at all. I don't read Aristotle on a scroll, after all, and I certainly am not prepared to sit under a tree for endless discussions of Plato. Forgive me if those flippant examples are historically inaccurate, but you get my point-- journals are a particular way of disseminating knowledge which have served us rather well and for which we have all been trained and socialised into respecting. We are busily trying to replicate the journal experience online, but perhaps that's a mistake. At the AAA in Montreal last year, Gustaaf Hautmann (editor of AT who I am sure needs no introduction) gave me an impassioned explanation for why PDFs were an obsolete technology when it comes to intellectual exchange. It's trying to reproduce the satisfaction of hardcopy and the illusion of authorial coherence, when new intellectual productions were not only possible but happening all around us. So not only are journals possibly under threat, but ideas about authorship and what constitutes collaboration might also be fundamentally changed as a result of the technological changes.

If I could try to relate that back to Jussi's paper, I wonder if it would be fair to suggest that Kittler's point about the mediatic conditioning of the way we see, think, dream, memorise, hallucinate and so on is at play here. We are conditioned to receive our scholarly work via not only certain media, but the constraints of prior media which is not necessarily relevant anymore. Just to illustrate this, I am the editor (with Paul Sant Cassia) of *History and Anthropology*, a journal that exists both on and offline but conforms to our expectations. It's not open access and it's not free, but I'm very proud of what it's done over the years. I am a managing editor of *Structure and Dynamics*, which is open access and free and is published by the University of California Press. The peer review processes are very similar and I would say they are comparable in terms of quality, though deal with very different subject matter. We do have a loose idea of volumes and issues with *Structure and Dynamics*, but we publish journals as they are accepted and we don't concern ourselves with page limitations and certainly don't care how many images or simulations or any other add ons authors may want to include. With *History and Anthropology* we are having to move into a bifurcated world of the online version and the off line version. In the offline version page numbers are pretty serious and we have to fit within a range for each issue and for each volume. As a result, we've had to impose a strict upper word limit and we have to be careful about images. We are using the online 'companion' to the journal to include things like audio interviews (well, we've done one, but the plan is to expand this), and have colour photos and offer things that aren't economically viable with the offline version. I think both journals are actually pretty safe for the time being, but I am starting to see a time when the mediatic conditioning of scholars assume research should be presented might mean that *History and Anthropology* (offline) will look as cumbersome and a 19th century book with no index-- so we'll still be using these things for a long time, but we may find that they are just more work than they're worth much of the time.

Best,
Steve

Rosa Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (rosa_gabriela_vargas-cetina@brown.edu)

hello list,

I agree with Steve that we have other possibilities for scholarly publishing. After all, I live in a country where we have chosen NOT to make a commercial business out of academia. In Mexico we are all intent on putting our own efforts into making academic work in journals freely accessible to everyone, and not only academics. We all pay for it, whether reviewing papers, suggesting other reviewers and in general running the journals for free, while our universities pay for the servers, the digitizing and indexing, plus the personnel to run the journals and the upkeep of the databases. We don't think of journals as a profit-making or even as a keeping-afloat proposition. We've just accepted that journals are expensive and they need to be subsidized. It is like agriculture in the European Community: you accept it has to be subsidized and work under that assumption. Now, the drawback is that if your university (or agriculture Ministry in the EU) cannot subsidize a particular product (or journal in our case) this one will die.

Also, I have been thinking of completely other publishing options. It will take some time for them (blogs and such) to be accepted but in the end the process seems irreversible. Now, does it have to do with technology per se or does it have to do with collective choice and the possibility of exerting the consequences of collectively-held values at any given point in time? Here is where the connection with Kittler lies: technological change, according to anthropology, would be tied to cultural choices. Technology as a demiurge, as in Kittler's writings, would probably determine those choices to begin with. Which is which? (and I should probably add here, According to who?).

Mark Pedelty (pedelthm@umn.edu)

"Media determine our situation" -- Friedrich Kittler

<goog_1269662396>

"It has become appallingly obvious that our technology has exceeded our humanity." -- Albert Einstein

"The most important and urgent problems of the technology of today are no longer the satisfactions of the primary needs or of archetypal wishes, but the reparation of the evils and damages by the technology of yesterday." --
Dennis Gabor

Excellent point, Gabriela. And, by the way, congrats on not going the business route with journals and academia as a whole in Mexico. The corporatization of U.S. universities is truly disgusting, all done under the false banner of "we have no choice." Given the handful of people involved in higher ed in any given nation, there are other choices for them/us to make. However, those of us in the dissent keep losing that particular debate.

However, here is where we might return to the question of scale. A relatively small group of

academics in any nation choosing to fund journals one way or another is on an entirely different matter than the larger scale structures of communication, technologies, and forms of mediation Kittler deals with (or Anderson's arg re printing press and nation-state, or McLuhan's focus on mediated change).

Take road systems. Journalists do a fine job of reducing agency to a few actors making choices that reduce later options--such as car companies buying up rail concessions--but in truth it is more often a matter of relatively compliant bodies working within relatively limited parameters set by institutional inertia. Even CEO's fail to direct such systems. Hardly anyone explicitly chose to create the car culture, and very few opt out now. Or, take climate change and flight. I continue to marvel at how even the most committed climate scientists and activists jump into jets and engage in perhaps the worst possible activity when it comes to climate change. Ask them/us why and they/we provide a range of excuses that boil down to "very little choice." Ethnographically, that is how I experienced war correspondents. On the micro scale, and during initial interviews, they claimed ultimate freedom to report events any way they would so choose. Asked about their own news stories, stories that ran counter their professed perspectives during our interviews, suddenly all of the limiting and conditioning structures started to come into evidence: organizational hierarchies ("the editor requires...", owners, job goals and hiring criteria), ideologies, checkbook exigencies, advertising subsidies setting the parameters of permissible discourse, training and enculturation, and so on.

In short, the smaller scale the view, the more I agree with the relatively balanced, chicken-and-the-egg model that views cultural choice and structural developments as reciprocal and mutually constituting. However, the larger the scale, the less explanatory cultural choice becomes. Kittler has focused more on large scale technological change and related broad scale discourses. One value of anthropology is to show such theorists that world systems are much more variegated than they might imagine ("It does not work like that among the X people."), but we might also have to concede that the existence of great diversity in the ethnographic lens does not undo the fact of patterning on larger scales of reference. Cultural choice, even in the aggregate, does not explain the global spread of cell phones, for example, as much as available tech, infrastructure, and compulsion. Opting out is theoretically possible, and some do, but that prosthetic is found to the ear of almost everyone on the planet that can afford one. When Kittler opened his book on gramophones and film by stating "Media determine our situation," he probably knew he was overstating the case. Nevertheless, I would argue that the truth lies somewhere between that linear model of overdetermination and one more reliant on cultural choice.

Having written two overly long comments, I promise to now hang up and take my answer off the air. :)

Regards,

Mark

Daniel Taghioff (danieltaghioff@yahoo.com)

Hi

These debates on scale and the relationship between what we know and control, and what by contrast has an often highly mediated life (or at least inertia) of its own are very interesting.

The questions that are raised by this, for me, are very much about what are the appropriate ways to investigate such things?

Does Kittler's theoretical approach have any methodological implications for Media Anthropology? Are there ways of approaching scale that are suggested by this?

On a different but related note I came across the following article in the Financial Times about the quantification of Financial Markets which spoke very much to similar themes.

<http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/2/0664cd92-6277-11e1-872e-00144feabdc0.html#axzz1on0Q82r4>

This actually opens up questions about how methodologies actually become part of the object of study (quantitative methods become part of the operation of markets).

Is there a Kittlerian approach to how academic studies and means of knowing more generally become part of the "machine"?

Daniel

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Dear All,

I just wanted to alert everyone to the imminent close of the e-seminar discussing Jussi's paper on Kittler. Our e-seminars run for two weeks and believe it or not, we're almost there. We will close the e-seminar on Tuesday 13 March in the evening, so any last minute comments anyone has should probably come in soon. That will give others a chance to think about the queries and comments and form a sensible response.

Thanks to all who have contributed so far and looking forward to a few more comments, possibly from people who have never contributed before!

Best,
Steve

Jussi Parikka (jussi.parikka1976@gmail.com)

Hi

this is a really interesting question where Kittler's approach for sure has implications; the idea that knowledge is already by definition born as part of a mediatic regime, or conditioned by technological apparatuses, systems, etc., already implies this set of questions having to do with

power, even if Kittler did not argue it from it always from such an explicit position (that people let's say closer to for instance political economy might do). 'Our writing tools are guiding our thoughts', (an inaccurate quotation of one of the often mentioned Kittler quotes -- that comes from Nietzsche) was worked by K into a wider set of theoretical openings, also relevant to an anthropological perspective, I would say. It has implications for the questions of openness and power networks (Kittler has a nice little text on Open Science in the Wendy Chun & Thomas Keenan collection New Media, Old Media), and for me, Kittler's approach resonates with something that Latour might agree with; for knowledge to be sustained as a "fact" it has to be produced in a set/assemblage of techniques, practices, and settings. From high tech to the seemingly simpler set of media technologies of knowledge, as for instance in earlier writing systems from pens to printing presses, we are dealing with the specifics of how knowledge gets worked into a fact (Latour: matters of fact born from matters of concern).

Perhaps Kittler indeed needs this little spark of media anthropology to be worked into a set of methodologies that tracks such assemblages...

The reference to quantitative methods and markets is really interesting, and we could extend to even wider research agendas -- like with the birth of artificial life sciences and their relation to complexity theories and their relation to epistemologies of finance capitalism!

best!
Jussi

Rosa Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (rosa_gabriela_vargas-cetina@brown.edu)

"Perhaps Kittler indeed needs this little spark of media anthropology to be worked into a set of methodologies that tracks such assemblages... "

Thank you, Jussi, for your opening paper, and for that hopeful endnote. Thanks to all who participated publically and also to those who wrote to any of us to comment on what we were posting. All best, everyone,

Gabriela

Stephen Lyon (S.M.Lyon@durham.ac.uk)

Dear Medianth List Members,
Thanks very much to Jussi for giving us such an interesting paper to think through over the past two weeks and of course to Gabriela for taking on the vital role of discussant. Thanks also to everyone who contributed to the discussion. I certainly learned a lot from this paper and will be digging a bit more into Kittler in the near future.

Sadly, I must declare this e-seminar officially closed now. The transcript of this e-seminar

discussion will soon makes its way up on the website and either Philipp, Nina or I will be sending round the link to let you know when that's ready.

Best,
Steve