CHAPTER TWO

Analog in the Age of Digital Reproduction

Audiophilia, Semi-Aura, and the Cultural Memory of the Phonograph

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In the study of media, the oppositions between the "mass," "popular," or "esoteric" and the "elite" or "esoteric" must be treated with a certain suspicion. If they cannot be avoided and must be granted at least a provisional or heuristic function—not least of all because the terrain of culture and media continues to structure itself through these categories—they also should not be taken at face value, for indeed the divisions that they articulate are infinitely porous and endlessly shifting. But for just this reason, if we allow these concepts any purchase at all, we must pay special attention to those moments where "esoteric" signifiers, signifiers that cannot, or at least not anymore, claim "general intelligibility," are deployed within an otherwise "popular" work. Sometimes this is done with didactic intent (thus, *Project Runway* initiates the audience into an at least somewhat technical language of fashion design), and sometimes, as in the case of certain rare and expensive things, it helps create an aura of luxury around objects that in order to be possessed by a few must be desired by the many. More frequently it is done for the sake of "mystification," as in the case of TV shows about doctors, lawyers, scientists, or denizens of Manhattan, where a more or less incomprehensible vocabulary and set of references is systematically deployed in order to create the illusion that one is peering into the work and play place of an intellectual or cultural elite. But the most telling and interesting case is where the recourse to such "esoteric signifiers" issues from a certain structural necessity: where a text from "popular culture" cannot work out its own logic but through recourse to that which withdraws from its own purported popularity and "mass intelligibility."

A striking instance of this last case is the appearance in popular entertainment of the record player, a technology, which, while functionally obsolete as a "mass medium," remains (in a sense that will become more clear as I continue) a marked esoteric signification. So, for example, in an episode of the recent television series *Ghost Whisperer*, the best friend of the heroine—a small-town antique-shop owner who speaks to the dead—purchases an old record player as a birthday present for her son. Alone in his room, he plays a record. A haunting voice comes from the speakers, the record starts skipping and the platter spins out of control, and finally, as the mother bursts into the room and tries to set the needle back on track, it discharges a near-deadly shock. *Ghost Whisperer*, with even more consequence than its sister psychic drama *Medium*, conceives of psychic powers as an ability (admittedly more passive than active) to call that which is absolutely absent, existing only as the complex of all that is left unresolved at death, back into presence: an ability that doubles, and is doubled by, the capacity of the medium of television itself to collapse dreams, hallucinations, and every sort of paranormal experience, along with a more quotidian reality, together into a single homogenous plane of simulacric seeing. And indeed what becomes present is not just the dead person, who appears almost in the flesh, but the last intentions and memories that were dissolved with his or her death, and which now, having been restored, allow for the solution of the mysteries surrounding it.

Given the ideological implications of this gesture—it is as if authorial intention were itself being resurrected in full force to serve as the law of the medium—it is all the more striking that phonography plays no less vital a role in an episode from *CSI Las Vegas* (the acronym stands for "crime scene investigation"), a TV program whose worldview is almost diametrically opposed, at least within the genre of "mystery" and "detective" shows, to *Ghost Whisperer*. Here the dead also speak, but only through the trace evidence produced in the moment of violent death: the question of intentions, and traditional detective work, is shunted aside in the name of the "hard" science of forensic analysis.

The episode in question is particularly noteworthy, not only because of its explicit invocations of the Ur-mystery *Oedipus Rex*, but also
because it presents with unusual clarity the fundamental conceit of the “scientific” crime show exemplified by the CSI franchise: the perfect mastery of a fully materialistic and empirical rationality over the irrationality of passion, crime, and madness. An apparent rape-murder at an institution for the criminally insane—the conjunction of passion, crime, and insanity is revealing—it is solved only when the lead investigator realizes that it would be possible to play a piece of pottery fashioned in an art class at the asylum as if it were a phonograph record, restoring the sounds of a conversation etched into the clay during its manufacture. Thus it is revealed that one of the nurses addressed a ward as “angel”:
the same sobriquet used in letters sent to him by his mother, with whom he had an incestuous relation since his father’s death. This in turn leads to the discovery that this nurse and the mother are one and the same, and that she, and not one of inmates, committed the murder out of jealousy.¹

If these two examples of the ghostly and uncanny appearance of the phonograph in television are especially suggestive, it is not least of all because they literalize one of the founding myths of phonography. The “ghostly” qualities of the phonograph are, indeed, well known: its earliest promoters promised that it would allow people to hear again and again the voices of loved ones long after they had died. The dead could even speak at their own wakes.² But this does not yet exhaust the significance of the specific appearance of phonography. While the power of making the absent present is perhaps strongly associated with sound-reproduction, promising as it does the reproduction of voice in its living presence as pure interiority, nevertheless this phonographic tendency motivates all mass media, and not least of all television, while at the same time the phonograph itself has been largely replaced by other analog and digital sound-reproducing technologies. What is striking in these episodes, this is to say, is that this general tendency is thematized through recourse to the literal phonograph; a media that for the most part has already fallen into obsolescence. More than two decades after being pronounced dead with the advent of digital reproductive media, it is the record player itself that still seems to haunt the present, refusing to let its voice fade away. It is as if the ghostly properties of the reproductive media in general could only present themselves through the specific “haunting” of the newer media by the old.

It is tempting to ascribe the persistence of the phonograph, and especially of the phonograph as icon, to a nostalgia always at work in visual and sonic culture.³ Yet the record player is not just one archaic object among many, but itself involves a system of memorialization and memory retrieval that is, in many ways, of great significance for the experience of memory in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The nostalgia for the phonograph is not so much the desire to bring back, and bring back to life, lost experiences, but rather to hold on to a means of recovering memories that it itself threatened with obsolescence. The record player not only belongs to a past that contains most of the founding myths of popular music, but it also promises the resurrection of collections of music, and associated memories, that most people, with the advent of the CD, had put away in storage. Indeed, with the advent of phonographic technologies, the system of cultural memory became dependent in an unprecedented way on the specific technologies that allow access to the transcription of an event: the very evolution of the technologies that promise the preservation of the past obstructs access to whole strata of past recorded experience, which in turn assume a most strange half- and afterlife within a system that seemed to promise the total recall of whatever of the past could be captured as a recording.

Hence the shock of the phonograph, made literal in Ghost Whisperer. With the emergence both of digital technologies of reproduction and of a global system of electronic content transfer, phonographic technology seems to have fulfilled the wildest promises of its beginnings. That more or less every recorded sound and image content is now available more or less on demand and instantaneously is perhaps the least of it. With the Internet a realm of concrete collective experience has opened up which, at least on the surface, transcends the limits of space, time, and human finitude. But the persistence of the analog phonograph, in a world in which phonographic technologies seem to have fulfilled their telos in the digital, is the persistence, above all, of a complication to a system of memory that seems to have resolved into a purely instantaneous and omnipresent availability. The afterlife of the phonograph, in other words, involves a certain kind of depth to memory. In a world in which, it would seem, memory images and sounds are available “on tap,” the phonograph works as a capacitor: it stores and releases, unexpectedly, and to a shocking effect. And indeed it is an aleatory capacitor, since what is stored is sometimes itself something accidental, like the trace evidence from a crime scene, created outside of a system of fulfilled intentions and rational control.
The persistence of the phonograph goes hand in hand with the development of an esoteric audiophile culture that for the most part continues to maintain the superiority of the LP to at least the more popular digital recording formats, and in some cases the intrinsic superiority of analog over digital.\(^6\)

What is interesting about the claims to vinyl's superiority, whatever their possible validity, is that they involve a conception of what the experience of recorded music is, and indeed of the very nature of the media of musical reproduction, that differs radically from those of what we might call the mainstream music-consuming public. The polemical exchanges between the various sides quickly reveal disagreements about the nature of judgment and aesthetics and indeed the criterion of truth that are anything but trite, and it often appears that there can be no real agreement regarding what constitutes the basis of judgment or the court of appeal.\(^5\) A simple example is the concept of signal-to-noise ratio, a crucial measurement of acoustic fidelity. While the technical assessments of signal-to-noise ratio seem to favor the CD player, the vinyl enthusiast would argue that, in fact, the "objective" measurement is not the best basis of judgment, and that not all noise is the same, but that the subjective act of listening must also be taken into account. LP noise is more regular, more predictable, and hence either can be "tuned out" more easily or is itself experienced not as noise but as warmth of sound.\(^4\) There are few places in popular culture, indeed, where the crises of postmodernism show themselves so clearly. For the true audiophile, the true lover of the "absolute sound," no objective criterion of technological evaluation can ever refute a certain kind of radically subjective experience of listening that is almost mystical in its resistance to communication. Just as the mystic invents a new language to speak of the unspeakable, the audiophile creates a new vocabulary to capture the most mercurial and intangible aspects of acoustic experience.\(^7\)

It is not just a question of the criterion of fidelity, whether subjective experience or objective measures, but of the nature of fidelity itself, and, by extension, of reproduction. Analog reproduction appears superior to digital reproduction not simply because of demonstrable or even demonstrable technical criterion, but because the reproduction of sound comes to be understood as a specifically analog, rather than digital, process. What is ultimately at stake is a clash between very different conceptions of the nature of sonic reproduction, of "writing sounds," and even, ultimately, of consumer technology itself. The phonograph's persistence suggests a specifically analog, rather than digital, conception of sound recording or sound writing.

There is a tendency, even in quite subtle analyses of phonographic media, to conceive of "reproduction" principally in terms of a digital model. So, for example, Mark Katz, in his admirable study of the effect of technology on music, writes: "No longer temporally rooted, recorded music can be heard after it was originally performed and repeated more or less indefinitely."\(^4\) This assertion is not wrong, and yet it conceals the basic difference between the analog and the digital. Whereas analog reproduction involves the transduction of a wave from one form of physical embodiment to another, digital reproduction involves the translation of a physical event into a code of information that, even if it must be contained and transmitted in some sort of material medium (such as an optical disk or the memory chip of a computer), is inherently immaterial. Every digital event, such as a musical recording or a compact disk, could be expressed as a finite, if extremely large, integer. While the dependence of digital codes on material carriers does involve the possibility of error, nevertheless the digital code itself transcends its material embodiments to the same degree as any mathematical object. The "digitalization" is this very abstraction. With analog reproduction, such a moment of "abstraction" never takes place; there is merely movement from one physical form to another, and indeed with every physical event of "reading" the inscription, the possibility of some transformation and (to use a loaded term) distortion. In the case of analog reproduction, the "more or less," in other words, takes on an entirely different meaning. Nor can we speak of a complete temporal uprooting. The temporal dimension comes to reside in the fallibility of the material itself: the symbol of which is, above all, the grooves of the LP slowly etched away by the stylus—as if the moment of inscription could never be contained just in the original recording of the sonic event, but also leaves its traces on the operation of playback.
phonograph’s persistence suggests is a constitutively different form of writing, which is neither reducible to sound or voice (phone, in other words), nor structurally opposed, but rather its haunting replication. Jonathan Sterne, in the Audible Past, a study of the cultural origins of sound reproduction, suggests that his ambition, somewhat following Derrida, is to challenge the “audiovisual literacy”—a list of seemingly naturalistic assumptions about the difference between hearing and vision—which is in fact rooted in a “two-thousand-year-old Christian theology of listening.” By idealizing “hearing (and, by extension speech) as manifesting a kind of pure interiority,” it merely restates “the longstanding spirit/letter distinction in Christian spiritualism,” whose own roots can be found not only in the Gospel of John and Saint Augustine, but ultimately in the discussion of speech and writing in Plato’s Phaedrus. Sterne goes on to discover in the earliest proponents of technologies of sound writing, such as Scott, the desire to develop a form of “natural writing,” reflecting the true nature of sound, “hearing an indexical relation to speech, rather than the abstract and arbitrary relation to speech” of typography. While I am basically sympathetic with this ambition, and while certainly (as Sterne admirably demonstrates) there is much in the early history of the phonograph that suggests a rampant phonocentrism, there is also, I would argue, a different aspect of phonography, which to some extent obscures the very opposition of speech/sound/noise and writing. The “analog” moment, as it were, involves neither the preservation of sound, in its transience, through writing, nor the institution of a “perfect” writing, capable of representing the natural language of speech, but instead the replication and rewriting of a sonic event which is always already writing, but a writing which is inherently and irreducibly materially embodied. The essence of analog sound-writing, in this regard, is the inherence of noise and decay in every moment of reproduction: Analog reproduction neither negates the transience of sound, nor preserves it ad infinitum, but instead draws it out, tarrying with it. It is, in other words, a certain way of experiencing finitude. This is not to say that analog is not also “theological,” but it involves a theological tendency— provisionally we might refer to it as Gnostic—which to some degree stands in a contentious relation to the Western, Augustinian, spiritual tradition.

The concepts that Walter Benjamin develops in his Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit (The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction) provide a useful point of reference. For Benjamin, technical reproduction “frees (ablost) what is reproduced from the realm of tradition.” This realm of tradition, the aural properties of the artwork, involve an “authenticity” and “singularity” consisting in everything that can be “handed down,” from its material endurance in time to the way in which it bears witness to the circumstances in which it was made. The work of art, through its reproductive multiplication, becomes an article of mass consumption that can be actualized under whatever circumstances the consumer wishes. Benjamin’s model of reproduction is, again, fundamentally digital: mechanical reproduction involves an abstraction away from the material embodiment of the original and everything that is associated with this. Insofar as tradition itself, as the “handed down” of what is materially embodied, is the medium of aural works of art, then mechanical reproduction translates the original into an essentially different medium; a translation that could amount to nothing less than the “Erschütterung der Tradition.”

 Nowadays, in a world of MP3 players, digital cameras and video recorders, DVRs, and portable DVD players, one must wonder all the more at the prescience of Benjamin’s analysis, even if his revolutionary hopes for the mechanical reproductive media have been travestied in almost every way. Analog nevertheless seems to challenge Benjamin’s understanding of mechanical reproduction: it neither preserves the aura of the original artwork, nor abstracts fully away from it, but instead the aura, or indeed the distortion—the Verkrümmerung—of the aura, tradition as the distortion of tradition, becomes the medium. Each instance of reproduction is a handing down, not of work itself in its singularity, but of the aura as recorded trace of the singularity of the event. The aura is handed down only by being submitted to further distortion, which, however, again inscribes the moment of handing down as a singular event. One could even say that the sonic event, the wave form itself, is itself nothing else than distortion. This aspect of analog is clearest in the case of the phonograph, where the deterioration of the medium is so palpable in the mode of reproduction. Moreover, though, the mass production of the vinyl records itself involves what might be called semi-auratic aspects, of the greatest concern for audiophile collectors: Since the masters that are used in the stamping process have a limited lifespan and wear out with their repeated use, the value
of what is ostensibly the "same recording" can value dramatically according to the master used in the pressing and even whether the record was produced near the beginning or the end of the life-cycle of a given master. For an audiophile, these differences in manufacturing have palpable effects: The work, far from being infinitely reproduced, is itself degrading during the process of manufacture.

For Walter Benjamin, the question of mechanical reproduction ultimately concerns the nature of the sensual perception (Sinneswahrnehmung) of the human collective. Sensual perception, the way in which it organizes itself and the medium in which it takes place, is, for Benjamin, historically conditioned. I would ask, in turn, whether analog, in the sense that I have discussed, also corresponds to a historically emergent mode of sensual perception. To be sure, the more recent history of mechanical reproductive techniques already suggests certain "collective effects" of the analog medium. Most striking is the nostalgia for an antiquated reproductive medium: The culture of mass production, far from abstracting the work from its historical context, seems instead to preserve the sensory "feel" of superannuated technologies, or in other words, its particular mode of distortion, as the palpable sign of bygone ages. The past, in this way, becomes not so much the object of an insatiable yearning as an object of experience. We experience the past neither as a set of atomic contents that can be preserved as a collection, nor in the unrecoverable totality of a lost world, but as the medium of experience. This logic of nostalgia, moreover, is inseparable from the forms of popular music that emerged following the introduction of technologies of reproduction. That mercurial "sound," the qualities of timber that are so inseparable from the experience of music, especially rock music, is of essence a controlled distortion. The musical content comes to coincide with the medium: both rock music, and its reproductive media, amount to the same thing—the distorting reproduction of controlled reproduction.

The tendency of popular listening culture, seen in the ascendance not only of digital media but also of low-resolution formats like the MP3, seems to be to deny this elegiac dimension of music in the age of mechanical reproduction. Digital, as it were, turns the analog, and all the "sounds" of the past, back into a pure content, subject to potentially infinite reproduction. But this tendency is countered by an esoteric analog audiophile listening culture that seems to take pleasure in precisely what the more "mainstream" listening culture denies. Whereas the digitalized public regards the musical past as an immaterial collection of digital files archived ad perpetuum and accessible on demand, for the vinyl enthusiast this past is embodied in material objects dispersed throughout space and time and subject to an inevitable law of decay.

VI

This other-time and other-history that the phonograph exposes reaches not only back into the past, but also into the future: Not only does the production of record players continue even at the present, but the technology of record players also does not remain static; it continues to develop. Yet this innovation follows laws that are strikingly different from those governing the development of consumer electronics meant for mass consumption, and indeed, granting that the experience of the future is, to an ever greater degree, mediated by the experience of technological innovation, it would not be wrong to say that the future itself, no less than the past, has become bifurcated into two, necessarily coexistent, paths. Whereas consumer electronics tends to become smaller, concealing an ever greater range of functions within a deceptively simple exterior—a design philosophy exemplified, above all, by the iPod—esoteric audiophile products become larger and more extravagant in their design even as the range of functions is reduced to an absolute minimum.

Granting that sensual perception is a function not just of the human body and its organs but of the media that extend these senses in time and space and develop new possibilities of communication and memory and creativity, then it seems possible that this strand of esoteric consumerism is not just an irrelevant anachronism, but that it also helps define the historical emergent logic of perception of the digital age. Perhaps sensual perception has itself become divided between analog with its continuous semi-acoustic elegies and abstracted digital media. Every cultural product, and all perceptual experience, would hover, ghostlike, between these two worlds.

VII

It is indeed curious that although the audiophile seems to strive to have his or her sound-reproducing systems come as close as possible to the subtlety and rich dimensionality of "natural," nonreproduced sonic events, nevertheless no natural sound, and even those of the concert
hall, could ever provide fulfillment for this quest for the perfect sound. One might call this the paradox of reproduction: The perfect sound has to be reproduced, even though no reproduced sound can ever be perfect. This may be explained in terms of the specific content to which music-reproducing technologies give access—not the random sounds of everyday life, but controlled sonic events existing only in the form of recordings. Indeed, as many have noted, even in the world of classical music, which (Glenn Gould notwithstanding) has generally resisted the idea that the musical work could itself be created in the recording studio, nevertheless reproductive technologies have had a strong effect on the development of playing techniques and the tastes and expectations of the listening public. Perhaps more significant, however, is that such technologies not only give access to contents, but allow an active control over the experience that is not possible with nonreproduced sound. The “perfect” sound must be the possible object of technologies of control. This element of control is an element of both exotic and esoteric listening cultures, and yet assumes radically different forms in each. The esoteric ideal is the manipulation of contents and the “contouring” of sound to personal taste. Musical contents should not only be on tap to satisfy the whims of the moment, but should be recombined into an idiosyncratic collage. The esoteric ideal, in contrast, is not so much about manipulation of sound and content—almost no high-end audio products have tone controls, let alone graphic equalizers—as the absolute control of the system of delivery. Every link in the chain of transmission that leads from the source to the listener’s ear must be secured against possible interference. It is not only a question of isolating the sources of distortion inherent in the devices themselves, such as the vibrations caused by the motor of a turntable or the electrical interference of an amplifier’s circuitry. Taken to the extreme, this control extends beyond the reproducing technology itself. Not only must the listening room be shielded from outside noises, but the turntable must also be placed on a special suspension system isolating it from all vibration, and the entire system must be plugged into a special power supply, purifying the current of the public power grid of irregularities.

This control, in the case of both exotic and esoteric listening cultures, seems to involve transforming sound from a public to a private event. Yet the nature of privacy is, in each case, dramatically different. Whereas exotic privacy revolves around an ideal of individual self-expression through choice, esoteric privacy involves an environmental control that extends even into the most seemingly public of commodities. This experience, indeed, extends beyond the sense of hearing. Esoteric audio technology, with its enormous see-through acrylic plinths and visible vacuum tubes, provides a visualization of the idealized neutrality of the medium. The purity of the medium, moreover, becomes palpable as a purity of rare or valuable materials—pure acrylic, gold, diamonds, graphite—that are united in the apparatus.

These two kinds of privacy suggest different, though related, logics of sensation. The exotic listener rejoices in the freedom to manipulate the passive experience of affect, whereas the esoteric listener seeks to free from distortion what, in the end, consists only in distortion. The one treats affect abstractly as content that can be submitted to infinite repetitions and manipulations, whereas the other inhabits the interior of affect, trying to experience its purity that can only be purified through its destruction.

Perhaps what is ultimately at stake in these logics of listening and sensation is the structure of cultural memory, as it is itself historically constituted. It is tempting, following a familiar motif, to think of music as originally and essentially public in character. But we should rather say that musical experience, and sonic experience more generally, has a character that is both, in a tense and even paradoxical way, private and public; that indeed, like memory, it inhabits at once the private and public, and indeed both in an extreme way. Cultural memory is perhaps this changing, almost infinitely complicated, relation between public and private—the system of folds, to use a Deleuzian figure, through which the public and private are enfolded into each other, maintaining their difference while losing the specific polarities of “inside” and “outside.” The tension between the digital and analog as different ways of “privatizing” sense experience thus suggests above all a confrontation of two interrelated ways of mediating between the public and the private, or indeed constituting the public and public in such mediation. What characterizes both, and thus determines the limit of system that they establish, is that the public dimension continues to exist only as a residue that somehow has to be processed away, and yet which cannot be eliminated. It is this public dimension, in other words, that continues to haunt.

It is curious to note a striking parallel between both the “esoteric” and “exoteric” regimes of listening and memory and the dialectics of subjectivity of Fichte’s early Wissenschaftslehre. If esoteric listening culture suggests an “I” or self that masters the content given to it
through an ironic attitude, bringing raw material into ever newly created and quickly dissolved configurations, the esoteric involves an ever expanding program of mastery of the “not-I” by reforming it in accordance with the will. The limit of both regimes, in this way, would consist in an original positing of an opposition between “I” and “not-I,” form and content, or, as one might also say, signal and noise. This link is significant not least of all because Fichte’s attempt to ground philosophy in the self-positing of the “I” presents perhaps the most powerful and absolute philosophical expression of the notion of radical individuality that plays such a decisive role in the ideological configurations of capitalist. In his contribution to this collection, “Medium, Reflexivity, and the Economy of the Self,” Samuel Weber suggests the need to resist the tendency, so common in a field such as media studies, to forget our philosophical and conceptual past. Following the insights of Benjamin’s somewhat neglected dissertation Der Begriff der Kunstkritik in der deutschen Romantik, Weber suggests that the writings of Friedrich Schlegel, Novalis, and Friedrich Hölderlin provide a point of departure for a rigorous conceptualization of media. In this vein, I would suggest that this constellation of thinkers, each of whom (like Schelling and Hegel) starts out from a transformative critique of Fichte’s radical subjectivism, provide powerful, and even necessary resources for re-conceptualizing media as cultural memory, overcoming the Fichtean moment of radical individuality that transcends the networks of media in such a way as to preserve the illusion of a stable relation, defined by the oppositional pair inside-outside, between the private and the public. The analog and the digital, both of which presuppose a deconstruction and even contraposition of the material and formal, make it possible to think, in a way that is at once more rigorous and more concrete, what early Romanticism tried to make comprehensible through an often baffling array of translations of the foundational opposition synthesis and the analysis.13 Yet this very concreteness and conceptual articulateness allows for the deceptive appearance that the analog and digital, and indeed a wide range of derivative moments, could be not only isolated in singular media practices but also regarded as systematically self-contained units. What is necessary, as it were, is a “romanticization” (in the strict and precise sense) of media studies: The analog and digital, in all their various and singular versions and instantiations, must be brought into relation to one another in the thought, in Samuel Weber’s words, of medium as continual discontinuity. If the mass media, following an impulse that might be called ideological (or ontological), always seeks a compartmentalizing into a system of opposed regimes that together uphold the self-presence of pure subjectivity as their anchor and arché, media studies must insist, at every turn, on the interruptions that take place at the threshold between regimes.

This is not only possible as theory, but above all as practice—as indeed in the wake of Romanticism the opposition between theory and practice itself collapses. A striking example is the digital poem “Another Emotion” by Jason Nelson, which Kiene Brillenburg Wurth discusses in her introduction to this volume. While the text, presented through seven colored squares in a mobile horizontal arrangement, reads as a dense manifesto for a digital perspective in which everything seemingly real, sensuous, and intuitive (from the “I” to mathematics, colors, style, and even the natural world) is dissolved into a system of infinite patterns, the text, and with it the absolute digitization that it seems to propose, is interrupted at several levels by an analog residue. Not only are the words of the text divided into colored squares whose very insistence and stylistic coherence seems to belie the reduction of color and style into pattern, but the flickering, ever changing vertical lines, reminiscent of the cracked texture of film, cut across the screen, imposing a temporal dimension by allowing traces of an obsolete, analog medium (present only as defect and accident) to intrude onto the very site that would seem to promise, in the name of digital poetry, the perfectly accomplished self-rendering of the digital. Meanwhile, the music playing the background, a fragment that repeats endlessly without resolving, evokes at once a somewhat canonized cinematic nostalgia and a characteristic mood of Bach. It is as if the other emotion signaled by the name of Nelson’s poem stood in a certain analogy to the melancholy that Walter Benjamin, in his Habilitationsschrift, attributed to the German Baroque: a sadness that attends the thought of the world dissolved into mere patterns and surfaces, a feeling that seems to enter in as if through the cracks of a system that has excluded feelings in their stubborn singularity. But this is also only an analogy, written at the fissure where the digital breaks down and the analog breaks through. Perhaps the moods and emotions of the new media are also fully new, and truly other. Or perhaps, to use a Schlegelian motif, they are potentialized—emotions to the second or third or fourth power: at the very least not just a sadness for loss, but for the loss of loss, and so on, ad infinitum.