

Representations of the Telegraph



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Types of representations



- **Speed and space**
- **Inventors and Inventions**
- **Progress and Change**
- **Fairy Tales**
- **Morse Code**
- **Telegraph Operators**
- **Control**
- **Simplicity**
- **National Pride**

Speed and space



France

- On ferait voyager la pensée avec une vitesse (...) la vitesse même de la terre autour du soleil (*Le Magasin Pittoresque*, 1854)
- Le mot *télégraphie électrique* veut dire communication instantanée de la pensée à travers toute distance. (Louis Figuier, *Merveilles de la Science*, 1870)
- C'est, en deux mots, l'anéantissement de la distance quant aux esprits: deux intelligences peuvent, sans fatigue, sans obscurité, faire la conversation des bords de la Seine à ceux du Mississippi et du St. Laurent. (J. Aymard, *Le poudre à canon, le télégraphe ...*)

The United States

- Why is the telegraph like a musician? Because it beats time. (*The Telegrapher*, vol.1, No. 6, 1865)
- Thus the fortunate idea was at last formed and announced, which enabled the dead machines to move and speak intelligibly at any distance, with lightning speed. (*History of the Invention of the Telegraph*, 1853)
- Time and space are all but annihilated. Years are converted into days, days into seconds, and miles have become mere fractions of an inch. (*A Historical Sketch of the Telegraph*, 1852)
- with the speed of thought, a knowledge of all that is occurring throughout the land; making, in fact, *one neighborhood* of the whole country. (*Letter from Morse to F.O.J. Smith*)

Fairy Tales



France

- Mais il est un sentiment qui domine tous les autres : c'est celui de l'admiration pour cette puissance de l'esprit humaine, s'appuyant sur la science, sur l'industrie et sur la civilisation, et parvenant à des résultats que l'imagination même la plus fantastique des contes de fées n'aurait pu concevoir. (*Le Magasin Pittoresque*, 1854)
- Et ne criez pas trop à la fantaisie ! Toutes ces rêveries d'aujourd'hui deviendront des réalités, bien certainement, demain peut être ! (S. Henri Berthaud, *Les Petites Chroniques de la Science*, 1862)

The United States

- No fairy dream could ever surpass the wonders of the present age. (...) that tiny thread of wire which dangles in the air conveys a silent current far away, and thus transacts the business of a mighty trade and commerce, and carries our very thoughts to dear and distant friends. Who can tell what another century may bring forth! (*History of the Invention of the Telegraph*, 1854)
- In its wildest flights the most exalted imagination would not have dared, even in fiction, to give utterance to these stubborn realities. (*The Telegrapher*, Vol.1, No.5, 1865)
- electricity is the poetry of science; no romance—no tales of fiction excel in wonder its history and achievements. (*Historical Sketch of the Electric Telegraph*, 1852)

Source of tension



- Representations were predominantly magical and exaggerated.
- Projected uses emphasized the practical aspects of the telegraph

The telegraph is a link between the magical and the technical, the rational and the irrational.

Negotiations



- Le style télégraphique
- Privacy
- **Online relationships**
- Women in the workforce

Online relationships –The United States



“Is she good looking?” inquired Phil, deeply interested.

“Guess so—she sends well.”

“What in the wide world has her sending to do with her looks?” quoth Phil, impatiently.

“Well, perhaps not a great deal, but as I haven’t seen her yet it’s all I have to judge by. (...)”

Phil warns Tom of the dangers of online relationships:

“Take my advice old fellow—be careful you don’t get caught. I was reading in a paper, the other day, of a fellow who fell in love with a ‘sister operator’ whom he had never seen, and only became acquainted with by talking over the wire. He rashly proposed, she rashly accepted, and they saw each other for the first time on their wedding day. Rather risky business, I should think!”

Tom’s response:

“You can form quite as good an estimate of a girl’s character and temper by working and talking with her over the line, as by being personally acquainted with her; better, perhaps, for you take her on her merits alone, and are not prejudiced by her appearance.”

“Wooring by Wire”, *Lightening Flashes and Electric Dashes*, compiled by W.J. Johnston, 1882

Online relationships--France



“Autant Edmond Charoy était troublé, incertain et pusillanime lorsqu’il était en présence des gens, autant il faisait preuve a distance dans ses lettres, par exemple, ou ‘à l’appareil’, d’abandon, d’expansion et d’audace. C’ était une façon de prendre sa revanche. »

“Il s’ était même enhardi il était si brave de loin! – à l’interroger sur son physique ; si elle était grande ou petite . . .
« Plutôt grande.

--Et mince?

--Oui.

--Blonde ou brune?

--Blonde.

--Les Yeux bleus?

--Oui.

--Et la peau blanche, je gage.

--Gagez, et vous gagnerez.

--Ah ! ah! Mais . . . vous ne devez pas être désagréable à contempler, mademoiselle! La main potelée ? ou bien fine et longue ?

--Oh ! mais assez monsieur! Jusqu’ou iriez-vous, si on vous laissait? . . . Faites-moi donc plutôt le plaisir de me tracer un peu votre silhouette, à votre tour . . .

--Tout à vos ordres, mademoiselle ! »

Albert Cim, « Le Mariage d’un Timide », *Lectures pour tous*, [s.d.]

Conclusion



UN BUREAU DE « POSTE ET TÉLÉGRAPHE » DANS UN VILLAGE DES ENVIRONS DE PARIS.