

# Media Theory and Cultural Technologies



# Media Theory and Cultural Technologies:

*In Memoriam  
Friedrich Kittler*

Edited by

Maria Teresa Cruz

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## FOREWORD

This collection results from a selection of the contributions presented at the international conference “Cultural Technologies and Media Arts”, co-organized by the Goethe Institut in Portugal and the Research Center in Communication and Language of the New University of Lisbon. The purpose behind this initiative was recognizing the importance media theory has assumed for the understanding of human experience and culture, in its broader sense, especially under the influence of Friedrich Kittler (1943-2011), and promoting the discussion of new contributions to this area, which added concepts like cultural techniques and operativity to the concept of materialities, central to a post-structuralist media theory, through essays like the ones by Bernhard Siegert, Sybille Krämer and Peter Weibel. The transformations brought about by the introduction of the computer in the plane of relations between our mind, our memory, our body and our senses, and the way these are reflected in our actions, productivity and thought are both the direct and indirect horizon of the reflections presented in this volume. Also in this respect, it pays tribute to the paths opened up by Friedrich Kittler, which lead to a profound reflection around digital culture and its archaeology in western culture.

I thank the support given to this initiative by Lisbon’s Goethe Institut and the Research Center in Communication and Language, and in particular, to Dr. Joachim Bernauer and Dr. Claudia Hahn-Raabe, the collaboration for its conception and organization to Maria Augusta Babo and José Gomes Pinto and the complicity in its execution to Adriana Martins, Manuel Bogalheiro, Carlos Natálio, Catarina Patrício and Jorge Rodrigues. For the work of translation and invaluable support given in the editing of these texts, I also thank Rui Azevedo and Francisco Lima Soares.

Lisbon, December 2014  
Maria Teresa Cruz





# CHAPTER ONE

## AFTER THE MEDIA: THE TEXTILITY OF CULTURAL TECHNIQUES

### BERNHARD SIEGERT

#### 1. Media After Kittler

Since Friedrich Kittler left this world in October 2011, numerous conferences and obituaries have been dedicated to the discussion of his legacy. The question of the past and the future of the so-called media is in this context of particular interest – especially with regard to the discipline of media studies, which is still developing, or already vanishing again. *After* Kittler, the meaning of media history as well as the necessity of media theory is on trial. The double meaning of *after* (in the Latin sense of either *secundum* or *post*) provides a useful framework for this revision.

On the one hand, the question is what role *after* Kittler (in the sense of *secundum* or *according to* Kittler) media history and theory played in the humanities. Historical media studies, which emerged in the eighties of the last century in Germany and in the founding of which Kittler had been clearly instrumental, was not primarily concerned with the theory or history of single media. This was already the province of individual disciplines such as film studies, television studies, computer science, radio research and so on. Rather, it strove toward histories of the mind, soul and senses removed from the grasp of literary studies, philosophy and psychoanalysis and thus ready for transfer to a different domain: media. But because media were less of a focus than a change of the frame of reference for the traditional objects of the humanities – to quote Kittler’s infamous words, it was a matter of “expelling the spirit from the humanities” – the traditional objects of research that defined communication studies (e.g., press, film, television, radio) were never of great interest. Media studies deserted literary studies only to invade them again and to replace the emphasis on authors or styles with a sustained attention to

inconspicuous technologies of knowledge such as index cards, writing tools, typewriters, discourse operators (such as quotation marks), pedagogical media such as the blackboard, media like phonographs or stereo sound technology, and disciplining techniques like alphabetization. As indicated by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht's famous catchphrase "the materialities of communication", this changing of the humanities' frame of reference aimed to replace the hegemony of understanding, which inevitably tied meaning to a variant of subjectivity or self-presence, with power constellations or military couplings of technologies and bodies as the base and abyss of meaning.<sup>1</sup> Therefore Kittler was never much interested in stories that told the history of such technologies for their own sake (like, for instance, in STS). Kittler had always been a genealogist in the Nietzschean sense, and firmly believed that discovering the mean origins of some highly valued concept would change that concept in a fundamental way. Thus he tried once to talk Niklas Luhmann out of his social systems by explaining to him how systems theory originated in digital switching circuits and cybernetics.

## 2. Media After Media

But this media analysis already operated across a historical abyss that separated media technology from the genealogists, who deciphered their secret agency in the history of literature, philosophy, anthropology, art or whatever. To quote from the beginning of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*:

Technologies, which not only subvert writing but absorb it and carry it away, including the so-called man, render their own description impossible. [...] Once formerly distinct data flows [are turned] into standardized series of digitized numbers, any medium can be translated into any other. With numbers, everything goes. Modulation, transformation, synchronization; delay, storage, transportation; scrambling, scanning, mapping – a total media link on a digital base will erase the very concept of medium. Instead of wiring people and technologies, absolute knowledge will run as an endless loop.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, "Flache Diskurse," in *Materialität der Kommunikation*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1988), 919; see also Gumbrecht, "A Farewell to Interpretation," in *Materialities of Communication*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht and K. Ludwig Pfeiffer (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994), 399.

<sup>2</sup> *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, 7–8.

Once the distinctions between media in the plural are only a question of interface design between the so-called user and the Universal Turing Machine, which is able to simulate all other machines, media lose their ontological status as material objects. Therefore the second question is what role media history and media theory can possibly play in the humanities *after* Kittler – in the sense of *post*-Kittler – after media studies has lost the media? Are media studies left with retrospections of past media, as Kittler himself suggested? In fact there is a discourse going on that addresses media only as a thing of the past or denies their being altogether – Friedrich Kittler in 1993: "There is no software"; Eva Horn in 2007: "There are no media"; Claus Pias in 2011: "Was waren Medien? (What were media?)"

Thus, there are good reasons to assume that media after Kittler are characterized primarily by their inauthenticity. Methodologically their authentic meaning never was to be found within their own history but in their "destructive character" (Benjamin): in the "exorcism of the spirit" or in "the abandoning of the Human" or in the "Stop Making Sense". Ontologically, media exist after the implementation of Turing's Universal Machine and Shannon's scanning theorem only as simulations of themselves. To this inauthenticity of the media, a number of "turns" and neologisms pay tribute, which emerged in the aftermath of the aforementioned transformation of media into interfaces: In Germany it is first of all the neologism "mediality"; in the UK we learn about the new plural of "mediums", which is meant to replace the ontologically inauthentic "media"; in France it is the concept of the "mediateur" (brought up by Antoine Hennion and recently adapted by Bruno Latour), or it is the old but modernized concept of "cultural techniques". Cultural techniques are a result of the "practical turn" in media studies, which itself is a result of the post-media effect. Kittler himself turned his back on the inauthentic media and turned towards what he called "media before media": the symbolic operations of images, writing and numbers, not to mention his late obsession with Aphrodite and the Sirens.

But interestingly the ontological abasement of media to simulations in the digital age resulted in a mediatheoretical revision of ontology itself, which already very early on in Kittler's lifetime turned into techno-ontology. The father of techno-ontology is of course Martin Heidegger. Modern metaphysics, Heidegger taught us, founds an epoch in which being (*das Seiende*) is interpreted as objectiveness. The techniques and technologies of this epoch, that have the power to call something into being, are the techniques and technologies of representation. Only what can be represented is an object. That is, only what can be represented is at

all. Kittler's high-tech version of this techno-ontology is the formula: "Nur was schaltbar ist, ist überhaupt." Only what can be implemented in the form of a switching circuit is at all. Implementation as a switching circuit is the pre-condition of being. If we take "wiring" (*Schaltung*) in its broadest possible meaning, then Kittler's techno-ontology resonates in a quite surprising way with Bruno Latour's ontology of scientific facts. Like Kittler, Latour insists on the necessity of opening up the black boxes of abstract concepts like The Social, The Spirit, Man and other philosophical generalities and demonstrating by what inconspicuous means they are fabricated, and how sociologists or philosophers are made to believe in the autonomy of concepts or facts. The Latourian version of Kittler's techno-ontology would read: Only what remains stable in the "wiring" of the immutable mobiles is at all. "Wiring" in Latour's terminology would be "enchaînement", i.e., concatenation. The referent of scientific knowledge, the fact, is produced by the concatenation of immutable mobiles, and that referent remains solid or "real" as long as it survives all translations without any intolerable transformations. Such a translation would no longer carry with it the onto-historical undertone, which is audible in Kittler's formula. It would as a consequence liberate the question of how being is made – fabricated – from onto-historical thinking in epochs. The overcoming of an onto-historical conception of media history, which was always basic to media history according to Kittler, opens up the possibility for a reconceptualization of ontology, which one could call "operative ontologies", that asks for the concrete ontic operations and practices that produce first of all ontological distinctions – among many others, also those between image and picture, or figure and ground, or active and passive, or message and medium, subject and object, man and animal and so on. These ontic operations are called cultural techniques.

### 3. Cultural Techniques

The concept of cultural techniques refers to the process of articulation as such. The methodological stake of a theory of cultural techniques is marked by the fact that it replaces an ontological distinction with the ontic problem of making that distinction, which may be dealt with by different cultures in different ways. Only on this level of an operative ontology does the concept of cultural techniques gain its actual strength. According to Bruno Latour, the world is not divided between material objects on the one hand and language on the other as modern science has claimed so often (in contradiction to its own practices), but language and things, signs and referents are connected with each other by chains of hybrid elements,

which operate the articulation between matter and form. These hybrid elements, which generate the world of distinctions, are cultural techniques in the sense of operative ontologies.

Geoffrey Winthrop Young has recently pointed out this concept of cultural techniques in a very smart way:

The term ‘cultural techniques’ refers to operations that coalesce into entities which are subsequently viewed as the agents or sources running these operations. Procedural chains and connecting techniques give rise to notions and objects that are then endowed with essentialized identities. Underneath our *ontological* distinctions are constitutive, media-dependent *ontic* operations that need to be teased out by means of a techno-material deconstruction. To rephrase it in a more philosophical vein: the study of cultural techniques continues in a technologically more informed fashion a philosophical line of ontic-ontological questioning opened up by Martin Heidegger. If German media theory in the Kittlerian vein focused on the materialities of communication, the study of cultural techniques takes aim at the materialities of deconstruction.

In order to differentiate cultural techniques from other technologies, Thomas Macho has argued that only those techniques that involve symbolic work should be labeled cultural techniques. “Symbolic work requires specific cultural techniques, such as speaking, translating and understanding, forming and representing, calculating and measuring, writing and reading, singing and making music.”<sup>3</sup> What separates cultural techniques from all others is their potential for self-reference or a “pragmatics of recursion”:

From their very beginnings, speaking can be spoken about and communication be communicated. We can produce paintings that depict paintings or painters; films often feature other films. One can only calculate and measure with reference to calculation and measurement. And one can of course write about writing, sing about singing, and read about reading. [...] Building on a phrase coming out of systems theory, we could say that cultural techniques are *second order techniques*.<sup>4</sup>

Without a doubt it would be very tempting to follow a proposal of such alluring simplicity, but unfortunately it is not always so easy to distinguish between *first* and *second order techniques*. It makes a difference, Macho

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Macho, “Tiere zweiter Ordnung: Kulturtechniken der Identität und Identifikation,” in *Über Kultur. Theorie und Praxis der Kulturreflexion*, ed. Dirk Baecker et al. (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2008), 99.

<sup>4</sup> Macho, “Tiere zweiter Ordnung,” 100.

writes, whether you whittle and adorn an arrow or shoot it an animal.<sup>5</sup> But does this not ontologize and universalize an occidental rationality that always already separates two different types of knowledge: culture on the one hand and technology on the other? What if the arrow can be used only after it has been “adorned”? What if said “adornment” is part of the arrow’s technical make-up?

In short, it is problematic to base an understanding of cultural techniques on a static concept of technologies and symbolic work, that is, on ontologically operating differentiations between first and second order techniques. Separating the two must be replaced by chains of operations and techniques: In order to situate cultural techniques *before* the grand epistemic distinctions between culture and technology, code and thing, it is necessary to elaborate a *processual* rather than ontological definition of first and second order techniques. We need to focus on how recursive operative chains bring about a switch from first to second order techniques (and back), how nonsense generates sense, how the symbolic is filtered out of the real or how, conversely, the symbolic is incorporated into the real.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Textility as Paradigm

A paradigmatic case is the art of weaving. If you adhere to the rigorous distinction between first and second order techniques, weaving will not qualify as a cultural technique because it does not exhibit any self-referential qualities. The term only makes sense once a piece of tapestry depicts a piece of tapestry, or a garment appears on a garment. Yet the very technique, the ongoing combination of weave and pattern, always already produces an ornamental pattern that in our culture is usually blinded out as the passive medium, but that by virtue of its technical repetition refers to itself and therefore (according to Derrida) displays sign character.<sup>7</sup> Following this insight, Gottfried Semper, who argued that “most of the decorative symbols used in architecture originated or were derived from the textile arts,” conceived of the wall, a basic first-order architectural technique, as a second-order technique that came equipped with an originary self-reference.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Macho, *Vorbilder* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2011), 45.

<sup>6</sup> See Tim Ingold, “Toward an Ecology of Materials,” *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 41 (2012): 427–42, here 438.

<sup>7</sup> See Jacques Derrida, “Signature Event Context,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, tr. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985), 307–30.

<sup>8</sup> Gottfried Semper, *Style in the Technical and Tectonic Arts; or, Practical Aesthetics*, transl. Harry Francis Mallgrave and Michael Robinson (Los Angeles:

A wall in the sense of a vertical closure of a room (*parede*) and a wall in the sense of a support for a roof have nothing in common insofar as the function of the wall (*parede*) was realized originally by some kind of textile: be it by a braided mat or a woven carpet. It is important to note that the German word *Wand* (wall) is etymologically closely related to *Gewand* (garment). Thus it reminds us of the old origin of the room partition.<sup>9</sup> “The use of rough textiles as a means to separate the interior life from the exterior life and as a formal design of the idea of space preceded the most simply constructed wall of bricks.”<sup>10</sup>

Images of textiles, for example, garments, often appear in textile media, for example, tapestries. But when a tapestry depicts a transparent fabric, there is an increased interference between ground and figure because of the particular qualities of the textile medium. This can be seen in an early fifteenth-century tapestry, showing the Passion of Christ, held by the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) in London (fig. 1). It is made of wool and silk with gold and silver thread; it comes from Arras in France and probably hung in front of or behind an altar.<sup>11</sup> Next to Joseph of Arimathea, we can see Nicodemus holding up an apparently transparent shroud by the edge in order to wrap the body of Christ in it. It is a kind of “visual deception”: we see the fabric of the tapestry through the fabric of the shroud even though the fabric of the shroud is nothing other than the fabric of the tapestry. To put this more precisely, the shroud as a represented fabric is a figure on the ground of the fabric of representation. If we venture closer, the structure of the medium is so strongly perceived that the represented shroud and the shroud of representation return to the same level (fig. 2). The difference between first order and second order technique dissolves. The threads of the shroud turn out to be the same threads as those which make up the tapestry. The represented ground and the ground of representation become indistinguishable. In fabric the image can never be entirely detached from its medium; unlike the hylomorphic scheme, in which form is imposed on a passive material, a contact remains here between ground and figure, material and form, or medium and thing.

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Getty Research Institute, 2004): 242. See also Bernhard Siegert, “After the Wall: Interferences among Grids and Veils” in *Grazer Architektur Magazin*, 9 (2012): 18–33.

<sup>9</sup> Gottfried Semper: *Der Stil in den technischen und tektonischen Künsten* [1860], vol. 1, Frankfurt/M./Hildesheim/Zürich/New York 2008, 229.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 228 (interpunctuation modified).

<sup>11</sup> Victoria and Albert Museum, London, inventory number T.1-1921.

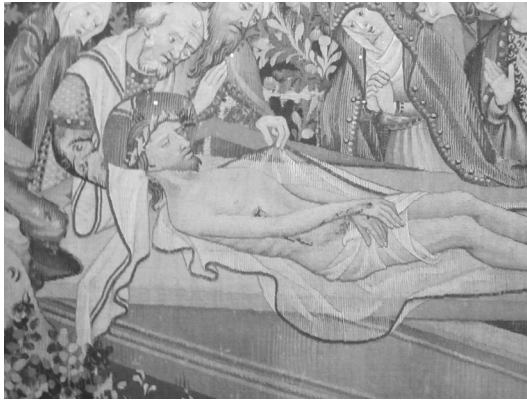


Fig. 1: Tapestry with scenes from the passion of Christ (detail), c. 1400-1425, presumably France (Arras). Wool, silk, silver and gold threads. Victoria & Albert Museum, London.



Fig. 2: Tapestry with scenes from the passion of Christ (detail).

Another example is a tapestry from the famous Unicorn Series from the end of the 15th century, which today is held by the Metropolitan Museum in The Cloisters (fig. 3). The tapestry depicting the unicorn as it is attacked by the hunters shows in its left margin a hunter just about to let a dog off the leash. His right stocking or top boot features a patch (fig. 4). How shall one decide without radio carbon dating whether there was a hole in the tapestry, which at this spot has been repaired, or whether the artist wanted to depict a patched stocking? Is the hole in the carpet or is it



in the stocking? Does the hole belong to the layer of the image or to the layer of the medium? In textile media this is an *a priori* unanswerable question.



Fig. 3: The Unicorn is Attacked. Tapestry, woolen warp, wool, silk, silver and gilden weft. Southern Netherlands, 1495–1505. The Metropolitan Museum, New York, The Cloisters.



Fig. 4: The Unicorn is Attacked (detail).

An altar cloth presumably from Nuremberg from around 1465, which depicts Christ as the man of sorrows among several saints, shows another kind of entanglement of image and medium (fig. 5). The side wound is represented by the body of the carpet in yet another way, by the wefts, as one can recognize if one ventures closer (fig. 6). Whether it was created like that or whether it was caused by a practice of veneration, which then

would bring the carpet into close affinity with a relic, is hard to decide. But anyway, the wound is represented too by an oblong opening in the carpet. It is as if the carpet had replaced the represented body to make possible the gesture of the doubting Thomas. If we accept the possibility that the opening was caused by the desire of the believers to touch the wound of Christ, this would be a perfect example of an interdependent causation of two operations, where the entanglement of figure and ground causes the practice of touching and thereby produces the opening in the carpet, and vice versa the practice of touching.



Fig. 5: Altar Frontal with Man of Sorrows and Saints, c. 1465. Linen warp with woollen and silk weft, Nuremberg, Germany, presumably Lorentzkirche. The Metropolitan Museum, New York, The Cloisters



Fig. 6: Altar Frontal with Man of Sorrows and Saints (detail).

An example from the Maghreb from the 1940s bridges the gap between my first example, the carpet from Arras, and the media art with which I will conclude. It is a carpet that was most probably knotted in the Gerouan area (near Meknes) by hand (fig. 7). I am indebted to Thomas Slunecko for bringing it to my attention and also collecting the necessary data for the determination of its date of manufacture. He drew on Prosper Ricard's monumental collection *Corpus des tapis marocains* (from 1934), and on this basis the origin of the carpet can be determined with great probability: It is the product of a local factory in the Gerouan area, manufactured by a Berber woman after a design by a French merchant. If one takes a somewhat closer look, its key feature comes even more to the fore, and is one which is alien to the Berber tradition as well as to the Turkish: none of them features the little squares that structure this carpet in its complete horizontal and vertical extension. Yet the interpretation of these mysterious elements is accomplished immediately if we understand them as an echo of a cultural technique introduced into the art of drafting and design in Europe during the Renaissance, and which in the 20th century was familiar to every school kid, but obviously not to members of the Berber tribes. The craftswoman did nothing but weave the technical ornament of the gridded paper (fig. 8), millimeter paper or checkered paper, on which the design was drafted into the carpet. In other words, what had been for the commissioner nothing but a carrier medium was not blinded out by the knoter but was transferred onto the carpet on an equal footing with all the other visual elements. The knoter did not "understand" the hylomorphic separation between the medium, which was meant to be ignored, and stay absent or invisible, and the figure, the ornamental design.

Tim Ingold singled out the textile as a paradigm for a non-hylomorphic model of technology.<sup>12</sup> For Ingold, the textility model of making has been downgraded by the rule of hylomorphism, which replaced the interweaving of matter and form with the ontological distinction between the two. But Ingold uses the concept of textility in a merely metaphorical way. His conceptualization is not supported by the study of empirical textile materials.

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<sup>12</sup> See Tim Ingold, "The Textility of Making", in *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 34 (2010): 92.



Fig. 7: Berber Carpet, Morocco, Gerouan area, 1940s.

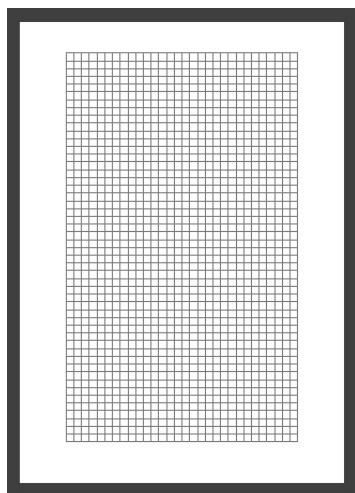


Fig. 8: Gridded paper.

#### 4. Interweaving of Image, Object and Medium

In contrast, the work of the Berlin-based artist Veronika KelIndorfer aims exactly at revealing such a textile entanglement of image, represented object and medium.<sup>13</sup> Art is the “setting-itself-to-work” of truth, wrote Martin Heidegger in the 1930s.<sup>14</sup> KelIndorfer’s works, which combine the media of photography, silkscreen and glass, enact no less than a deconstruction of this term. It is not “the truth” that sets her art to work but technical displacements that set to work a disturbance of ontological certainties about what is image and what is imaged, about what is medium and what is form. Decisive for the conception of the image in modern painting, wrote Wolfram Pichler with reference to Hubert Damisch, is that the image carrier and the ground are not subordinated to the painted surface or the figure but are interwoven with them.<sup>15</sup> But what if we “have never been modern” as Bruno Latour claims? What if we apply this statement not only to modernism but also to the image concept of the late Middle Ages, and not only to image-making but to cultural techniques and technologies in general?<sup>16</sup>

Some art historians endeavored to place Veronika KelIndorfer’s work into this or that modernist stylistic direction –minimal art or installation art, or Marcel Duchamp’s glass works, or whatever. A different observation seems more fruitful to me: her works are in a fundamental sense technical images. What I mean is that KelIndorfer’s glass works are the result of an interconnection of technical image-producing procedures based on the application of a discrete coding of image data. First a slide is transformed by a scanner into quantities of electronic energy. The disassembled image is translated into a screen, which then serves as a medium for applying variously dense dots of color onto the image carrier. The photograph printed onto the pane of glass is then sintered, causing the image to no

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<sup>13</sup> KelIndorfer's works have been exhibited in Berlin, Rome, Munich, Dresden, Los Angeles, Prague, Stuttgart, Haarlem, Santa Monica and many other cities. See Veronika KelIndorfer, *Exterior and Interior Dreams*, exhibition catalogue, Ostfildern 2005 and Veronika KelIndorfer, *Layers of Light and Reflection. Case Studies*, Ostfildern 2012.

<sup>14</sup> See Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art” in *Off the Beaten Track* (Cambridge, 2002), 21 and elsewhere.

<sup>15</sup> Wolfram Pichler, “Topologische Konfigurationen des Denkens und der Kunst,” in Wolfram Pichler and Ralph Ubl, *Topologie. Falten, Knoten, Netze, Stülpungen in Kunst und Theorie* (Vienna, 2009), 45.

<sup>16</sup> See Hans Belting, *Spiegel der Welt. Die Erfindung des Gemäldes in den Niederlanden* (Munich, 2010).

longer be on the carrier but in it. The technical production process manifests a visual thinking that occurs in operations, in which the artist can only intervene at the beginning of a new stage, at first through the selection of the motif then the determination of the format, and finally the choice of color.

The use of a hole matrix in silk screening refers directly back to the beginnings of technical image production: namely, to the technique of image generation through coded patterns of holes that dominated industrial graphics from the late nineteenth century onward, a procedure that analyzes and transfers the halftone values of an original image. The idea of the halftone goes back much further, however: to a seventeenth-century media-theoretical model that combined the mezzotint technique, which was invented in 1642, with Descartes's physiological theory of the processing of optically perceived data through their point-by-point fragmentation into patterns imprinted in the brain.<sup>17</sup>

But technical images do not begin with copperplate technique and the idea of neural signal analysis through pattern codes. Technical images are not restricted to modernity. The textile image had always been a technical image as it is generated by a mechanical process of distributing discrete visual points. So it is not by chance that Veronika Kellndorfer's glass works quite often feature a layering of textile veils and rasters, especially when they appear as parts of walls or facades (fig. 9, 10, 11), and thus reflect old Semper's thesis about the textile origins of architecture and the original connection between wall and curtain. With Kellndorfer's work we leave behind a critical shortcoming of Ingold's ecology of materials, namely, that Ingold restricts his concept of technology to manufactural, artisanal techniques of making (like brickmaking, forgery, carpentry) and he held that mechanical procedures had fallen irretrievably under the spell of hylomorphism.<sup>18</sup>

Veronika Kellndorfer's work can be seen as a scheme that refers back to the beginning of the era of the image and thus asks questions about the ontology of the image – that is, the basic relationships within the triangle of image, visual medium and depicted object – under the condition of the technicity of the image. The work of deconstruction performed by Kellndorfer's glass works can be appreciated in the fact that it is unsatisfactory to describe them as images at all. They are rather interventions into the way images exist, recursive loops that translate the depicted things into the

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<sup>17</sup> See Karin Leonhard and Robert Felfe, *Lochmuster und Linienspiel. Überlegungen zur Druckgrafik des 17. Jahrhunderts* (Freiburg im Breisgau and Berlin, 2006), 29–36.

<sup>18</sup> See Ingold, *Textility of Making*, 98.

mediality that underlies their existence: from the images' apparently antecedent reality, they derive a mediality, which they combine with the image of this reality. It is not so much that they depict something in the sense of representation but rather that they are objects that intervene in the media structure of reality. They appear in buildings (fig. 12) – as integral architectural components – and what they show are metaphors, translations, scalings of their own technical being. They are empirical objects that simultaneously reflect their technical conditions of possibility and the media structure of so-called reality. And by doing so, they subvert the reliability of the objectivity of things.



Fig. 9: Veronika KelIndorfer: Bellevue (A curtain of glass), 1997. Silkscreen on glass, 275 × 170 cm each. S-Bahnhof Bellevue, Berlin © Veronika KelIndorfer.



Fig. 10: Veronika KelIndorfer: Window of the IG-Metall Building, 2002, silkscreen on glass, Berlin © Veronika KelIndorfer



Fig. 11: Veronika KelIndorfer: Ocean Vista, 2007, 3-panel-silkscreen on glass, 293 x 357 cm, Christopher Grimes Gallery, Santa Monica, USA © Veronika KelIndorfer





Fig. 12: Veronika Kelldorfer: *The Viewer Moved*, 1993, silkscreen on glass, 625 × 275 cm, S-Bahnhof Bornholmer Straße, Berlin © Veronika Kelldorfer

In Alberti's treatise on painting, the textile veil, the *velum*, serves as a medium of the technical construction of perspectival images. Alberti's *velum* recurs in Veronika Kelldorfer's glass works as the pattern of holes in the screen through which the image is applied to the glass. The screen itself is a polyester fabric, by the way (fig. 13), a curtain that has to be

tightly stretched in order to disappear behind the act of imaging. What would happen if there were an accidental fold in the screen (fig. 14)? The ground of representation would then appear in the representation of the world, as in the tapestry from Arras. The curtain, said Jacques Lacan in reference to its cultic use,<sup>19</sup> is the idol of absence.<sup>20</sup> What is behind the curtain is doubtlessly nothing, but it has the quality of existing symbolically. However, it is not absence that is portrayed in Kellndorfer's curtains but the medium. In place of the numinous, in the sense of the divine, there is the numinosity of media technology: the curtain is the medium of an operative ontology, which in late antiquity reveals the god; in modernity – with Johann Heinrich Füssli, for example – what has been split off from the subject, and with Kellndorfer, the technical medium as the ground of being.

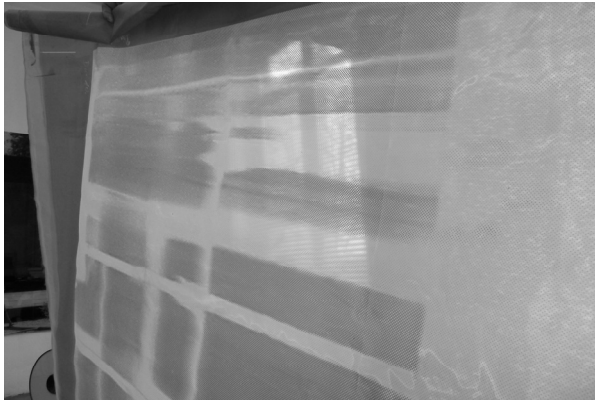


Fig. 13: Veronika Kellndorfer: silkscreen, rolled out vertically, the artist's studio © Veronika Kellndorfer

<sup>19</sup> See the curtain before the Ark of the Covenant in the Israelite's Tent of Meeting (Exodus 26, 31–33), the curtain in the Temple of Solomon that tore at the moment of Jesus's death (Mathew 27, 51), or the curtain that brought about the mechanical imitation of the divine epiphany in the prokypsis ceremony of the Byzantine imperial cult. See Brigitt Andrea Sigel, *Der Vorhang der Sixtinischen Madonna. Herkunft und Bedeutung eines Motivs der Marienikonographie*, dissertation (Zurich, 1977), 43–45.

<sup>20</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Le séminaire livre IV: la relation d'objet* (Paris, 1994), 155.

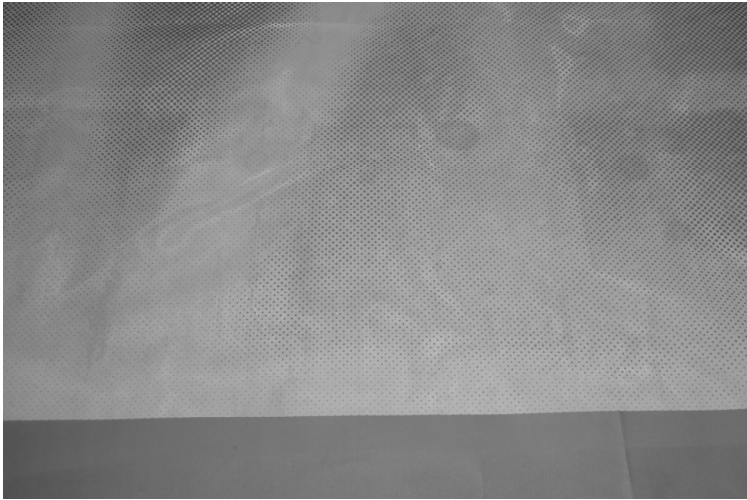


Fig. 14: Veronika Kellndorfer: silkscreen with folds, the artist's studio © Veronika Kellndorfer

In their technical raster structure, the images burnt into the glass repeat the curtain they depict, as an ornament, so to speak. It is not by chance that a small work (in the studio) shows nothing but a curtain (fig. 15), and if you go up close enough to it, the curtain starts to interfere with the raster in the same way as in the tapestry from Arras in the V&A Museum (fig. 16). The recursive interweaving of image, represented object and medium is demonstrated in an exemplary way by a glass that shows a part of the Millard House by Frank Lloyd Wright in Pasadena from the year 1923 (2009) (fig. 17). The façade of the building, which belongs to a series of four houses by Wright, which he himself called “textile houses,” is itself a hole matrix. It repeats the silkscreen raster of the technical procedure with which the photograph is put onto or into the glass. Not only is the façade created from blocks of cement like a textile curtain, it is also perforated like a dot mask or a fabric. Here I rediscover my tapestry from Arras. A fabric within a fabric, a raster within a raster: the technical structure of the medium returns as an ornament of reality. The ghostly effect that such recursions bring about can also be seen in the visual object in the image of the Millard House: on its façade lies the shadow of a tree that is not itself in the picture. A shadow? Our perception continually flips back and forth between seeing a shadow to seeing a real tree behind the curtain of the façade. The trees standing behind the house, their crowns towering above the façade, are partially involved in the creation of this picture puzzle. But

decisive to the oscillation of perception between a shadow projected onto the façade from the front and an image emerging through it from behind is the window in the top right corner. This window is a *mise en abyme* of a Kelldorfer glass. The eye cannot decide whether the tree whose forked trunk we see in the window is real and seen through the window, or a reflection in the glass. The eye cannot decide whether the aperture, which is additionally reminiscent of a picture because it is recessed, frames the world in front of or behind the façade. And in this coincidence of spatial determinations, the autonomous reality of the medium itself appears.

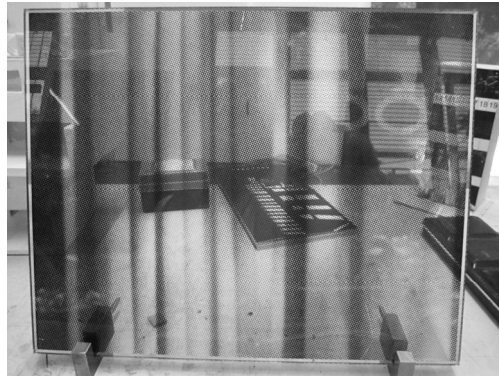


Fig. 15: Veronika Kelldorfer: Curtain, 2009, silkscreen on glass, the artist's studio  
© Veronika Kelldorfer



Fig. 16: Veronika Kelldorfer: Curtain, 2009, detail © Veronika Kelldorfer

We don't see through the glass but become entangled in layers of veils that cancel out the distinction between in front and behind, interior and exterior, image and medium. What is real? A dream within a dream. What is an image of reality? A dream within a dream within a dream. Or to put it more technically, a veil within a veil within a veil. A grid within a grid within a grid, endlessly interwoven.

It is threshold phenomena of this kind that the history and theory of cultural techniques as a version of post-Kittlerian media studies is eager to conceptualize in a paradigmatic way. The approach of the study of cultural techniques does not *a priori* distinguish between object and meaning, represented reality and image, medium and form, but questions the ontologies that dominate a given culture by focusing on the technical and practical processing of those distinctions.

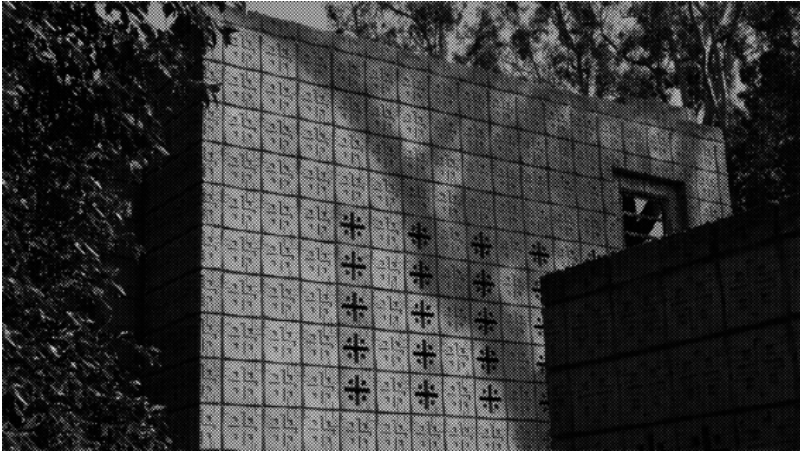


Fig. 17: Veronika Kellndorfer: Millard House, 2009, silkscreen on glass. Author's collection.

# CHAPTER TWO

## MEDIA AND AMECHANIA

### PETER WEIBEL

#### **Foreword**

In this communication I'll be sharing some new ideas about the development of media in European civilization. I will take you on a journey starting from the Greeks. When you talk about culture in Europe, you always have to start from the Greeks. So that's where we'll start, and we'll move forward to the present. I don't know whether I'm right or not, but I want to propose to you some new ideas and propositions.

#### **Media and Amechania**

The word "Amechania" is the starting point to rethinking the concepts of mechanics and mechanical arts. Today, when we speak about mechanics or the mechanical, it is always pejorative; we think of it as something dull and stupid. Mechanics is separated from the mind. I want to show you that maybe during the last 2,000 years, we've had the wrong idea about mechanics. I will show you the reasons why and at the end of the lecture, I will show you what new idea we might adopt about the concept of mechanics.

"Amechania" was the name of the Greek goddess of helplessness. There has always been the idea that we are born helpless and that's why we cry and demand help as babies. As we grow up and become adults, we remain beings with deficits who still need help.

Now comes the point: the Greek element – *a* means negation. And so if we look at the word "Amechania" and take away the element "a", which means negation, we end up with "Mechania" and then "Mechanics". This is the first idea: mechanics is about help. We invented mechanics because it is a tool to help us. The first revolutionary mechanic invention, the first universal tool was, in my opinion, the alphabet. This picture *Intelligente*