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“The Little ‘So-Called Men’ Go to the Movies”¹

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¹ In tribute to one of the great critics of cinema and culture, Siegfried Kracauer.

I. “A War of Typewriters”

In *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter* (1986, tr. 1999), a history of media and technology, German cultural studies scholar Friedrich Kittler laments how modernity overwhelmed humanity with its machines. He sees this process having begun in the 19th century. Step by step, electronic devices commandeered all of the human sensory functions: “A telegraph as an artificial mouth, a telephone as an artificial ear—the stage was set for the phonograph” (28). The gramophone allowed a machine to capture the human voice, while the cinema subsequently replicated sight.

However, it is with the typewriter, the seemingly most innocuous of 19th century inventions that Kittler crescendos his epic study. Drawing upon such diverse sources as Thomas Pynchon’s novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) and Paul Virilio’s *War and Cinema* (1989), Kittler traces the close development of media technology and warfare. In the United States, Remington became the dominant manufacturer of typewriters—1881’s Remington II model was the best selling machine in America—allowing the company to diversify beyond its original firearms concerns. For Kittler, there is little difference: in his eyes, the typewriter is “a discursive machine gun” (191).

The writing on the wall predicting the demise of humanity was typewritten, argues Kittler. Type represents the penultimate replacement of the human by the machine. Whereas handwriting is individual, and expresses the diverse souls of people, type is the same no matter the differences between the hands that strike the keys.

The final step in the decimation of what Kittler terms “so-called Man” took place at the beginning of World War II, and is intriguingly represented in Norwegian Morten Tyldum’s film, *The Imitation Game* (2014), which finds mathematician Alan Turing building the computer that broke the German military encryption of troop locations

during World War II. The story begins with Enigma, the “secret typewriter of Wilmersdorf” (253), a German encoding machine that was thought unbreakable. By building essentially the world’s most important computer, Turing’s team was able to decipher the Nazi code and allow the Allies to win the Second World War.

While clearly a better outcome than a victory by Hitler, Kittler pauses to consider this triumph as more than a bit Pyrrhic. For it really wasn’t a victory of one set of humans over another, but an abrogation of the human role, given over to the machines. Kittler positions World War II as a “war of typewriters” (256). Turing’s Universal Machine was simply a more powerful typewriter than the vaunted Enigma, itself a machine into which humans merely typed messages to have them automatically encrypted and deciphered. Through a series of rotors, the Enigma machine converted messages into a seemingly random string of letters that could only be transformed back into meaningful language when an identical Enigma machine was fed the proper settings. Humans could change the settings every day, but only to allow one Enigma machine to once again speak to others of its ilk.

“The Second World War devolved from humans and soldiers to machine subjects,” Kittler argues (259). The filmmakers behind *The Imitation Game* set about capturing the work of genius it was for Turing to build a machine to break the German Enigma. The film humanizes Turing, making us care emotionally about him by demonstrating how cruelly he was treated as a gay man in post-war Britain, at a time of rampant homophobia. Arrested for indecency, his primary role in defeating Nazism completely censored from the public record, Turing committed suicide less than a decade

after the end of the war, despite his central role in completely transforming the future into an unfathomable computerized network.

It is precisely this Romantic notion of the individual genius endorsed by *The Imitation Game* that Kittler works so hard to dismantle in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Whether gay men are allowed to love whomever they want, or whether brilliant female mathematicians get the professional respect they deserve, the emotional content of *The Imitation Game* is beside the point for Kittler's analysis, in which technology has doomed all humanity, progressive, oppressive, or otherwise.

The movie treats the Enigma story, not as the last nail in the coffin for our future, but instead as a string of brilliant individual deductions, tied to humanity's greatest ability, thinking. The film's Turing makes one great act of empathetic humanity, squirreling Joan Clarke (Keira Knightley) into Bletchley Park because she is a genius at doing puzzles. However, the sexist military structure refuses to allow Joan to work on Turing's project. Instead, he gets her hired in the secretarial pool, where women type out intercepted Nazi radio transmissions. Kittler predicts as much: he is fascinated by how the typewriter as a machine subsumes the female labor that the very word hides: a typewriter is both a female secretary who uses the machine, and the name of the machine itself.

The Imitation Game's Turing throws a pebble at Joan's window late at night, not to engage in sexual shenanigans, but instead to have her help him work on his decryption algorithms. Indeed, it is Joan who sparks Turing's solution to Enigma. She reports that not all German radio operators are the same. She can tell one of them by the cadence of his typing. Contra Kittler, human individuality has been preserved amidst the

technological onslaught: one radio operator *can* be individuated from another. People like Joan, who does what the imprisoned Turing tutors us to do repeatedly—“Are you paying attention?”—*are* able to use their mental faculties to overcome the reductionism of the machine. Joan’s insight cascades into Turing’s, who subsequently realizes that their machine does not have to start from scratch every morning after Enigma’s settings have been changed, because almost every German transmission ends with an idiotically repetitive refrain: “Heil Hitler.” And thus, in one of the great ironies in human history, Nazi mechanization fell to British individuation.

Despite the Romanticism of *The Imitation Game*, Kittler lurks behind every image. At one point, a graphic match links the whirring rotors of Turing’s machine to the treads of a Nazi tank squashing a British army helmet into the mud. Mechanization clearly threatens humanity at all times, but the cinema points beyond Kittler’s technologically determinist pessimism. This essay proposes to find a middle ground between Germanic Romanticism and cultural morbidity. A grotesque historical mirroring of *The Imitation Game*, *The Lives of Others* (2006), Florian von Donnersmarck’s German film about the aftermath of the Soviet victory in East Germany, envisions Kittler’s influence in communications technologies: typewriters, audio, and video recorders. Set in Berlin in the 1980s, in the same location and at the same time as Kittler wrote *Gramophone, Film Typewriter*, *The Lives of Others* extends *The Imitation Game*’s study of the technological deterioration of “so-called Man” into the post-war period and beyond.

II. “The Engineers of the Soul”

Friedrich Kittler uses the technological communications revolutions of the late nineteenth century—the invention and diffusion of the phonograph, the cinema and the typewriter—to explain the current plight of humans. Kittler argues that the coincidence between communication and militarism has destroyed our humanity; he repeatedly forwards the phrase, “so-called Man” to describe the nuclear threatened state of humanity at the end of the 20th century. Kittler scholars Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz summarize the argument of the book:

Writing, a technology of symbolic encoding, was subverted by new technologies of storing physical effects in the shape of light and sound waves. Two of Edison’s developments—the phonograph and the kinoscope—broke the monopoly of writing, started a non-literary (but equally serial) data processing, established an industry of human engineering, and placed literature in the ecological niche which (and not by chance) Remington’s contemporaneous typewriter had conquered.

(xxv)

The typewriter, an individualized variant of the Gutenberg printing press, was promulgated in the United States by the Remington gun concern, while a young soldier in the American Civil War, Thomas Edison, invented the gramophone in order to reduce human error in telegraphy, with his company’s invention of the film camera to follow.

Kittler wrote his remarkable book in the early 1980s, in a Berlin torn asunder by the Cold War. Indeed, the Cold War use of military communications technology

permeates the book. In reference to the West German use of U.S. Army radio equipment, Kittler argues:

The entertainment industry is, in any conceivable sense of the word, an abuse of army equipment. When Karlheinz Stockhausen was mixing his first electronic composition, *Kontakte*, in the Cologne studio of the Westdeutscher Rundfunk between February 1958 and Fall 1959, the pulse generator, indicating amplifier, band-pass filter, as well as the sine and square wave oscillators were made up of discarded U.S. Army equipment: an abuse that produced a distinctive sound. (97)

In 2006, fellow Berliner Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck produced a film, *The Lives of Others*, about the Stasi surveillance of artists in early 1980s Berlin, another Cold War story of the conflation of militarism and communications technologies. The 2007 Academy Award winner for Best Foreign Language Film, *The Lives of Others* is an intertextual adaptation of *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, an exciting instance in which a film and a theoretical critical studies text resonate around the same material objects to understand one particular moment in cultural history.

Both Kittler's text and von Donnersmarck's film make sense of the early 1980s in Berlin by framing the political repression of the Cold War via the analysis of media communications. That much could perhaps be chalked up to the cultural zeitgeist; after all, the Wall—a symbolic and literal barrier to communication—was the defining feature of Berlin in the second half of the twentieth century. The impetus for this reading, however, is that the specifics of the two texts, not just these vague generalities, line up remarkably closely, as closely as any purported Hollywood adaptation of a canonical

literary text. The plot of *The Lives of Others* hovers around the three material objects central to Kittler's study. The film concerns Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Muhe), a Stasi agent who uses video surveillance ("film") and voice recording technology ("gramophone") to spy on the population of East Germany. At the beginning of the film, Wiesler is assigned to the case of Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch), a Marxist playwright loyal to the East German government. However, Dreyman's friends, mostly other artists, are a suspicious lot, and thus the subject of much harassment by the Stasi.

As a result of the rape of his girlfriend, Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck) by a high-ranking East German government official, Dreyman comes to fully appreciate the corruption of the regime; he consequently decides to write a scathing indictment of the government. His friends give him an unregistered typewriter, which he uses to compose the missive. Because Wiesler's insight into Dreyman's apartment is limited to the line of sight of the surveillance cameras (outside of Dreyman's building) and the audio-only regime of the surveillance bugs, Wiesler does not know where Dreyman has hidden the typewriter under the floorboards. Thus, it is the specific nexus of incomplete communication posed by gramophone, film, and typewriter with which *The Lives of Others* is concerned. The tracing of the theoretical boundaries of this nexus reveals that Kittler's and Von Donnersmarck's understanding of the dehumanizing effects of the Cold War on Berliners is compellingly coincident.

And yet, Von Donnersmarck is headed in the same direction as was *The Imitation Game*. He ends his film with humanist redemption, when the former Stasi agent opens Dreyman's book to discover that it is dedicated to him. Wiesler tells the cashier at the Karl Marx bookstore, an ironically named shop if there ever was one, in response to the

clerk's inquiry about giftwrapping: "No, it's for me." The double-entendre is heart-wrenching, and offers a glimpse of hope that the future might be better than the past. Here, "so-called Man" sheds his "so-called-ness" and demonstrates that Kittler may just be underestimating our species. As a critic devoted to pedagogy, I must agree that von Donnersmarck's hopeful approach to learning from the abuses of the past is more in keeping with my experiences than is Kittler's pessimistic nihilism. This, of course, is not the same thing as saying that Kittler's model for communication theory is useless for understanding *The Lives of Others*. To the contrary, his understanding of how militarism dominates communication is crucial for plumbing the depths of von Donnersmarck's remarkable theoretical project etched into celluloid.

The beginning of *The Lives of Others* resonates with Kittler's study of the gramophone. Kittler argues that the gramophone transforms human civilization because it uses mechanical and electrical means for the first time to preserve the uniqueness of the human voice. As Kittler frames it, "Media render Man, 'that sublime culprit in the most serenely spiritual sense' of his philosophy, superfluous" (78). Indeed, one early marketing strategy for Edison's phonograph in the United States was to highlight its use for preserving the dying words of family members. Thus, the gramophone takes previously ephemeral human utterances and turns them into an archive of stable and reusable knowledge.

The Lives of Others begins with typewritten title cards that will come to be associated with the East German spy technology: Wiesler and his minions type everything they hear during their audio surveillance onto sheets of paper. The typed words set the film's historical location: "1984, East Berlin. Glasnost is nowhere in sight.

The population of the GDR is kept under strict control by the Stasi, the East German Secret Police.” Another title card exposes the absurd extent of this mad typewritten epistemology: “Its force of 100,000 employees and 200,000 informers safeguards the Dictatorship of the Proletariat. Its declared goal: ‘To know everything.’”

The image fades to black, and we next hear the sound of footsteps. The first shot of the film proper is of two men’s backs, one an East German guard, and the other a suspect being held in the Stasi prison. Thus, even before the end of the film’s very first shot, *The Lives of Others* has displayed the entirety of Kittler’s critique of the dehumanization of “so-called Man” (“Preface,” xxxix). The film, through a mix of typography, and sound and image recording, has demonstrated the abstract brutality of the Stasi regime: men whose faces we do not even need to see are engaged in destroying humanity, and this in a country where that task was nearly completed for slightly different reasons a mere forty years previously.

The Lives of Others continues this Kittlerian critique throughout its conventional, narrative cinematic explorations of the lives of these others, historical remnants of a world left behind by the tearing down of the Berlin Wall in November 1989. The first narrative sequence of the film—its “gramophone” section, if you will—is obsessed with the nature of sound recording. It is November 1984, and this particular prison is the “Temporary Detention Center,” the qualification of the concreteness of detention with the absurd notion of temporariness being one of the film’s many Kittlerian ironies.

The first close-up of the film is of a reel-to-reel tape recorder in Wiesler’s desk drawer. Wiesler turns on the device and closes the drawer as the guard brings the prisoner into his office. The prisoner insists to Wiesler: “I’ve done nothing. I know nothing.”

Wiesler's job is to break down this man's freedom by overwriting this blank epistemological performance. By the end of the interrogation, Wiesler will have produced Kittler's "so-called Man" before our eyes, documenting both textually and phonographically his guilt, both in action and knowledge. Wiesler begins with the double-speak of Totalitarianism: "If you think our humanistic system capable of [mistake], that alone would justify your arrest."

Wiesler interrogates Prisoner #227 by asking him to repeat his story. The prisoner replies simply, "It's in my statement." However, writing is not enough for Wiesler. He is interested in the details of the performance, which both gramophone (his tape recorder) and film (Von Donnersmarck's camera) will capture. "Once again please," Wiesler insists. Wiesler is interested in evidence that the prisoner's story is memorized. Thus, exactly as Kittler analyzes, humanity cannot escape from mechanized dehumanization: repeated interrogation is what the Stasi demands of its suspects; the suspects in turn memorize their story in order to not get caught. If they fail to perform the story identically, the Stasi have evidence of their guilt. If they do succeed in memorizing perfectly, Wiesler knows they are guilty because no human being can be that perfect. Only "so-called Man"—a failed, dehumanized automaton—can possibly have lived into the late twentieth century when trapped amidst such contradictions. Alan Turing certainly did not, destroyed within a decade of the end of the war by a different witch-hunt on the opposite side of the Wall separating the "free" world from the enslaved one, which for Kittler are one and the same.

The prisoner's memorized story is about his old friend Max Kirchner. They listened to music together on the day in question. "He has a telephone, you can call him

to confirm this.” At this exact moment, when music and aural reproduction (“gramophone”) are mentioned, the film shifts narrative registers dramatically. A cut to a different, vertical reel-to-reel tape deck reveals Wiesler, not in his office, but in a classroom. He is playing the audiotape *recording* of the interrogation for his students at the Stasi Hochschule in Potsdam. The film’s trick, beginning in the past, and then shock cutting to the present, establishes a pedagogy of audio reproduction. Wiesler is teaching his students not only interrogation techniques, but more importantly, how to listen. In Alan Turing’s terms, Wiesler is asking them, “Are you paying attention?” Wiesler explains: “The enemies of our state are arrogant.” He rewinds the tape so that they can hear the evidence, an audio record that is full of data, and unchangeable.

Von Donnersmarck’s film, however, believes in visual images as well, and uses them to fight against Wiesler’s logic of the gramophone. This is indeed the allegorical key to *The Lives of Others*. While Kittler believes the nexus, gramophone/film/typewriter has murdered off humanity, Von Donnersmarck’s film, as does *The Imitation Game*, believes “so-called Man” is redeemable: the wars against humanity can be overcome by human decency. Wiesler will become the hero of the film. He plays the role of evil pedagogue now, but his schooling is to come. For now, *The Lives of Others* goes its own visual way, beginning the process of severing its discourse from Wiesler’s.

The film returns to its images of the interrogation, cross-cutting the visual recreation of the past event as supplement to Wiesler’s audio experience for the students in the classroom. The prisoner falls asleep in his chair in the interrogation room; Von Donnersmarck’s editors cut from the visual witness to that event to a rightward panning camera down the row of Stasi students. The film is now intervening against the

gramophone. Yet Wiesler is still in charge. Just before the camera arrives at one particular student at the end of the row, to the right of the image, that student complains: “Why keep him awake so long? It’s inhuman.” Wiesler makes a notation in his grade book about this troublemaker on his seating chart, planning perhaps a future interrogation of this student’s Kittlerian subversiveness. However, a different radical, one who believes in the human (Man over so-called Man), will have the last laugh (how far is the liberalism of German Expressionism from the contemporary German cinema anyway?), as Von Donnersmarck’s film discourse wins out over Wiesler’s gramophone record.

Wiesler explains that the best way to catch a guilty prisoner is non-stop interrogation. An innocent man will rage, a guilty one will cry. He turns the tape recorder back on. The prisoner repeats verbatim: “He has a telephone, you can call him to confirm this,” he sobs. Wiesler stops the tape and calls his students’ attention to these words: “A liar has prepared sentences which he falls back on while under pressure.” Sure enough, the prisoner cracks: he names the person who helped his friend escape to the West: Werner Glaeske. The students chatter. Wiesler tells them to be quiet. On the tape is the sound of him taking the fabric off of the prisoner’s chair. Wiesler asks them to listen to that sound. “Your subjects are the enemy of socialism,” he concludes, with the implication that their stink is a threat to the State.

Wiesler’s boss, Anton Grubitz, comes to applaud his lecture. The students follow suit, reluctantly. Grubitz’s arrival catalyzes the plot of the film: he invites him to the theatre where Grubitz will assign Wiesler the task of investigating the playwright Dreyman. Almost seven minutes into the film, after this opening tour de force of the gramophone, Von Donnersmarck produces the title card, *Das Leben der Anderen*. The

rhetorical terms are set: Wiesler's audio recordings of suspicious East Germans will compete against Von Donnersmarck's filmic reconstruction of history to testify to how humanity again won over the monstrous beasts of Totalitarianism, just as Turing's machine defeated Enigma forty years earlier.

The Lives of Others and Kittler's text converge at the militarism of the typewriter. Like Enigma and the "bombe" before it, this typewriter—the "discursive machine gun"—is used by both sides. The Stasi use the instrument to convert complex human actions into scientific catalogs of events while Georg Dreyman uses the machine to highlight the tangible failures of the East German system: when suicide rates go too high, the government simply stops keeping track of the numbers. Similarly, the failure of the Stasi typewriter does in fact lead to real machine guns, firing after escapees across the Wall. It is remarkable that *The Lives of Others* need not turn to any such clichés; as Kittler explains it, the typewriter is already a visible weapon of the Cold War.

Like Enigma and the bombe, the plot of *The Lives of Others* concerns two typewriters: Wiesler's, through which the spy inscribes the details of Dreyman's personal life; and Dreyman's, with which he composes the essay discrediting of the East German government. Beyond the typewritten text of the opening title cards, the first narrative appearance of a typewriter in the film is Weisler's as he sets up his technological surveillance shop in the attic of Dreyman's building. Wearing headphones to listen to the audio emerging from the bugs in Dreyman's apartment, he types down everything he hears, an automaton, a so-called Man.

However, a different audio fights back against this human debasement. Dreyman's mentor, the ruined blacklisted playwright Jerska, gives Dreyman sheet music

to play on his piano, “Sonata for a Good Man.” During Dreyman’s birthday party, Wiesler keeps typing throughout the evening. After all the guests have left, we watch Wiesler type the words, “They presumably have intercourse,” exposing the pathetic nature of his status as no more than a peeping tom, intruding upon the private life of Dreyman and his girlfriend, the actress, Christa-Maria Sieland. At this moment, Wiesler’s subordinate arrives to relieve him of duty for the overnight shift. The replacement is far more crass than Wiesler, “These artists, always at it”; Wiesler at least performs his unctuous job with wordless, albeit diabolical, dignity.

Dreyman’s story, however, centers not on Wiesler’s surveillance typewriter, but another one altogether. One of the angry dissident artists, Gregor Hessenstein brings Dreyman a typewriter hidden underneath a cake. He could only get a red ink ribbon for this model. “Nobody may know that this typewriter exists,” the rebel insists. Sure enough, after the publication of Dreyman’s essay in *Der Spiegel*, Grubitz gets chewed out by his superiors. He assures his boss that they have a copy of the original essay from their spy at the magazine. Using the typeface, they will trace the essay back to its author. In the most Kittlerian scene in the film, a graphologist reports on the typewriters used by all of the authors in the GDR.

In low-angle medium shot, representing Grubitz’ seated point-of-view at his desk, the graphologist delivers his scientific report. Using a metal pointer, he displays blow-ups of the red typed examples from Dreyman’s essay. The graphologist knows every typewriter in East Germany, but cannot match these letters to any known dissident. Grubitz asks the expert about the typewriters used by particular troublemakers. The graphologist responds with precision: “Paul Hauser uses a Valentino typewriter, made by

Olivetti. That model has a more horizontal...” However, as the expert begins to point to his chart and explain the details of the graphical analysis, Grubitz interrupts him. The report concludes with Grubitz asking how big is the typewriter that produced Dreyman’s essay. The graphologist again responds with precision: “It’s one of the smallest available 19.5 cm x 9 cm x 19.5 cm.” When Grubitz observes, “it’s as easy to smuggle as a book,” he dismisses the graphologist.

Kittler argues that one of the typewriter’s major cultural effects was the loss of the personal information contained in handwriting, more evidence of our debased status as “so-called Man”:

Cinema and the phonograph, Edison’s two great achievements that ushered in the present, are complemented by the typewriter.... Since 1868, writing has no longer been the ink or pencil trace of a body whose optical and acoustic signals were irretrievably lost, only to reappear (in reader’s minds) in the surrogate sensuality of handwriting” (13).

The Lives of Others resists such Kittlerian determinism. Even though the Stasi have discovered that typewriting is indeed more individualizing than Kittler claims, Dreyman’s hidden typewriter still confounds their desire to “know everything.” Without perfect video surveillance within Dreyman’s apartment, they cannot possibly know about the existence of his red-ribbon typewriter, never mind where they might find it.

The centerpiece sequence of *The Lives of Others* also features filmic images of human bodies fighting back against the linguistic reduction of humanity to the typewritten page. Almost exactly halfway through the film, the first typewriter scene described previously is inverted. Wiesler’s assistant again relieves him for the night shift.

By this point in the film, the agent is now in the midst of full-blown doubt about the purpose of his life. Not knowing what to do with himself, he stumbles into a bar, where Christa-Maria struggles with her own guilt at not telling Dreyman about the abuse she is suffering at the hands of the rapacious Minister Bruno Hempf. After their brief conversation, Wiesler returns to the surveillance room. His helper has fallen asleep at his post. However, earlier, he typed a report about Christa-Maria and Dreyman having sex.

Wiesler rips the report out of the typewriter and reads it. The film cuts to a close-up of the typewritten document. In voice-over, we hear Wiesler read the contents of the report. Superimposed over the typewritten text is the film's most passionate, Romantic sequence: Christa-Maria rushes in to embrace Dreyman, and the passionate lovers have sex, wordlessly in silhouette. The assistant's voice-over delivers the report on the soundtrack, filled with absurd inaccuracies. The film's images thus undo the feebleness of the typewritten report. His description of the intense lovemaking is: "Vigorous acts of intimacy follow." His misreading of the reason for Christa-Maria's return—she is really choosing Dreyman over the Minister—provides the film's most humorous moment: "What she means by her statement is unclear. Perhaps she intends to take better care of his household." Both *The Imitation Game* and *The Lives of Others* transcend mere Romanticism to instead represent a complex humanity in the wake of seeming technological determinism. The Turing film replaces sex with cryptology, while Von Donnersmarck's uses sexual intimacy as a marker of humanity's resistance to reduction to mere typed reports.

The sex sequence in *The Lives of Others*, testament to the power of visual images over the reductive typewritten report, foregrounds the film's political project. For

whatever their other flaws, Dreyman and Christa-Maria, at this one moment, are able to establish human contact with one another. The lush Romantic sequence serves as a marked contrast with Wiesler's sex with a prostitute. After mechanically servicing him, the prostitute gets up to go to her next appointment. When Wiesler begins to beg for a few more minutes of human contact, she tells him curtly to book a longer slot next time.

The sequence where Dreyman and Christa-Maria make love is resonant with similar analysis in *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Kittler analyzes a 1919 essay by Rainer Maria Rilke entitled, "Primal Sound": "[The piece] leaves no doubt whatsoever about which contemporary developments were most important to literature in 1900. Instead of lapsing into the usual melancholic associations of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*... at the sight of a human skull in candlelight, the writer sees phonographic grooves" (43). The primal scene where the Stasi agent misunderstands the lovemaking because his aural surveillance gives him only part of the story is given to the film's audience visually, as we ironically see the images of the lovemaking on top of the inaccurate and ultimately meaningless typewritten report.

Kittler analyzes: "Word processing these days is the business of couples who write, instead of sleep, with one another. And if on occasion they do both, they certainly don't experience romantic love" (214). As Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz describe it a bit more clearly in their "Translator's Introduction": "[Kittler] further develops the contradictory and complicated relays between gender and media technology, including a 'register' of this century's 'literary desk couples'—couples who, according to Kittler, have exchanged lovemaking for text processing" (xxviii). The triangular love relationship in *The Lives of Others* engagingly develops this metaphor. As playwright and

actress, Dreyman and Christa-Maria are literally supposed to be the “literary desk couple” destroyed by militaristic modernity. Indeed, they are by film’s end, as Christa-Maria is run over by a car and killed while running away from Grubitz and his Stasi agents.

However, ultimately, *The Lives of Others* is Wiesler’s film, a narrative that documents his redemption. Wiesler hides what he knows about Dreyman, allowing the playwright to emerge from the investigation unscathed. Wiesler, however, is not so lucky. For his failure, Grubitz demotes Wiesler to a basement office where he merely opens letters, not composes them out on assignment. Later, after the fall of communism, he becomes a mailman, still only delivering letters. In the film’s very last scene, he passes a bookshop with Dreyman’s photo on a poster in the window. The new book, a novel, is called, *Sonata for a Good Man*. Wiesler enters the Karl Marx bookstore to purchase a copy of the novel. As if to a lover, the book is dedicated to “HGW XX/7,” Wiesler’s code name as a Stasi agent. The cashier asks Wiesler if he wants the book gift-wrapped. “No, it’s for me,” he says tellingly.

The film ends in freeze-frame on Wiesler’s face. While Kittler’s analysis stresses that militarized communications technologies have reduced lovers to “so-called Man,” *The Lives of Others* demonstrates that, despite the brutalities of Cold War culture, it is possible for humans to rediscover their humanity. Wiesler and Dreyman survive the Cold War; Dreyman’s discovery that his Stasi tormentor, his Inspector Javert, was the very one who saved him from torture, becomes the stuff of his post-Cold War literary creation, replacing Christa-Maria as his muse with “the good man” who found his soul by refusing to continue his robotic service to a Totalitarian regime.

At the narrative level, of the three material communications objects that Kittler studies, film—the moving image—is the least present in *The Lives of Others*. There is merely one sequence in which Grubitz leads a raid on Dreyman’s apartment in order to attempt to discover the whereabouts of the typewriter. On his way into the apartment building, Grubitz waves at Wiesler, who sees him via the video surveillance camera. However, *The Lives of Others* is itself a film, and thus participates, at the metadiegetic level, in the Kittlerian examination of the culture of so-called Man. At the center of Kittler’s argument lies his attachment to Derridean deconstruction, a belief that modern technology has re-shuffled the history of Western civilization in ways that belie the false ordering and rationalism of Western philosophy. Kittler argues: “Whereas (according to Derrida) it is characteristic of so-called Man and his consciousness to hear himself speak and see himself write, media dissolve such feedback loops” (22-23).

Kittler is part of a group of cultural studies scholars who believe that technologically determined social ways of being force profound transformations on cultural practices. Similarly, James Carey argues that the telegraph inaugurates a new era in communication because it separates, for the first time in history, communication from transportation. Unlike the pony express or the railroad, the telegraph allows people to communicate without moving themselves or their representatives. Nothing more extreme than tapping a finger to send electrons scurrying down a wire is involved in trans-continental telegraphy. Kittler’s similar insight about the transformation of culture at the hands of the phonograph is of particular interest for adaptation studies. Indeed, Kittler implies that the phonograph’s short-circuiting of print-based media invents the twentieth century, and radically transforms the world of classical philosophy: Plato in *Phaedrus*

argues with Socrates over whether giving a speech or writing it down is the more effective form of communication; film of course is superior to both, both better at engaging an audience and better at recording the world with precision.

The phonograph, the typewriter, and the cinema produce a new possibility that we in adaptation studies make it our business to interrogate. The literary basis, indeed the Platonic basis, of traditional adaptation studies would do well to absorb Kittler's technological dimension. His theory of the phonograph is an adaptational one: recorded sound allows for the transmittal of communicative information without the conversion to literary symbols. Similarly, a film communicates narrative and emotional information, often without the need to resort to its literary, symbolic "source." This process does not point to deficiency as implied by traditional fidelity studies, but instead becomes the normal state of twentieth century modernity.

Early on in the book, Kittler argues that, "oral history today confronts the historians' writing monopoly" (6). Given the prior force of Jacques Derrida's argumentation on this point, in works ranging from "No Apocalypse, Not Now" to *The Post Card*, and the technological proofs that Kittler piles on top of them, the wisdom of seeing modernity as destabilizing a teleological history of communications technologies is not in question. A Platonic belief in a progressive civilization proceeding from oral primitiveness to written dominance has rightfully become undone. *The Lives of Others* instead challenges Kittler's pessimism about the consequences of these observations. Not the fact of the cinema's militarist technological status, but the subversive artistic uses of audio-visual technology demonstrates how "so-called Man" is in fact far more human than Kittler allows.

Kittler's precise analysis of the transformation in culture produced by the communication apparatuses of the late nineteenth century allows us to understand how cinema interrogates the citizens of the twenty-first century. Von Donnersmarck's artwork, in its obsession with audio and video surveillance, and in its central plot concern over a hidden typewriter, is a radical adaptation of Kittler's book. Both Kittler and Von Donnersmarck are subjects of a Berlin of the late 20th century. Both thinkers document the horrors of militarism run amok. And yet, the last page of Kittler's book obsesses over the aftermath photographs of Hiroshima in 1945, while Von Donnersmarck's film celebrates the collapse of the East German dictatorship and the survival of the film's artistic hero, and his former Stasi spy turned savior. *The Lives of Others* takes the same data as Kittler, but ends its narrative progression with a completely different interpretation of that data. The "so-called" men in *The Lives of Others* find their humanity and triumph over the repressive East German government, and indeed live into the twenty-first century. This cannot be inconsequential to those of us, myself and Kittler alike, who deeply care about the future of humanity.

Early in the course of *The Lives of Others*, Dreyman attends an after-party at which Minister Hempf meets Christa-Maria. In order to cut in on his dancing with her, Hempf praises Dreyman by quoting, "Writers are the engineers of the soul." Dreyman's radical friend, Paul Hauser confronts the Minister with the observation that this quote is from Stalin. The Minister responds with mock joking, stating that he likes to provoke. As his hand is placed firmly on Christa-Maria's backside, Paul and Dreyman do not take kindly to this. The corrupt conflation between East German political power and engineering is the material pessimistically analyzed in Kittler's *Gramophone, Film,*

Typewriter. The testament to the enduring viability of “no-longer-so-called” Man is crucially, eloquently expressed by *The Lives of Others*: the nefarious scientific dehumanizing of our souls at Hiroshima and Auschwitz can be reverse engineered and transformed for the betterment of humanity by great artists such as Von Donnersmarck.

III. Conclusion: “Just a Body Doing a Job”

My readings of both *The Imitation Game* and *The Lives of Others* have relied upon a method of seeing the material technological objects of Kittler’s analysis within the film’s images themselves. There is something too literal about this methodology that misses the full impact of Kittler’s argument about what film culture might mean to contemporary humanity. I would like to conclude with a far less literal, and more speculative example of the Kittlerian, an analysis of *High School* (1968), Frederick Wiseman’s documentary expose of Northeast High School in Philadelphia as a factory meant to produce soldiers for the war in Vietnam. One of the truly great editors in the history of cinema, Wiseman’s films work like Turing machines. The filmmaker shot dozens of hours of footage over the course of three weeks, resulting in a brief eighty-minute film. Wiseman squeezes meaning out of every cut, ratcheting through possibilities of where to put each shot like the Universal Machine’s rotors.

In the first half of *High School*, we see close-ups of teachers, well meaning, but encouraging rote automatism, not all that far from Wiesler’s lecture at the Stasi training school in *The Lives of Others*. A kindly Spanish teacher does not seem to appreciate the irony that she forces the students to repeat the word “*existencialista*” while teaching the students about Jean-Paul Sartre, an advocate not of military order but of human freedom.

The first section of the film ends with another kindly English teacher playing a reel-to-reel tape recording of Simon and Garfunkel's song, "Dangling Conversation." Wiseman's camera dwells on the reels of the tape recorder, plunging the film into a Kittlerian reverie about why the mechanical recording of the song is so much better than when the teacher, in her own voice, read the words out loud minutes before.

Then, an intermission! Why would an eighty-minute film need an intermission? Wiseman has withheld the entire political project of his film for the final forty minutes. The second half begins with the school's soccer coach reminiscing about his star player, whom he has just learned had his foot blown off in Vietnam. After much abuse of many more students, the film ends with images of a demonic woman, one of the administrators reading a letter to revel in the fact that a student, about to fly a secret mission in Southeast Asia, does not think he will return alive. Because he has no next of kin, he bequeaths his life insurance benefits to the high school. Wiseman cuts to black to end the film, having had us dwell for minutes on this frightening face in a low-angle close-up.

Wiseman's films are Turing machines, cold and analytical, and yet seem to have learned the lessons of Kittler. The airman's hand-written letter to the high school is both an articulation of Romantic individualism and also testament to the machine-like precision through which the high school factory has successfully destroyed his humanity in order to churn out soldiers. *High School* is a film that sees the world Turing bequeathed to us as analyzed by Kittler, deeply threatening to the future of humanity. But, like *The Lives of Others* and *The Imitation Game*, *High School* also believes in the power of individuals, using the master's tools, mechanically reproducible images that are the cinema, to dismantle the machine's house.

High School is the Turing film that *The Imitation Game* is too literal to allow it to become. Benedict Cumberbatch gets us to care deeply about Turing's secret homosexuality amidst his grandiose project of inventing the future of high-speed computation. Yet, unlike *The Lives of Others*, *The Imitation Game* seems to believe it is telling a straightforward historical tale of the past. Kittler suggests the devastating implications of the mechanization of humanity lie not in our past, but in our future. The war of typewriters did not end with the Turing machine's victory over Enigma; that was merely the first volley, to be continued behind the Iron Curtain, and in Vietnam, and who knows how much further into our future.

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