

Echoes and Frequencies: Tele-visions and Wireless Technologies, 19th–21st centuries.

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IMAGO-Cultures Visuelles

"Echoes and Frequencies. Tele-Visions and Wireless Technologies. 19th-21st Centuries".

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In 1924, the "Jenkins Picture-Strip Machine," a wireless-photography transmission device invented by the U.S. television pioneer Charles Jenkins, was used as part of an ambitious astronomy experiment. On August 21, the closest the planet Mars had been to Earth in eight years, all U.S. radio stations were asked to pause their broadcasts for five minutes in anticipation of the pick-up of possible Martian signals. The Jenkins Machine recorded onto film on this occasion a series of dots and dashes: traces of radio waves that weren't sent by any Martian creature but were in fact a manifestation of the natural phenomenon known as "cosmic noise." At the peak of the interwar "communications euphoria," such "radio vision" fostered "an aesthetic of the [electromagnetic] signal" (Gethmann, 2013, p.75). This example is a telling case of the cultural reception of the profound epistemic shift marked by the discovery of Hertzian waves and their rapid deployment in telecommunications, a process that began in the late nineteenth century with the development of wireless telegraphy and radio. Beyond the mere absence of cable, this shift brought about a new media paradigm with social, political, artistic, and philosophical resonances which have frequently been reassessed as new wireless technologies have emerged. For instance, the "wireless being" described by computer scientist Nicholas Negroponte in 2002 in response to the expansion of Wi-Fi (Negroponte, 2002) echoed and updated the "new and astonishing world" of wireless technologies described by William Crookes as early as 1892 (Crookes, 1892 p. 174).

Expanding the scope of the international conference Tele-Visions: Technologies of Ubiquity in Visuals Arts held in Paris on October 3 and 4, 2023, this issue of *VIEW Journal of European Television History and Culture* invites inquiries into the discourses and practices of tele-visions reflecting a shift toward a wireless epistémè. Beyond the medium of television itself, the plural "tele-visions" refers to the variety of remote viewing technologies and image transmission techniques, from radar to satellite and up to Wi-Fi, which have configured new models for the circulation and transmission of visual contents. At the crossroads of art history, media studies and STS—including, but not limited to, visual studies, broadcasting studies, radio studies and sound studies—as well as in echoes of recent inquiries into the circulation and transportation of images (Jenkins, Ford and Green 2018, Mostakova, 2021, Feitved, 2013) contributors to this issue are invited to explore the electromagnetic dimension of tele-vision technologies¹. Throughout the last 10 years, this discipline-cum-methodology branched out into various disciplines, fostering a hybridization that challenges the common conceptions held in the fields of humanity and histories of technolo-

gy (Galili & Huhtamo 2020). Echoes of this new academic pursuit have been felt in the realm of television studies and have prompted detailed rereading of the history of the medium as well as excavation of its unexpected aspects (Galili, 2020, Weber 2022), as evidenced by the 2015 issue of *View* “TV Archeologies” edited by Andreas Fickers and Anne-Katrin Weber (Fickers and Weber, 2015). Following up on these recent research endeavors, we encourage contributions from authors with different expertise and interests in “tele-vision,” alongside (but not limited to) the following themes:

1 – SPECTRAL IMAGINARIES

We invite scholars to draw on the “imaginary media” (Kluitenberg, 2006) that have anticipated and shaped the very idea of wireless tele-vision. Well into the interwar period, multiple models for understanding electromagnetism coexisted in popular conceptions. Reflections on the ether that have accompanied the birth of abstraction throughout what scholars have called “vibratory modernism” (Henderson, 2002; Enns, Trower, 2013), have influenced the work of the historical avant-gardes as early as Kupka’s turn-of-the-century dreams of a “telepathic” painting. Further on, planetary and cosmic aspirations have found expression through cultural conceptions such as Gene Youngblood’s videosphere (Youngblood, 1970), that in part designates the electromagnetic paradigm of tele-vision.

This issue also welcomes papers discussing the cultural intersections of parasciences and the electromagnetic spectrum as well as the cultural histories of “electronic presence” and “technical delusion” (Sconce, 2000; 2019). We believe that the fantasies of a shared electromagnetic space that inhabit the imaginaries of the radiophonic, televisual and computer wireless networks and communities can help to outline an electromagnetic archeology of tele-vision.

Sound studies have already invited media studies to reconsider the electromagnetic spectrum in its sensorial, aesthetic and social implications. Inclusive and transversal understandings of electromagnetic energy fields, ranging from visible light to radiowaves, have given rise to transductive regimes that have sparked what scholars have called “signal plenitude” and “panaurality” (Kahn, 1999; Kahn, 2014). We therefore welcome papers exploring the productive intersection of sound studies and visual culture, renewing approaches to tele-visions through accounts of energies of “abiotic” origin.

2 – SEEING BY FREQUENCIES: FROM THE INTERFACES TO THE INFRASTRUCTURES OF THE WIRELESS

The wireless or Hertzian turn has marked an important shift in the long history of remote vision techniques. If the optical vision has always been connected to the human eye, increasing its reach by ever-evolving prosthetic devices, the wireless is part of a modern reconfiguration of the vision now organized both as transmission and visualization: it brings closer what is far away through the transportation of images and signs, and embraces into the field of vision what was excluded from it.

This expanded field of visibility opens up to physical realities that are accessible to the human eye only to the extent that an interface allows it: from the visualization of X-rays, generating its own visual culture (Natale, 2011), to the dynamic screens of radars as ingenious forms of real-time

imaging (Geoghegan, 2019), the electromagnetic spectrum continuously produces traces intercepted, stored and translated into a variety of inscriptive and tele-visual media. These artifacts possess not only technical and scientific significance but also carry cultural and artistic implications. Indeed, the electromagnetic spectrum itself could be transformed into a source from which new artistic forms may be derived or even intercepted, as exemplified by the works of Swedish artist Lars Fredrikson (1926–1997) and within the broader context of telematic art. We welcome papers exploring this direction not only within visual arts and cultures but also extending far beyond, encompassing the vast realm of remote-seeing practices envisioned here as material practices.

Though frequently associated with the immaterial and the invisible, putting forward the very absence of cables, the wireless relies on an extensive communication infrastructure (Starosielski, 2015), often relegated into the background, either through the proliferation of interfaces, or through strategies of concealment or even camouflage (Parks, 2009). However, as evidenced by the recent scholarly interest in the logistical and infrastructural media, rendering devices (interfaces) are not conceivable without capturing devices (antennas and sensors broadly defined), as well as infrastructures connecting the former and the latter together. We encourage submissions that explore and shed light on this infrastructural dimension of remote viewing practices.

3 – NAVIGATING ELECTROMAGNETIC TERRITORIES

This third track invites scholars to delve into the intricate interplay between the territorial nature of electromagnetic waves and the geopolitical forces that inform their trajectories. As they cross territories, waves bring with them a tapestry of geographic, political, and environmental issues. Each country establishes its own set of rules and standards governing their use, resulting in a patchwork of broadcasting standards across different geographic territories. As a result, the electromagnetic spectrum reflects a complex web of international relations, trade agreements, national policies, and techno-diplomatic negotiations (Balbi and Fickers, 2020).

We encourage papers that scrutinize the intricate dynamics of “electromagnetic politics,” ranging from the regulatory allocation of frequency spectra to the subversive realms of hacking, resistance, diversion, and pirate radio, including deliberate disruptions or control of signals. This may include reflections on cultural diplomacy during the Cold War, postcolonial approaches in the context of the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as insights into the global governance of space-related technologies, including satellites and their footprints (Parks, 2005; Slotten, 2022).

As the environmental turn of media studies reminds us (Horn, 2018; Peters, 2015), elements are the primary carriers of media and it is crucial to recognize nature as the backdrop of wireless technologies. The topography of the Earth is a critical factor influencing the transmission of electromagnetic signals. Mountains, bodies of water, and atmospheric conditions present challenges that necessitate technological adaptations. We invite inquiries into waves as natural resources, prompting an examination of anthropic influence on the geopolitical dynamics of mediated spaces.

1 On the topic of the circulation of images, see the recent Symposium “Transporting Images,” an “Economies of Aesthetics” Symposium held at Brown University on October 20, 2024 and convened by Peter Szendy.

Paper proposals (max. 500 words) are due on June 15, 2024. Submissions should be sent to journal@euscreen.eu. A notice of acceptance will be sent to authors early July 2024.

Articles (between 3,000 – 6,000 words) will be due on December 31, 2024. Longer articles are welcome, provided that they comply with the journal's author guidelines (<https://www.viewjournal.eu/about/submissions/>).

All articles will be peer-reviewed.

For further information or questions about the issue, please contact the co-editors at imago.tele.visions@gmail.com.

Reference:

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