



SPECIAL SECTION ON FRIEDRICH KITTLER
(1943–2011)

INTRODUCTION

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Friedrich Kittler died on October 18, 2011. It is on the occasion of the first anniversary of his death that *Cultural Politics* presents this special section. Our aim is to expand on the knowledge of Kittler's work by focusing on aspects that have been of less importance in the anglophone reception of his work.

Once scholars achieve a certain degree of fame or notoriety, they inevitably gravitate toward interviews and published lectures. There are more invitations to speak and more requests to comment on things of public interest, no matter how closely (or not) they are related to their work. Kittler was no exception. As Larson Powell notes, it is not the least of ironies that a thinker so concerned with technological media should have reverted to orality. Indeed, during the last decade of his life the oral format became an expedient outlet for Kittler and an equally valuable resource for his followers. He was an outspoken interviewee who never wasted the reader's time with carefully balanced statements, and the esoteric, highly complex nature of his final project—the envisaged tetralogy *Musik und Mathematik* (*Music and Mathematics*) (of which only the two parts of the first volume were published in his lifetime)—made it all the more necessary and welcome to present certain aspects in a more accessible format.

The core of this special section are two lectures that Kittler delivered as part of the prestigious Mosse Lecture Series held at Humboldt University in Berlin in honor of the German American historian George Lachmann Mosse (1918–99). For obvious reasons, one of the topics of the 2002 series was the war on terror. Kittler’s essay “Of States and Their Terrorists”—hitherto only translated into Swedish—was flanked by contributions by Étienne Balibar and Martin van Creveld, among others. The lectures in the summer of 2007, in turn, were dedicated to “Odysseys.” Less topical than terror, the theme was of great personal importance to Kittler, given that Homer’s work and its recursions through history were a significant part of his *Musik und Mathematik* project.

We indicated above that lectures tend to present difficult subject matter in a more accessible way. Here, too, Kittler occasionally breaks the mold. Especially his lecture “In the Wake of the *Odyssey*” presents formidable problems to listeners, readers, and—above all—translators. We are therefore including two companion pieces, Geoffrey Winthrop-Young’s “Hunting a Whale of a State” and Powell’s “Excursions and Recursions,” which are designed to engage Kittler’s lectures on terrorism and the *Odyssey*, respectively. Their goal is to both explain and challenge the peculiar one-sided richness that is the hallmark of Kittler’s work. Further contributions include some personal impressions by Winthrop-Young of Kittler in his Freiburg glory days (“Well, What Socks Is Pynchon Wearing Today?”) and an interview conducted by Christoph Weinberger (“The Cold Model of Structure”) in which Kittler—not without a number of characteristically pithy put-downs—looks back on his work.

While Kittler occasionally expressed his belief that there were certain aspects of bygone discourse networks he had analyzed so thoroughly that there was nothing left to say, he never saw himself issuing final words on our current technological habitat. It is fitting, therefore, to conclude with Sebastian Franklin’s contribution “Cloud Control, or the Network as Medium,” which goes beyond Kittler—or, rather, which takes Kittler forward into technologies he himself did not have the opportunity to deal with. Franklin follows Kittler’s analogy between Greek origins (or metaphors) and current technology but proposes a political reading of computer technology distinct from Kittler’s. Finally, Franklin’s essay tackles that complete virtualization and invisibility of current media technology against which Kittler’s own Hellenic vision of immediate erotic presence may have been a reaction.

On behalf of *Cultural Politics* and Duke University Press we would like to thank Weinberger and Franklin for their contributions. We are especially grateful to Susanne Holl for granting the permission to translate and publish Kittler’s texts.