Mary Fairclough, "The Telegraph: Radical Transmission in the 1790s."
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Mary Fairclough's recent essay explores the political, social, and epistemological effects of the optical telegraph in late eighteenth-century Britain, focusing in particular on how telegraph imagery appears in conversations about reformist politics and global communication in the 1790s. Fascinatingly, as Fairclough outlines, the optical telegraph "appears to demand recourse to figurative or metaphorical expression in order to describe its effects" (26). To track the deployment of the telegraph metaphor, she focuses on how the aptly named anti-ministerial newspaper, the *Telegraph*, exploits the figurative implications of its namesake – namely the telegraph's speed, accuracy, and reach – in ways that mobilise radical politics and help mitigate the repression of dissent. First documenting how telegraphic technology moves from France to Britain, Fairclough goes on to discuss the *Telegraph*'s implementation of the telegraph trope, as well as its skirmishes with the law and its connections with the London Corresponding Society. While the *Telegraph* employs the telegraph metaphor as a means of articulating the "radical aspiration to the swift communication of political information," conservative attempts to curb such aspirations similarly appropriate telegraphic imagery, and thus command over the telegraph trope becomes central to the political discourse of the period. Fairclough also examines the telegraphic metaphor in terms of both its promise (the possibility of "radical communication" across the globe [33]) and its limits (as in the case of exiled radicals in Australia). Despite the practical limitations of telegraphic technology, however, Fairclough concludes that the telegraph comes to demonstrate "the transformative political effects of communicative media" (Abstract).

In "Part One: Le Télégraphe," Fairclough documents the importation of optical telegraph technology from France, in part through analyzing Charles Dibdin's musical extravaganza, *Great News, or a Trip to the Antipodes* (1794), which features a song about the telegraph and "demonstrates the immediate effect of the optical telegraph on the popular imagination" (28). Fairclough next discusses *The Gentleman's Magazine*, which from September to December 1794 ran a series of articles detailing the new technology and its function, with particular focus on "how the French design might be improved upon by English ingenuity" (30). Here Fairclough also studies James Gillray's print satire of 1795, *French Telegraph Making Signals in the Dark* (which depicts Whig opposition leader Charles James Fox as a human telegraph who leads a French fleet to London), and Thomas Maurice's 1798 poem, *Grove-Hill* (which "makes the telegraph symbolise the universal communication required to enable Britain's global imperial ambitions" (31)). Fairclough then moves on to examine telegraphic imagery in the press in order to demonstrate that the "battle over the polemical implications of telegraphic images forms a fascinating subset of the much broader battle over the expansion of the political press in the 1790s" (33). "Part Two: The *Telegraph* and Periodical Politics in Britain" argues that the *Telegraph*'s savvy depiction of the telegraph as both material technology and political symbol allows the paper to emphasise its speedy dissemination of news while also "enlightening and radicalizing readers" (34). In this section Fairclough also discusses how the *Telegraph* "complicate[s] existing critical models of print culture" (35), specifically Jon Klancher's paradigm for transmitting political information.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the *Telegraph*'s emphasis on radical communication drew a great deal of attention, and in "Part Three: Communication on Trial," Fairclough examines two cases in which the *Telegraph*'s transmission was "subject to particular scrutiny" (38). Finally, in "Part Four: The Limits of Global Communication," Fairclough turns to cases where telegraphic communication "is sorely tested, as reformers in London encounter the difficulties inherent in sustaining lines of communication with compatriots in Botany Bay" (43). While "radicals exploited the slippage between telegraphic technology itself, and its metaphoric version, to allude to the possibility of universal communication," they were confronted "with the difficulty of sustaining radical solidarity over enormous distances" (43). Yet Fairclough suggests that even in the face of these obstacles, the telegraph metaphor works to ensure "the survival of radical solidarity" (48) and maintain "the possibility that 'the whole world' might become a politically active 'Corresponding Society'" (49).

Offering astute readings of a wide array of archival material, from satirical cartoons to court proceedings, Fairclough demonstrates vividly how technological and scientific development, communication and media, and the figurative use of language "all bear upon national identity in Britain" (26). I appreciate especially how this argument zooms in and out from the particular to the axiomatic with ease and grace: From evidence in a single court trial to the larger political climate of the 1790s, from the *Telegraph* to questions about the expansion of the press in the early nineteenth century, from the practical application of a single invention to the larger scope of intellectual history, Fairclough continually connects her argument to important questions about technology, power, and print culture. Indeed, this article contributes directly to our understanding of print culture and repression in the 1790s, and Fairclough clearly situates her argument in light of other important theories about media and communication technologies as put forth by scholars like Klancher and Nigel Leask. Most pressingly, Fairclough shows how technology and figurative understandings and representations of that technology develop in tandem as individuals explore the many implications of technological change in diverse ways. In fact, perhaps most relevant to readers of *JLS* is how Fairclough allows us to see clearly the "epistemological role of metaphor," which gives individuals from across the disciplinary spectrum the language to conceptualise new phenomena and think through technological change (34). One can't help but notice that this article is particularly evocative in light of our current tech boom and its political applications: As Fairclough suggests, "We might read the effects of online communication as the eighteenth-century metaphor of universal communication made actual" (49).

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