

A TRANSMISSION OF INTELLIGENCE: BLINK VOX

Is it a fact – or have I dreamt it? – that, by means of electricity, the world of matter has become a great nerve, vibrating thousands of miles in a breathless point of time? Rather, the round globe is a vast head, a brain, instinct with intelligence! Or, shall we say, it is a thought, nothing but a thought...

Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The House of the Seven Gables*.

The most radical of all acts of daring transformed night into day with a simple gesture: turning on the light. From a rather unique idea in the shadow of the great revolution – one that interfered with natural time and its biological clock – electricity soon occupied the epicenter of modern life. In the eighteenth century, scientific society unleashed a veritably euphoric enthusiasm over electricity that contaminated philosophers, priests, aristocrats and amateur adventurers alike, making way for every manner of curious machine – some of which had no function whatsoever. As the eighteenth century became the nineteenth, they came to shape the hybrid development of radio, offered in a complex of techno-scientific models. To accept this chain as a sequence is to pontificate: in the beginning was the telegraph.

Its invention broke the boundaries of space and time, suggesting to writers such as Hawthorne the end of substance as a signifier of material presence and revealing a wireless form of communication related to thought transference, telepathy, occultism and spiritualist contacts corroborated by prominent scientists in search of a device that would record the human body's sensations and perceptions as a discourse translatable into mathematical terms. In the genealogy of radio, the principal branch of such experiments emerged with photographer Samuel F. B. Morse's 1838 plea to United States Congress for funding of his project of "a new and useful machine and system of signs for transmitting intelligence between distant points."

A partial lack of mastery over his own invention led Morse to describe the process of transmitting messages as a transmission of "intelligence", leaving fuller explanations up to God.

BLINK VOX

[...] In 1870 a new cable was laid between England and France and Napoleon III used it to send a congratulatory message to Queen Victoria. Hours later a French fisherman hauled the cable up into his boat, identified it as either the tail of a sea monster or a new species of gold-bearing seaweed, and cut off a chunk to take home.

Neal Stephenson, *Mother Earth Mother Board*

In the beginning, the "world of the telegraph" was harnessed to transatlantic wires and cables, although Morse himself suggested that such a technical and financial hurdle might be overcome by introducing the idea of wireless communication, making

use of water's electrical conductivity and solar rays. Using a model that might be pleasing to a twenty-first century ecologist, he succeeded in transmitting a message from one bank to another of a Pennsylvania river... Although it didn't seem to amount to much, the subsequent adventure of radio communication was already there in that early language design and one might well recall Nietzsche: "[...] The significance of language [for the development of culture] lies in the fact that human beings used it to set up a world of their own beside the other one [...]"

Hence the sensation of proximity with another world, of observing intelligences, when we are in the presence of this "Mechanical unconscious" constructed by Otavio Schipper.

one touch. a current. a system.

Telegraph machines on tables are interconnected by audio, electrical currents and impulses, equalizing information beat out by tactile, electronic, mechanical, analogical and digital elements. Varying composition signals listening times that are amplified by the length or shortness of the table legs – height as determinant. Our eyes become soundboxes.

a blink. another current. another system.

A visible soundscape, it but echoes the original machinery... Morse's telegraph needed at least a finger to be activated. There is none here. In this new mechanism proposed by Schipper the telegraph repre-sents that which does not represent; it eludes history to transmit an intelligence of its own, another message articulated in air.

The reflection of a flickering incandescent bulb hovers above the telegraph machines. This suspended light bulb blinks like a voice converting our eyes. It blinks in counterpoint to the beeps that break boundaries in their own way, transforming space into time. But if the voluntary blink of our eyelids occurs at the speed of waves produced over three or four hundred thousandths of a second, what it is that eludes us in this fractioned landscape? What gaze captures the place between one blink and another?

In this installation by Otavio Schipper, art – and the music of Sergio Krakowski – suggest the magical sentence that can elucidate the matter: the unseen is different from the invisible.

It might be a telegraph or a mermaid's tail... all you need to do is blink.

TEXT BY LILIAN ZAREMBA