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From electrotype to the electric image, the new accuracy and speed of long-distance graphic transmission promised a global unity to vision transcending linguistic differences. Yet fundamental ambiguities remained. Color, for example, proved a recurrent dilemma necessitating the use of words, as seen in this telediagraph sequence (Fig. 4).

And what of Korn's hope that picture telegraphy would provide more reliable news of distant lands? Consider this photograph from the Russo-Japanese War in 1904, as it made its way to New York and Berlin. According to Collier's Weekly, it depicted a Japanese orderly carrying one of his own wounded countrymen. But according to the Berliner illustrierte Zeitung, the same photograph depicted a Japanese soldier benevolently carrying a wounded enemy Russian. As I continue my research, I thus aim to inquire not only into the technologies and economies for the global provision of images, but also into the practices of truth and meaning that emerged alongside these. What strategies were deployed to stabilize visual meaning and make concrete claims in a world of ever more mobile and ubiquitous images? These questions place my research into closer dialog with our contemporary crisis where, surrounded by visual communication, from the emoji to Instagram, we are increasingly unsure of what an image tells us of reality.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Max Mustermann (mustermann@mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de) is a Postdoctoral Fellow in MPIWG Department II (Ideals & Practices of Rationality), directed by Lorraine Daston.

Eine zusätzliche Version ist mit weiteren Forschungsthemen auf der Institutswebseite zugänglich: www.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/de/forschungsthemen

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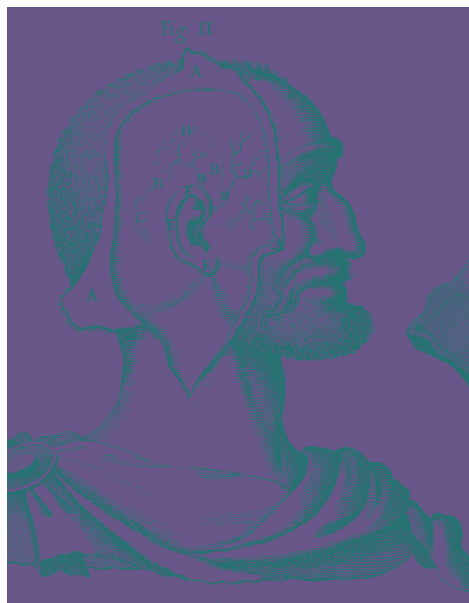


Von der Elektrotypie zum elektrischen Bild: Globales Sehen circa 1830–1930

von Max Mustermann

APR 2018

Between 1830 and 1930 lay a century that redefined the nature of image circulation, with changes in how they could be reproduced, amassed as property, and transmitted to distant locales with relative speed and accuracy. These new regimes for the worldwide supply of visual content, and the technologies that enabled it, are the subject of Max Mustermann's project at the Max Planck Institute for the History of Science.



01

»Die neue Genauigkeit
und Geschwindigkeit
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02

A convoluted course of illustrations led to Copernican Astronomy Illustrated (1808) in Japan: an English treatise on the construction of globes by a royal instrument-maker; a revised translation of this treatise in Amsterdam; manuscript excerpts from the Dutch text made by a Nagasaki interpreter; images from this manuscript copied into Shiba Kōkan's notebook; carvings on woodblock, reimagined from Kōkan's notes, used finally to print the illustrations of Copernican Astronomy Fig. 01. Such once was the fate of images transmitted across long distances, from engraver's burin, through calligrapher's brush, to xylographer's knife.

Fast forward to 1 to 1910, and we see a differently convoluted transaction. Writing to Wilhelm Wundt for permission to translate the Grundzüge der physiologischen Psychologie (1873–74), the Japanese psychologist Motora Yūjirō was informed that rights would be given only if electrotype reproductions of the book's illustrations were purchased directly from the Grundzüge's original publisher. The Japanese protested the expenses; the Germans argued that this would assure the accuracy of illustrations. Negotiations fell apart. No Japanese translation of the Grundzüge was ever produced.

What had changed? At the beginning stood electrotyping and stereotyping, allowing publishers to easily stockpile images for duplication, and giving birth to what we now recognize as stock image banks. As early as 1826, the publishing house Hachette had already launched a Service des illustrations, cataloging their stock of images by topic



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and licensing out stereotyped copies to other printers. Soon after, Harper's constructed a subterranean vault for electrotypes, with shelves eight feet high running 200 feet under the streets of New York City. By 1855, it held over 10,000 electrotypes, at an estimated 70 tons Fig. 02.

Although images had long circulated through varied means of reproduction, the rise of electrotype image banks standardized this circulation as a legal-commercial practice. Combined with international copyright regulations, plates offered authors and publishers better control over their images abroad. Against complaints that translations for distant markets featured "abominable illustrations" miscopied from originals, contracts stipulated that publishers of translations also purchase electrotypes of the original illustrations.

Simultaneously, the growing availability of plates for all occasions inclined publishers to source illustrations from existing works, rather than invest in new ones. Longman's Town and Window Gardening (1879), for example, was illustrated with electrotypes purchased from six other publishers. So it was that a guide to the art of window garden-boxes shared the visual vocabulary of botanical textbooks and Darwin's Fertilisation of Orchids, among others Fig. 03.

While the economy of electrotypes took form, inventors were devising tools of transmission more efficient than heavy plates. Since the advent of the telegraph, it had been hoped that the electric clicks of Morse code might one day be replaced by graphic rep-



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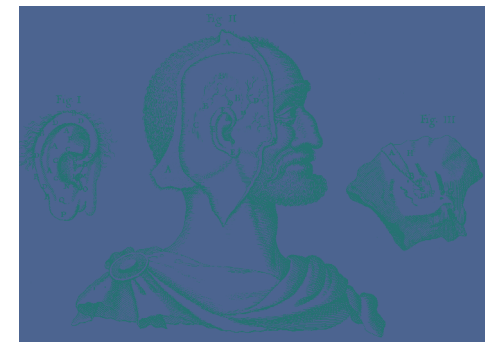
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