Unpublished notes from the symposium
Kate Southworth

The Media Matters symposium took place at the end of June and it has taken this long to gather my thoughts sufficiently well to make some useful comments on the event. At first, I thought my inability to write a coherent text was due to a lack of understanding of the finer points of complex media theory, but over the last couple of weeks I have stopped feeling quite so inadequate and begun to shift the blame elsewhere. In fact, I think it's Friedrich Kittler's fault. In his keynote lecture at Tate Modern the German media theorist whose breathtaking intellectual acrobatics weave together theoretical and methodological moves from Derrida, Foucault, Lacan and Mcluhan - was searching for love.

The Media Matters symposium opened with an introduction to the work of Friedrich Kittler from Steven Connor. He explained that in the early 1980s when 'signifiers, écriture, grammatology, and discursive regimes' were first being talked about, it occurred to only a few to see connections between the revolutionary arguments of Foucault, Derrida and Lacan and the simultaneous revolutions that were beginning to take place in the fields of information and communications technologies. He suggested that one of the few people to make connections across these areas of research was Friedrich Kittler in *Discourse Networks 1800/1900* (1985) and in its sequel and expansion, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* of the following year. In these texts, Kittler showed how the study of the internal structure of discourses and representational practices could be related to the material forms in which such discourses were stored, filtered, accessed and distributed. As Steven Connor suggested, 'the inside of discourse was now unthinkable without thinking its outside'.

The keynote lecture and performance by Friedrich Kittler with Joulia Strauss and Martin Carlé followed. For me, this was the oddest part of the symposium, and the part to which I keep returning. Imagine the womb-like interior of the Starr Auditorium at Tate Modern; the lights are dimmed, an image of naked women typical of the unreconstructed 1960s is projected, and Friedrich Kittler enters stage left to the sound of 'And The Gods Made Love', the first track on *Electric Ladyland* by Jimi Hendrix. The music fades and Kittler speaks: "Sweet ladies, gentlemen. A simple double question here in Swinging London as it was called four decades ago. Two questions: What does it mean 'Electric Ladyland' and why should the Gods make love?

For many years Professor Kittler has written on the iterative relationship between media technologies and warfare, but as he told us on Friday night, some recent 'sudden event, an inspiration' made him redirect his thinking from warfare towards love. But, 'speaking on love [...]

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proves to be much more difficult than on war'. To find an appropriate framework within which to think love, Kittler shifts his attention (albeit temporarily) from computers and contemporary media technologies to the media before 'media' – to the media of the ancient Greeks. The relationship between the emergence of the discrete media of *Gramaphone, Film and Typewriter* and Jacques Lacan's articulation within psychoanalysis of the Real, Imaginary and Symbolic registers is central to Kittler's thesis, and continues to be of the utmost significance to our understanding of the computer's ability to incorporate all media via its 0s and 1s. In the alpha-numeric Greek Alphabet Kittler identifies a single inscription system capable of encoding poetry, music and mathematics, and through which, for example, we can still hear the poet Sappho calling to Aphrodite the Goddess of erotic love. Sappho composed her poem in the meadows surrounding one of Aphrodite's temples - a magical environment full of sun, flowers and fragrances. To bring back the sound of Aphrodite's meadows Kittler invites us to listen with him to *Grantchester Meadows* by Pink Floyd. He then tells us that the young Alan Turing lay down in Grantchester Meadows as he finished writing his mathematical PhD thesis: the implication being, I think, that the birth of the computer was overseen by Aphrodite herself. Because ultimately, Kittler believes that the computer's 0s and 1s are the contemporary equivalent of the ancient Greek alphabet able to melt together previously discrete media. Now we (like the ancient Greeks) have a single system with which to encode and decode our world.

My difficulties with Kittler's keynote are concerned not with his turn to sexual love and his desire to call to the erotic Aphrodite, nor that he identifies the computer as the meta inscription system of 21st century, but rather that his thinking is overly-restricted within a phallic framework. A phallic framework attempts to incorporate everything into its logic and ruthlessly devalues and rejects that which doesn't or won't comply to its rules. For me, Kittler's latest work is important in that it calls attention to the emergence of the computer as the meta inscription system of the 21st century and as demarcating the parameters of a new symbolic register. However, given that much of my work is rooted in Bracha Ettinger's Matrixial theory that offers an immensely timely critique of the phallic as the only prism through which to understand the symbolic register, then I find his position limited. Whilst further discussion is outside the scope of this commentary, it seems to me that like Jacques Lacan, Friedrich Kittler knows there is something in the nothing; he hopes to find something in his calls to Aphrodite, but his logic refuses precisely that which he is seeking.

Professor Kittler left the stage and Joulia Strauss dressed a little like a cat, and Martin Carlé enter. Illustrating the powerful inscription system that was the ancient Greek alphabet their performance weaves together mathematics, music and poetry. Joulia demonstrates archaic singing accompanied by notes played on a reconstructed ancient Greek lyre with Supercollider extension. Martin commented on historical, theoretical, philosophical and formal aspects of Ancient Greek music and mathematics. They then presented the Cat Notation system that (as far as I could understand) relates the physical qualities of animals to different tonalities used in the Ancient Greek notation system. They talk mathematics and music with passion and with jokes. As

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an illustration of Kittler's ideas, the performance's overlaying of mathematics, music and poetry created one type of space within which the relationships between them could be thought.

The next part of the Media Matters symposium was organised around three themes, following the structure of Kittler's *Gramaphone, Film, Typewriter* text of 1985 and engaging the relationships between these media and Lacan's Real, Imaginary and Symbolic registers. In each session a pair of speakers were invited to engage with the notions of sound, visual and writing technologies respectively. What follows are very brief comments on some of the ideas presented by the speakers.

Gramaphone (chaired by Aura Satz)

Steven Conor
Explaining that the title of the book that appeared in English as *Discourse Networks* had the title *Aufschribesystem* in German, Steven Connor talked us through Kittler's interest in the genealogy of inscription systems. He explained that Aufschribesystem translates literally as 'a writing down system' and is a phrase taken by Kittler from *Memoirs of My Nervous Illness*, the book in which Daniel Paul Schreber (1842-1911) provides a detailed account of his own personal and very delusional system. Keeping notebooks over many years, Schreber wrote down all the thoughts and phrases that entered his mind; all the possessions he ever owned and all the people with whom he ever came into contact. (Sounds like Twitter to me)! Kittler recognises in Schreber's delusional system an indication of the historical shift from writing as the system of inscription to others that emerged in the technologies that allowed the storage and manipulation of words, sound and moving images.

John Durham Peters
John Durham Peters' paper provided a broad contexualisation of Kittler's work on acoustic media, focusing on the 'Gramaphone' chapter in *Gramaphone, Film, Typewriter*, and on Kittler's recent work on mathematics and music, yet to be translated into English. Addressing obstacles to the reception of Kittler's work for English speaking audiences, Durham Peters discussed Kittler's approach to the human and the humanities. He pointed to the ways in which Kittler believes humans are side effects of technological systems and noted Kittler's scorn for those who 'lament the quantification of the world'. For Kittler, time is central to what it is to be human, and he understands time as 'a rhythm that is counted'. Durham Peters reminded us that although Kittler seeks the 'truth' in his work, he never dismisses the 'erotic sixth sense', arguing that 'humans may be copying machines but thanks to Aphrodite, we're not'. Turning to the recent work on mathematics and music, Durham Peters discussed Kittler's interest in the uniqueness of the ancient Greeks, and his identification of the alphabet as the source of that uniqueness. A forerunner to the computer, the ancient Greek alphabet as primal medium melts together image, writing and number. For Kittler, the computer once again creates a universal alphabet, but this time it is made up of 0s and 1s.

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Film (Chaired by Kate Southworth)

Caroline Bassett

Confessing to having one foot in that 'rather quaint discipline' of cultural studies (as Friedrich Kittler once called it), Caroline Bassett argued for an understanding of our contemporary condition in relation to both the technological systems of control and to the experiential of the human. Drawing together work on narrative and new media, she explored the ever-changing relationship between the 'shaping force of human experience' and 'the material force of the digital'. Discussing Kittler's writing that question the relevance of looking to human experience or language as a means of understanding what is ordering our contemporary world, Bassett proposed that we might consider a middle ground between temporality of technologies as material orderings of movement and temporal flows of subjective experience'. Exploring how such a middle ground might emerge, she contrasted cinema and mobile screens by considering the materiality of the technology and the experiences of users.

Alexander R. Galloway

Weaving a route from painting to the computer via photography and film, Alex Galloway spoke of the human desire for nearness: for proximity with the world. Referencing Stanley Cavell's *The World Viewed,* Galloway notes that our attempts to satisfy this desire for nearness through medial forms such as cinema, photography and computers are not wholly satisfied. Galloway suggests that for the world to be brought near to us cinematically, one must erase oneself, whilst to be in relation with the world informatically, one must erase the world. He argued that rather than persisting to frame our understanding of computers metaphysically it might be interesting to think of computers as remediating metaphysics itself. Although he is acknowledged that there may be flaws in this line of argument, he continued his challenge to metaphysics and ontology by suggesting that the computer 'does not facilitate or make reference to an arrangement of being, but rather remediates the very conditions of being itself'. He concluded by proposing that if the computer could not be defined ontologically, then maybe it could be better understood in terms of ethics and politics: that is 'in terms of a practice or a set of executions or actions in relation to a world'.

Typewriter (Chaired by Tim Armstrong)

Mark Hansen

Rather than characterising the shift from writing to computation as a shift from the symbolic register to the real as is often done, Mark Hansen proposed that it is more accurate think the shift as being from one symbolic register to another. Drawing on his own recent writings on

'time' he proposed that we consider symbolic orderings at temporal scales beyond those characteristic of human perception. In other words he made the bold move of proposing that humans are not the sole correlate of the symbolic. The human-centred symbolic of writing that is correlated with natural language is now joined by the purely machinic symbolic of the computer which is correlated with computable or finite numbers. Although distinct from each other, and although each demarcates a distinct temporal scale - human experiential temporalisation and computational temporalisation – because both belong to a broader cosmological process 'they do not and cannot relate to one another in a model of simple exclusivity'.

Pam Thurschwell
Pam Thurschwell began by asking we might think about the typewriter in the discourse network of 1900 both in terms of the human operater – the woman who works the machine – and the machine itself. Referencing recent films and novels she considered the role of the writer and (usually) his typewriter – human operator and machine – and the relationship between them. Is the human typewriter the 'indespensible alter-ego' of the writer, 'or his supplement'? Does the human typewriter mediate the process of writing so effectively that she becomes 'such an efficient prosthesis' she becomes invisible? Detailing two recent novels - Michiel Heyns' The Typewriter's Tale and Cynthia Ozik's short story Dictation, which both consider fictionalised relationships between Henry James and his typewriter. Focusing on the secretary rather than James, both books explore less the question of authorship, instead preferring to emphasise 'questions of women, labour and class'.

The panels were followed by an informal conversation between Friedrich Kittler and Anthony Moore. Then we moved to the East Room at Tate Modern for a presentation of audio, video and text works curated Seth Kim-Cohen. The exhibition brought together eleven international artists responding in various ways to Kittler's ideas.

Artists:
Jarrod Fowler, -ion as Rhythm (2008)
Richard Mosse, Untitled (Ireland) (2007)
John Lely, Precision Sonics (2005)
Petrova Giberson She Loves Everything (2008)
Seth Kim-Cohen, Mise En Collision (2008)
Julian Rosefeldt, Lonely Planet (2006)
Aliza Shvarts Epist (2008)
Dexter Sinister: Blazon 4 Moholy-Nagy (2008)
Lytle Shaw & Jimbo Blachly, At the Family Manor, The Chadwicks Demonstrate the Golden-Age Microbrewery with a Rendition of Jacob Cats (2008)

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