Nostalgia & Nervousness.
Ambivalent Appropriations of Telephony in Germany

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Preface

At the dawn of the twentieth century, the telegraph and especially the telephone were commonly perceived as symbols of modernity par excellence – an account that still persists today. The spread of electrical telegraphy in the second half of the nineteenth century and the invention of the telephone in the 1880s were seen as important milestones in modernisation. The revolutionary inventions of the telephone and the telegraph, the narrative continues, promoted a changing perception of time and space. They accelerated modern life; they bridged long distances and, in doing so, notably contributed to the formation of a globalised world. However, the consequences of this alleged communications revolution were not solely assessed positively and as signs of progress, but its ambivalence was highlighted. For example, people feared the impact technology could have on their social life. The telephone was seen as a device that engendered more impersonal and superficial relationships and promoted the feeling of remoteness and loneliness. Concerns about privacy were expressed and the acceleration of life telegraphy and telephony brought about was said to trigger nervousness.

A couple of months ago, I was visiting a second-hand bookshop in the Netherlands. There, I came across a set of postcards depicting scenes that are related to telegraphy and telephony.[1] The cards show small drawings combined with short poems, both of which cannot be considered artistically precious but are rather simple. They were drawn and self-published by the telegraph inspector Hugo Starkloff from Meiningen in Thuringia in the first decades of the twentieth century. At first glance, Starkloff's drawings and poems do not seem to tell the common story of the telegraph and the telephone sketched above. Rather than focusing on the modernness of the technologies, the postcards appear old-fashioned and traditional. Examining the postcards more closely I noticed a note on the back of several cards, which indicates that Starkloff intended to use the proceeds from the sale to build a recreation home for female operators who were often diagnosed with nervous exhaustion. By then, my interest was aroused and I decided to use Starkloff's postcards as the source basis of my thesis.

In this thesis I will examine Starkloff's account of telephony and telegraphy from a cultural-historical perspective. Miri Rubin writes about cultural history: "Like all good ideas the basic point is simple. The cultural turn asks not only 'How it really was' but rather 'How was it for him, or her, or them?'"[2] Along the same lines, I ask: Telephony – how was it for Starkloff? How does he present and frame telephony? How do his attributions fit in a broader debate about modern technology at the beginning of the twentieth century? Since the telegraph already started to lose importance in the first decades of the twentieth century and telephony is central in Starkloff's postcards, telegraphy will play a minor but still significant role.

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1   Starkloff, Hugo: *16 Postcards on Telegraphy and Telephony*, Meiningen 1900–1918. Private Collection.
2   Rubin, Miri: What is Cultural History Now?, in: *What is History Now?*, ed. by David Cannadine, Basingstoke (2002), pp. 80–94, here: 81.

The structure of the thesis is as follows. The following introduction contains some remarks about the current state of research regarding the cultural history of the telephone. Furthermore, I will outline the theoretical and methodological foundations of this thesis and give basic biographical information on Hugo Starkloff. The subsequent main body of text is divided into five different chapters each of which highlights one aspect of Starkloff's account against the background of the broader debate about the role of the telephone and the telegraph. In the first chapter, I will describe and analyse the post inspector's account of the telegraph operators' profession. Moreover, Starkloff's telegraph postcards will give insight into his image of traditional and modern technologies. Then, in chapter two, the role of the female telephone operators will be explained and contextualised. In the third chapter, I will link the projected recreation home to appropriations of the telephone system and to nervousness in German modernity in general. Closely related is chapter four, which is dedicated to the changes in personal relationships that telephony caused and the way in which these are detectable in Starkloff's postcards. Chapter five will be concerned with a more common topic in the historiography of the telephone: I will ask how the role of space and time is depicted in Starkloff's postcards and how this account relates to a common narrative of the acceleration of time and the shrinking of the world. Eventually, in the conclusion I will merge the insights of the foregoing parts, place them within the broader context of modernity, and, last but not least, underline the relevance of the cultural history of technology in general.

This thesis would not have been possible to write without help. I would like to thank Clelia Caruso who got me hooked on the telephone. I am also grateful to Willemijn Ruberg and Joris van Eijnatten for providing me with support and feedback. Furthermore, I owe thanks to Iris Helbing and Heinrich Munk who searched their collections for me and dug up traces of Hugo Starkloff. Finally, my largest debt is to Fabian Zimmer with whom I have learned my telephone lesson the hard way.

Introduction

This introduction offers a three-part reflection on the theories and methods that my thesis is built upon. First, I will give a brief overview of the historiography of the telephone. It does not claim to be exhaustive, but will make clear in which way my approach to the history of technology, namely a focus on the cultural appropriation of technology, differs from most of the previous research. A second section highlights my interest in modernity and in Starkloff's postcards as a self-reflexive stance towards the technological modernisation of his time. Finally, I will give thought to the use of postcards as primary sources, especially to postcards that combine drawings and poems.

Cultural Appropriations

Since its invention in the late nineteenth century the telephone has been a frequently discussed topic in historiography. However, well into the twentieth century the literature focused almost exclusively on the telephone as a technical device. Scholars recounted the invention of the telephone[3] and examined the development of the telephone network.[4] Only in the late twentieth century, historians have begun to take into account social and cultural aspects of telephone communication, a trend that can be witnessed in the history of technology in general.[5] In many cases, authors who study the interdependency between culture and technology take a dichotomy between the two categories as a basis.[6] On the one hand, scholars frequently tend to portray technologies as a force that influences societal and cultural structures and therefore try to determine the impact of a certain technology. In this perspective, the telephone is seen as an explanation for the rise of modernity.[7] On the other hand, the telephone is regarded as a symptom of the underlying structure of modern life. Behind this narrative is the conviction that a technology is the expression of a certain modern zeitgeist.[8] For these scholars, certain features of telephony correspond to characteristics of modern societies and distinguish the latter from traditional ones, for instance, as Clelia Caruso states, "the telephone's evolution from an elitist status symbol to a product of mass consumption appears to epitomize the formation of the consumer society".[9]

Among the first to write a social history of telephony and to reject both of these research directions was the sociologist Claude Serge Fischer. In the monograph *America Calling*, which was

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3   See for example: Horstmann, Erwin: *75 Jahre Fernsprecher in Deutschland. 1877–1952. Ein Rückblick auf die Entwicklung des Fernsprechers in Deutschland und auf seine Erfindungsgeschichte*, Frankfurt am Main 1952.

4   See for example: Huurdeman, Anton: *The Worldwide History of Telecommunications*, Hoboken 2003. Thomas, Frank: *Telefonieren in Deutschland. Organisatorische technische und räumliche Entwicklung eines großtechnischen Systems*, Frankfurt am Main 1995.

5   See: Heßler, Martina: *Kulturgeschichte der Technik*, Frankfurt am Main 2012, p. 8.

6   See: Ibid., pp. 9f.

7   See for example: Kern, Stephen: *The Culture of Time and Space. 1880–1918*, Cambridge 1983.

8   Caruso invokes: John, Richard R.: *Network Nation. Inventing American Telecommunications*, Cambridge 2010. Fischer refers to: Brooks, John: *Telephone. The First Hundred Years*, New York 1976.

9   Caruso, Clelia: Modernity Calling. Interpersonal Communication and the Telephone in Germany and the United States, 1880–1990, in: *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 50 (2012), pp. 93–105, here: 99.

published in 1992, he investigates how the rise of the telephone influenced social relations in the United States from its invention in the 1880s to 1940.[10] Fischer assumes that understanding relations between technology and society is only possible when taking into account the users of a technology. At its heart, this perspective is a social-constructivist one, since it emphasises the importance of the contemporary usage for the understanding of a technology's role in culture.[11]

Referring to science and technology in general, Andrew Jamison and Mikael Hård take a wider approach and highlight the importance of interpretations and appropriation of technology. Based on the assumption that technologies always need to be integrated and adapted to a specific context, they challenge common narratives of the history of technology. In their book *Hubris and Hybrids. A Cultural History of Technology and Science* published in 2005, the two scholars state: "There is an additional set of stories that need to be told, the ones about using and learning and interpreting and giving meaning, which follow story lines of appropriation".[12] By adding the aspects "learning and interpreting and giving meaning" Jamison and Hård expand Fischer's approach to technology. According to them, human life is closely intertwined with technology and we constantly make use of technological innovations by "recreating our societies and our selves".[13]

Following Jamison's and Hård's notion of cultural appropriation as a "process by which novelty is brought under human control" and as a "way in which new things and new ideas are made to fit into established ways of life",[14] I perceive Starkloff's postcards as one interpretation or one cultural appropriation of telephony. Although the case study in this thesis can only be considered one little piece of the puzzle, its contextualisation can provide an approach to cultural appropriations of the telephone at the beginning of the twentieth century in general. Considering the historiography of the telephone, this is a new position. As mentioned above, up to now historians have mainly focused on the invention and spread of telephone communication and telephone systems, often from technical and economical viewpoints.[15] Furthermore, the scholars who focus on cultural aspects mostly highlight the social ramifications of the telephone's spread.[16] It is Carolyn Marvin's book *When Old Technologies Were New*, published in 1988, that comes closest to an analysis of past cultural appropriations of the telephone.[17] However, her analysis, which also takes into account reactions to the invention of electric light, is based on a variety of sources from the late nineteenth century Anglo-American world. Looking at Starkloff's postcards will add to the cultural history of telephony in Germany. While Marvin focuses on reactions to the new technologies *and* on changes in social habits they caused, my thesis is restricted to Starkloff's cultural appropriation of telephony,

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10   Fischer, Claude Serge: *America Calling. A Social History of the Telephone to 1940*, Berkeley 1992.
11   See: Ibid., p. 17.
12   Hård, Mikael / Jamison, Andrew: *Hubris and Hybrids. A Cultural History of Technology and Science*, New York 2005, p. 4.
13   Ibid., p. 4.
14   Ibid., p. 4.
15   See footnote 4.
16   See: Fischer 1992: America Calling.
17   Marvin, Carolyn: *When Old Technologies Were New. Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*, New York 1988.

taking seriously the importance of "broader frameworks of perception and understanding" and of "the ideas and visions about technology and science," as underlined by Jamison and Hård.[18]

In presenting sources from a small town in Germany, my thesis focuses on yet another aspect of telephone research that has been widely ignored up until now. While research into the appropriation of technology is generally disregarded, this is even more true for rural areas.[19] Although Meiningen in Thuringia had around 17 000 inhabitants in 1910 and, for that reason, cannot be named a rural area, it can neither be considered a big city. Thus, while most of the existing research on new means of communication focuses on their impact in cities like, for example, Berlin, I will pay attention to a previously disregarded small-town.

Modernity

Hård's and Jamison's approach is directed towards common narratives of modern technologies. Too often, they argue, histories of technology are either romantic myths of progress and ingenuous invention or tragic counter-narratives uttered by critics of modernisation that focus on negative consequences and on risks.[20] The two scholars attempt to counter these kinds of stories "with accounts that take broader social and cultural processes into consideration".[21] Hereby, Hård and Jamison distinguish between two levels of analysis. On the one hand, they discuss the cultural appropriation of technology in intellectual debates about technology and science. On the other hand, they pay attention to "a 'practical' level of lifeworlds and micro contexts, where different people make use of technological artifacts and scientific facts in their own particular ways."[22] With my examination of Starkloff's postcards I will concentrate on the latter. The micro perspective is important to me, because I agree with Martina Heßler that, besides the big picture, a cultural history of technology needs to tell detailed stories and to explain relations and inconsistencies.[23] Furthermore, analysing Starkloff's cultural appropriation of telegraphy and telephony offers the opportunity to pay attention to another neglected aspect in the historiography of technology: modern self-reflexivity.[24]

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18 Hård et al. 2005: Hubris and Hybrids, p. 5.
19 See: Zimmermann, Clemens: Kommunikationsmedien in der ländlichen Gesellschaft. Telegraf und Telefon 1850-1930, in: *Kommunikation in der ländlichen Gesellschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne*, ed. by Werner Rösener, Göttingen (2000), pp. 365–385, here: 365.
20 See: Hård et al. 2005: Hubris and Hybrids, pp. 4–7.
21 Ibid., p. xiv.
22 Ibid., p. 14.
23 See: Heßler 2012: Kulturgeschichte, p. 36.
24 As Simon Gunn explains, modernity "refers both to modern social and cultural formations *and* to the conceptual apparatus through which knowledge of these formations is acquired". (Gunn, Simon: *History and Cultural Theory*, Harlow, New York 2006, p. 114.) Many authors, from Jürgen Habermas to Zygmunt Bauman, have been describing this "conceptual apparatus" or modern condition with different outcomes, but one characteristic runs like a thread through many of these definitions: self-consciousness and self-reflexivity. See, for example: Ibid., pp. 109–114.

When since the late nineteenth century telegraphy and telephony have frequently been connected to modernity (for example, having been described as a "ubiquitous modern instrument"[25] or as "an indispensable utensil of modern life"[26]), the word 'modern' often referred to the telegraph or the telephone as part of the modernisation process. Hence, innovation and technological progress were seen as modern. However, sometimes the characterisation of the telegraph and the telephone as modern also refers to the social and cultural changes that the technologies are linked to.[27] Whereas these diagnoses are often made in hindsight, I will highlight the contemporary reflection about the social and cultural changes the modernisation process brought about. In doing so, I hope to make a contribution to present-day scholarship on modernity, because only in rare cases scholars take into account such "self-descriptive narratives of modern societies"[28] when linking the telegraph or the telephone to modernity.

The gist of the concept of modernity is a contrast with tradition.[29] Modernity, Christof Dipper summarises, differs from earlier epochs in that the contemporaries themselves recognised it as modern, thus, as distinct from the traditional.[30] On this account, the new *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity*

> concentrates on people making sense of their surroundings, articulating new meanings, cherishing uncertain customs, performing disputed pasts, expressing untested critiques, forcing breaks and ruptures, addressing complexities, nursing novel attitudes, and generally giving shape to modern values in unprecedented, practical situations.[31]

In this spirit, Starkloff's drawings and poems can be regarded as an attempt to make sense of the modernisation process and its new technologies. But to what extent does he present telegraphy and telephony as modern phenomena, as phenomena that broke with tradition? What makes Starkloff's account interesting is the fact that it is no straightforward narrative of the modern-ness or the novelty of the telegraph and the telephone. Rather, the postcards contain inconsistencies, they combine the 'modern' and the 'traditional', they point to innovation as well as to continuity, and they express an ambivalent stance towards modernisation. My study of the postcards, thus, highlights the contradictions inherent in the contemporary perception of modern technology.

To sum up, I will follow Hård's and Jamison's plea for narratives of modern technology and modernisation beyond romances of technological progress and tragedies of social or environmental destruction. By exploring Starkloff's ambivalent appropriation I will bring to light the

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25 Schantz, Ned: Telephonic Film, in: *Film Quarterly* 56 (2003), pp. 23–35, here: 24.
26 Mueller, Milton: The Switchboard Problem. Scale, Signaling, and Organization in Manual Telephone Switching, 1877-1897, in: *Technology and Culture* 30 (1989), pp. 534–560, here: 544.
27 Anthony Giddens, for example, argues that one main trait of modernity, time-space-distanciation, was fostered by technologies such as the telephone. See: Giddens, Anthony: *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford 1991. See also chapter 5.
28 Caruso 2012: Modernity, p. 103.
29 See, for example: Giddens 1991: Consequences, p. 36.
30 Dipper, Christof: *Moderne*, http://docupedia.de/zg/Moderne?oldid=84639, 4.6.2015.
31 Eijnatten, Joris van / Jonker, Ed / Ruberg, Willemijn / Segal, Joes: Shaping the Discourse on Modernity, in: *International Journal for History, Culture and Modernity* 1 (2013), pp. 3–20, here: 4.

ambivalences that are already inherent in the contemporary debate about narratives of modern technology. Eventually, this can help fathoming the ambivalences of modernity.

Looking at Postcards

As far as I know, the only existing publication on a selection of Starkloff's postcards is art-historian Brigitte Schoch-Joswig's article "Am Klappenschranke No. 2 oder die Unvereinbarkeit von Liebe und Arbeit".[32] In her article, Schoch-Joswig uses a series of six of Starkloff's postcards, which is not part of my collection, to show that in her opinion Starkloff had a reactionary image of women. For him, she reasons, women could either be sensual, feminine human beings or cold-blooded, emotionless operators. In chapter 2, I will explain why and to what extent I disagree with her. Here, it is important to me to highlight in what way the perspective from which she approaches Starkloff's postcards differs from mine. While Schoch-Joswig uses six postcards that tell one story, my collection contains sixteen different cards and, therefore, allows me to base my analysis on a wider spectrum of sources. Whereas she focusses on Starkloff's image of women and pigeonholes him as reactionary anti-feminist, I will analyse a variety of aspects touched in Starkloff's cards and try not to make hasty judgements. Instead of labelling him as reactionary, I will try to highlight the ambivalences and inconsistencies in his appropriation of telegraphy and telephony, thereby hoping to do justice to past lifeworlds instead of imposing my present system of values. And last but not least, unlike Schoch-Joswig's article, my argumentation contains a reflection on the applied methodology – the one that follows.

The sixteen postcards in my possession might belong to a series Starkloff himself advertised as "post-postcards" (*Post-Postkarten*), which consists of twenty-five cards and deals with Starkloff's workplace, the post office.[33] This is not certain, since there is no such note on any of the cards, but very likely with the fact in mind that transmitting telegrams and connecting telephone lines were important tasks in post offices at the beginning of the twentieth century. Starkloff drew the cards during the first and second decade of the twentieth century, more precisely between 1900 and 1918, and, thus, during the so-called golden age of postcards. From the turn of the century until the outbreak of World War I a huge variety of postcards were published and the importance of postcards as a means of communication reached its peak.[34] As Rudolf Jaworski remarks, the quantity and significance of postcards from this golden age provides a promising field for cultural

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32 Schoch-Joswig, Brigitte: Am Klappenschrank No. 2 oder die Unvereinbarkeit von Liebe und Arbeit, in: *Fräulein vom Amt*, ed. by Helmut Gold / Annette Koch / Rolf Barnekow, München (1993), pp. 188–194.

33 Starkloff sent an advertising postcard to the Swiss post office promoting his series of twenty-five "Post-Postkarten". (See: Starkloff, Hugo: *An das schweiz. Postamt*, Meiningen Mai 1926. Stadtarchiv Meiningen, Forschungsarbeiten, Nr. 236.) Unfortunately, the cards are not archived.

34 See for example: Jaworski, Rudolf: Alte Postkarten als kulturhistorische Quellen, in: *Geschichte in Wissenschaft und Unterricht* 51 (2000), pp. 88–102, here: 90.

historians.[35] However, although postcards have been used as historical sources for quite a while,[36] they have never become a customary type of sources for historians. Therefore, and because the use of any type of sources requires methodological consideration, some basic remarks on methodology follow.

According to Jordana Mendelson and David Prochaska who have published the volume *Postcards. Ephemeral Histories of Modernity* in 2010, "the scholarly literature on postcards still concentrates more on images and their interpretation than on production or reception".[37] With only little information about the people who purchased, sent, and received his cards, this is partly true for my analysis, too. Promotion cards and samples Starkloff sent to other post office clerks allow a predication about those who purchased his postcards. For example, he advertised his series of "post-postcards" by sending a promotion card to the Swiss post office in Hergiswil in the canton of Luzern in 1926. Here, Starkloff explicitly suggests a collective order of his post-postcard series by the Swiss post officials: "Für eine Sammelbestellung unter den dortigen Herren Kollegen u Kolleginnen wäre ich sehr dankbar". He also praises his product saying that the cards have a great appeal to post and telegraph clerks: "Die Karten haben mit ihrem harmlosen Humor in den Kreisen der Post- und Telegraphenbeamten sehr angesprochen und werden täglich nachbestellt."[38] It is not possible to answer whether it is true or not that Starkloff really sold his postcards so successfully, nor is it possible to draw any final conclusions about the reception side of the cards. Still, we can suggest that Starkloff's target group were professionals like him.

Furthermore, it is certain that Starkloff sent some of his postcards to the post museum in Berlin (*Reichspostmuseum*) and then, in turn, advertised them by saying that the cards were part of the museum's collection.[39] However, a post office clerk had put forward that the postcards were no memorable sources with historical value but rather a mockery of the civil service. He called them "eine gewollte Verhöhnung des RPM [Reichspostmuseums] oder der staatlichen Zustände".[40] Thereupon, the principal of the museum stopped the collection of Starkloff's cards and asked him not to use the museum's name in his advertising. Therefore, the cards were not archived. Yet, it is certain that they were disseminated across the German border: At least some of Starkloff's postcards ended up in the second-hand bookshop in the Netherlands where I came across them a couple of months ago.

The existing source material allows me to say a little more about the production side than about the reception. Hugo Starkloff was probably born in 1868 in Ritschenhausen, a village near

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35 Ibid., p. 90.
36 A milestone in the use of postcards definitely was: Schor, Naomi: "Cartes Postales". Representing Paris 1900, in: *Critical Inquiry* 18 (1992), pp. 188–244. Anne McCauley traces the scholarly discussion of postcards back to the beginning of the twentieth century: McCauley, Anne: Review of: Postcards. Ephemeral Histories of Modernity, in: *Visual Resources* 27 (2011), pp. 267–271.
37 Introduction to: *Postcards. Ephemeral Histories of Modernity*, ed. by David Prochaska / Jordana Mendelson, University Park 2010.
38 Starkloff, Hugo: *An das schweiz. Postamt*, Meiningen Mai 1926. Stadtarchiv Meiningen, Forschungsarbeiten, Nr. 236.
39 See: Schoch-Joswig 1993: Klappenschrank.
40 Oberpostdirektor Malisius in 1931, cited after: Ibid., p. 188.

Meiningen.[41] The back sides of his postcards indicate that at least since 1907 Starkloff worked for the local post. First, he was chief post assistant ("Ober-Postassistent"), then, at least since 1926, he was chief telegraph secretary ("Ober-Telegraphen-Sekretär"). However, after he had died on October 31, 1939 it was mainly his capacity as illustrator that was remembered. Indeed, the obituaries mentioned his function as a telegraph inspector: "Mit ehrlicher Trauer hörten gestern viele Meininger, dass ein beliebter und geachteter Mitbürger Telegrapheninspektor a. D. Hugo Starkloff heimgegangen ist".[42] But his drawings and postcards received way more attention. The *Weimarer Zeitung 'Deutschland'* wrote after his death:

> Mit ihm ging nicht nur ein tüchtiger Beamter heim, sondern auch ein außerordentlich begabter Zeichner, der in viele flotten [sic] Zeichnungen, die meist auf Postkarten erschienen, lustige Szenen aus Meiningens Volksleben und ganz besonders aus dem Postleben festhielt.[43]

Later, I will come back to the cheerfulness and the humour in Starkloff's sketches that is highlighted here. For now, it is enough to keep in mind that Starkloff was a respected telegraph inspector and a well-known illustrator. Although this information about the production side of the postcard will certainly help understanding the postcards, an interpretation of the images and texts themselves will be at the heart of my analysis. According to Mendelson and Prochaska, this could be called a rather common perspective. Still, my thesis differs from the majority of postcard studies with regard to another aspect. Mendelson and Prochaska note that "[p]hotographic or picture postcards receive a disproportionate amount of attention in contrast to other kinds of postcards".[44] Against this tendency, my study concentrates on postcards that combine sketches and text on the recto.

Showing drawings and poems the postcards are a combination of two types of primary sources that both have special characteristics and, therefore, require methodological consideration. Even though Starkloff's poems are not of high literary quality they are after all literary pieces. While using literature as historical sources was still highly controversial in the 1990s,[45] it has become an established method in cultural history during the last decades. The emergence of New Cultural History influencing historians and of New Historicism on the part of literary scholars have blurred

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41 At least, a handwritten comment by a former archivist in Meiningen says: "geb. 5.12.1868 Ritschenhausen, Vater Pfarrer Hermann, Mutter Mathilde, geb. Starkloff, Tochter Ilse Breitung"(Munk, Heinrich / Stadtarchiv Meiningen: *Korrespondenz* 2006. Stadtarchiv Meiningen, Forschungsarbeiten, Nr. 236.). From a volume of poems Starkloff gave to his daughter for Christmas 1931, "meiner lieben Ilse zur Erinnerung an ihren Vater", we know that his daughter was called Ilse (Starkloff, Hugo: *Gelegenheits-Gedichte*, Meiningen Dezember 1931. Stadtarchiv Meiningen, Forschungsarbeiten, Nr. 236.).

42 Thüringer Tageszeitung: *Bekannter Zeichner heimgegangen* 3.11.1939. Stadtarchiv Meiningen, Forschungsarbeiten, Nr. 236.

43 Weimarer Zeitung Deutschland: *Bekannter Meininger Zeichner gestorben* November 1939. Stadtarchiv Meiningen, Forschungsarbeiten, Nr. 236.

44 Prochaska et al. 2010: Postcards.

45 See for example the controversy between Lynn Hunt and Philipp Stewart: Hunt, Lynn: The Objects of History. A Reply to Philip Stewart, in: *The Journal of Modern History* 66 (1994), pp. 539–546.

the lines between historical and literary scholarship.[46] In the course of this development, it has become a commonplace that literary texts are not only accessible from a literary scholar's viewpoint, but also from a historian's angle. Since literature is created within a concrete historical and social setting, it is inseparable from its historical context. Therefore, literary pieces can give insight in worldviews and values of the past. As Lynn Hunt remarks, this does not mean that historians ask the same questions as literary scholars, but that they use literature as "evidence for historical arguments".[47] It is exactly this perspective that I want to adopt when looking at Starkloff's postcards. Although I will not provide sophisticated literary analyses of the poems, they can indeed be read as historical sources and shed light on a contemporary view of the world. That Starkloff's poems are written in a rather unpretentious, homely and, therefore, easily accessible style makes them more suitable to be looked from a historical rather than a literary angle.

Even more than literary pieces, visual sources have triggered the debate about how to use them as historical evidence. Analogous to the 'linguistic turn', the 'visual' or 'iconic turn' emphasised that our relation to the world is mediated not only through language but also visually.[48] Images, many scholars argue, convey meaning and, therefore, are central to the construction of social life.[49] Peter Burke notes that images

> have often played their part in the 'cultural construction' of society. For these very reasons, images are testimonies of past social arrangements and above all of past ways of seeing and thinking.[50]

The orientation towards the visual has entered historiography: More and more historians use images as primary sources and many methodologies to interpret visual material have been suggested.[51] In my analysis of Starkloff's postcards, I will draw upon Rose Gillian's advice for the interpretation of images.

In her book *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* Gillian Rose distinguishes between three sites that generate the meaning of an image: the production (how an image is made and by whom), the image itself (what an image looks like), and the audience (how an image is seen). As mentioned above, only a method that focuses mainly on the drawings themselves is appropriate, for there is only limited material on Hugo Starkloff himself, on the circumstances of the production of the postcards and even less information on the recipients.

Of all the presented methods, the approach Rose calls 'Discourse analysis I' comes closest to how I will look at the postcards. It is based on the Foucauldian assumption that all forms of texts

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46 See for example: Hunt, Lynn: *The New Cultural History*, Berkeley 1989.; Gallagher, Catherine / Greenblatt, Stephen: *Practicing New Historicism*, Chicago 2000.
47 Hunt 1994: Objects of History, p. 546.
48 See: Brocks, Christine: *Bildquellen der Neuzeit*, Stuttgart 2012, p. 7.
49 See: Rose, Gillian: *Visual Methodologies. An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials*, London 2001, p. 6.
50 Burke, Peter: *Eyewitnessing. The Uses of Images as Historical Evidence*, London 2001, p. 185.
51 In my eyes, some of them drown the sources in a terminology which tends to confuse rather than to clarify things (e.g. semiology), others are inappropriate for my purpose, because they are quantitative (e.g. content analysis), and again others are merely highlighting images 'as they are' without interest for the social construction they are part of (e.g. compositional interpretation). See for these methods, for example: Rose 2001: Visual Methodologies.

(textual, visual, habitual etc.) form a discursive formation.[52] As she explains, "the discourse analyst is interested in how images construct accounts of the social world",[53] thus, an interest that is very much in accordance with mine. Rose argues that although it is not originally a Foucauldian method, iconography can still be seen as an important part of discourse analysis, since both share the emphasis on the cultural context in which images have to be read.[54] Definitely, my case study will be no prototypical discourse analysis for the simple fact that it consists of only a small range of source material and does not address questions of power. Nevertheless, I think that my general aim justifies using the so-called 'Discourse analysis I' as a guideline for my thesis. Rose states that it addresses "the rhetorical organization and social production of visual, written and spoken materials".[55] That is precisely what I will be doing when using the postcards in order to examine how Starkloff's account of telephony fits in a wider discourse about the technology in his time and when showing in which way his depiction of the telephone accords with or contradicts common notions of the technology. Therefore, I will take on Rose's suggestions to look at the postcards with "fresh eyes", to identify the key topics depicted, to respect their complexity and contradictions, and to pay attention to details and to look for the visible as well as the invisible.[56]

This kind of analysis requires, as Rose underlines, a contextualisation of the primary sources. Some context information I can obtain by the sparse archival material on Hugo Starkloff. Furthermore, the postcards will be contextualised by means of secondary literature.[57] However, most of the literature on telephony's cultural history focuses on the United States and can only indirectly help to get an idea of Starkloff's historical background. Consequently, I will also support my argumentation by use of additional primary sources from Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century. Countless sources concerning the perception of telephony are available in many archives and digital databases, from postcards to newspaper articles, from scholarly pieces to fictional literature. I will use them to reconstruct the relevant context for a comprehensible picture of Starkloff's appropriation of telephony and the German debate about telephony in his time.

To sum up, the following analysis and interpretation will perceive Starkloff's postcards as cultural appropriations of the depicted technologies and take them seriously as a self-reflexive modern perception of the relatively new technologies and the related social changes. In order to do so, I will pay attention to the postcards' imageries with all their contradictions and invisibilities.

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52 Unlike "Discourse analysis I", the approach Rose calls "Discourse analysis II" focuses on the institutional power structures of discourses. Thus, that method is more concerned with the sites of production and audience. (See: Ibid., pp. 164–186.)

53 Ibid., p. 140.

54 See also Burke 2001: Eyewitnessing. In this book, Burke puts forward Erwin Panofsky's iconography as the most important analytical technique for images as historical evidence.

55 Rose 2001: Visual Methodologies, pp. 162f.

56 See: Ibid., p. 158.

57 For the specific characteristics of postcards I will consider, for example: Holzheid, Anett: *Das Medium Postkarte. Eine sprachwissenschaftliche und mediengeschichtliche Studie*, Berlin 2011.

Chapter 1: Telegraph Operators

The telegraph was and is said to be the first modern means of communication, because it was the first technology that uncoupled the message from its carrier and, therefore, altered the relation between space and time.[58] Many nineteenth century observers stated that the telegraph annihilated space and time.[59] Similarly, contemporary historians present the spread of telegraphy as a break between traditional and modern communication.[60] In this chapter, I will examine how Starkloff frames telegraphy and what stance towards the modernisation process we can recognise in his postcards. Furthermore, the fact that Starkloff addresses only the telegraph operators instead of the end-users of the technology is conspicuous and needs explanation. Acting on Rose's advice to first look at the material with "fresh eyes", thus, with as little preconceptions as possible, the chapter begins with an image description.
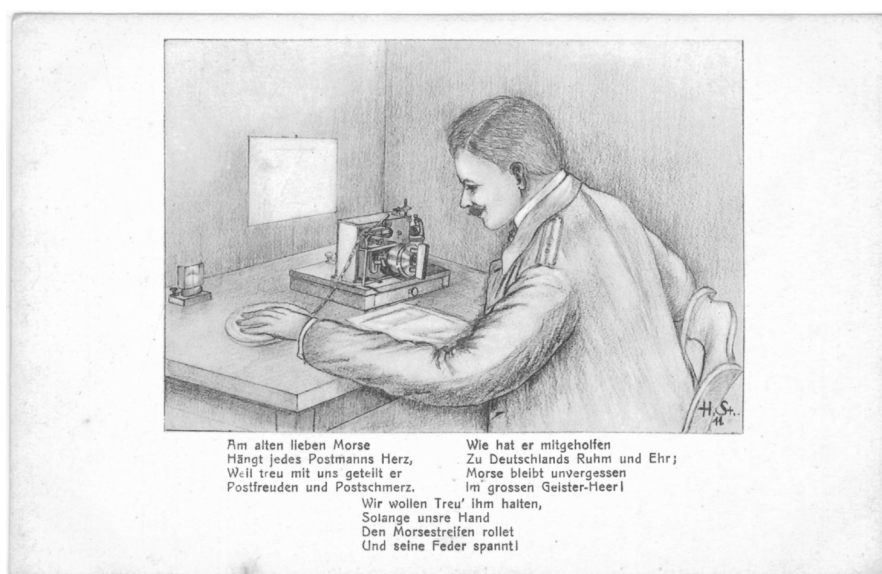

Figure 1: Morse telegraph (1911)

An elderly man with a moustache is sitting on his desk. He is wearing a uniform or, at least, a jacket with epaulettes, which makes him very likely a post office clerk. On the desk is a telegraph. So far, the three postcards in question here, on which we see telegraphs and their operators, look alike. The fact that Starkloff made the three drawings in 1911 adds to these similarities. However, a closer look also brings out differences and further commonalities between the postcards.

The telephone operator depicted in Figure 1 is using a typical Morse receiver with a moving paper tape, as we can conclude from a description of the Morse apparatus in a handbook from 1899:

> Der Morseapparat gehört zu den Schreibtelegraphen. Seine Wirkung besteht darin, daß er zwei Elementarzeichen, Punkte und Striche, welche der telegraphirende [sic] Beamte

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58 For more on this process see chapter 5.
59 See: Wenzlhuemer, Roland: Less Than No Time. Zum Verhältnis von Telegrafie und Zeit, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 37 (2011), pp. 592–613.
60 See, for example: Heßler 2012: Kulturgeschichte, p. 118.

durch eine einfache Handbewegung in beliebiger Reihenfolge und mit großer Geschwin-
digkeit nach einander zu entwickeln vermag, bei der entfernten Telegraphenanstalt auf
einem abrollenden Papierstreifen aufzeichnet.[61]

We see the operator's left hand rolling up the tape. A paper in front of him indicates that he is ready to note down the decoded message. The poem which is printed underneath the drawing consists of one headline and three stanzas à four lines. It is characterised by a deep appreciation for the depicted telegraph device: "Am alten lieben Morse / Hängt jedes Postmanns Herz, / Weil treu mit uns geteilt er / Postfreuden und Postschmerz". The poem does not only sound pretty nostalgic – every postman's heart is set to the Morse telegraph – but it contains also a patriotic notion: "Wie hat er mitgeholfen / Zu Deutschlands Ruhm und Ehr". It seems to be a matter of course that the Morse telegraph will never be forgotten: "Morse bleibt unvergessen / Im grossen Geister-Heer!". In this line, it remains to some extent unclear whether the telegraph or its inventor is meant. However, when in the last stanza the cohortative form "Wir wollen Treu' ihm halten" encourages mutual fidelity to the Morse telegraph, it becomes pretty clear that it is the device and not the inventor that is praised.
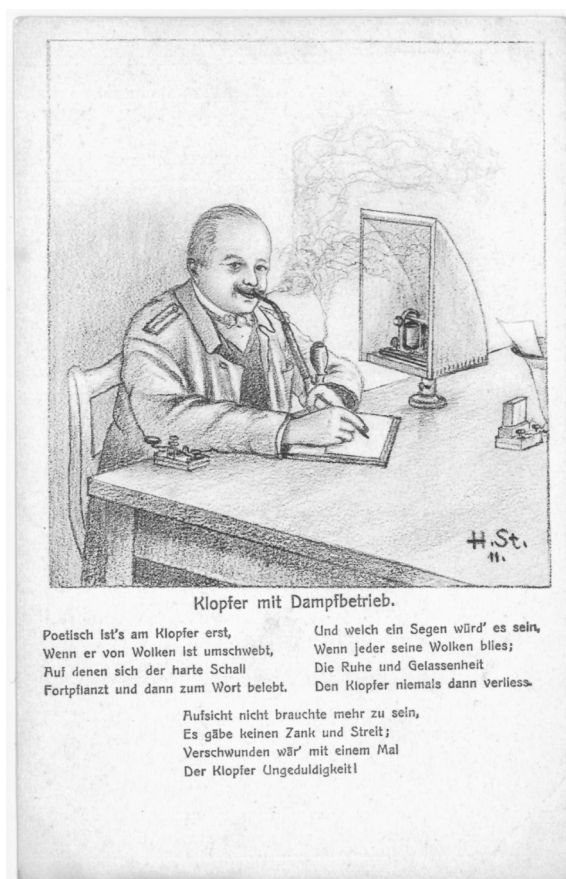

Figure 2: Klopfer (1911)

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61   *Beschreibung der in der Reichs-Telegraphenverwaltung gebräuchlichen Apparate*, Berlin 1899, p. 3.

While the telegraph operator in Figure 1 decodes written Morse code, the one in Figure 2 is receiving sound signals. He is using a sounder telegraph (German: *Klopfer*),[62] a technology that was cheaper and faster than the original writing telegraph.[63] The above-cited handbook states:

> Durch den Klopfer werden die mittels einer Taste gegebenen Zeichen des Morsealphabets beim Ohre des empfangenden Beamten wahrnehmbar gemacht. Der Klopfer ist deshalb zu den Sprechtelegraphen zu rechnen. Der Betrieb mit Klopfern gestattet eine größere Schnelligkeit des Arbeitens als der Betrieb mit Morse-Schreibapparaten.[64]

Figure 2 is the only of the three postcards in which the man is directly looking at the beholder. He is smoking a pipe and several grey lines form smoke that fills the air. The man is sitting between two parts of the telegraph: an ear cap with a sounder on his left and a Morse key to his right. While his left hand is holding the pipe his right hand holds a pen, ready to note something down on the paper in front of him. The poem's title, "Klopfer mit Dampfbetrieb" (in English approximately: "steam-driven Morse") is a wordplay: It is not the telegraph itself that is steam-driven, but rather the operator who is smoking the pipe. The poem is a call for calm and composure: If only everyone smoked placidly as does the telegraph operator there would be no impatience, no quarrel, no dispute. Unlike (the) unnamed impatient people, the smoking operator is not only serene, but even poetic: "Poetisch ist's am Klopfer erst, / Wenn er von Wolken ist umschwebt / Auf denen sich der harte Schall / Fortpflanzt und dann zum Wort belebt". The operator decodes the 'hard sound' and turns it into words.

The mere fact that Starkloff devotes two of the postcards to Morse telegraphy – which was definitely not a technological novelty anymore in 1911 – is noteworthy. Certainly, telegraphs were still in use around 1911. However, the Morse sounder little by little replaced the Morse writing telegraphs.[65] Furthermore, the spread of telephones, Hughes telegraphs, and teletypewriters "gradually replaced the Morse telegraph" in general.[66] In 1920 an author stated: "das Telephon ist hinsichtlich der Allgemeinheit des Bedürfnisses an die erste Stelle nach der Post gerückt, und hat den Telegraphen weit hinter sich zurück gedrängt".[67] And already in 1912 when Starkloff drew his telegraph postcards, 73,7 out of 100 messages were sent by mail, 25,4 were communicated via telephone and only 0,9 messages were telegraphed.[68]

Thus, it is definitely not a recent innovation that Starkloff is engaged with, but one that was even threatened by extinction. He underlines the importance of the disappearing Morse technology. His motive force, therefore, is not the adoration of an innovation but rather a nostalgic attitude as the poems cited above have shown. Starkloff tries to save the Morse writing technology from

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62 "Klopfen" means "to tap" or "to knock" and refers to the operator's use of the transmission key which produced a knocking sound.

63 Pichler, Franz: Die Einführung der Morse-Telegraphie in Deutschland und Österreich, in: *e & i Elektrotechnik und Informationstechnik* 123 (2006), pp. 402–408, here: 402.

64 1899: Beschreibung, p. 69.

65 Huurdeman 2003: Worldwide History, p. 306.

66 Ibid., p. 142.

67 Sax, Emil: *Die Verkehrsmittel in Volks- und Staatswirtschaft*, Berlin 1920, p. 354.

68 See: Ibid., p. 355.

oblivion and explicitly encourages other telegraph operators to follow suit: "Wir wollen Treu' ihm halten / Solange unsre Hand / Den Morsestreifen rollet / Und seine Feder spannt!" In publishing the drawings and poems on postcards Starkloff put this demand into practice: He recorded the Morse writing technology on paper.

Electrical Professionals

It is not only the old Morse telegraph Starkloff praises but also a more novel device. The post office clerk depicted in Figure 3 operates a Hughes telegraph. According to the handbook, the Hughes telegraph is a printing telegraph which is characterised as follows:

> Als solche bezeichnet man diejenigen Apparate, welche die Telegramme durch unmittel-baren Abdruck von Buchstaben, Zahlen, Unterscheidungszeichen, u.s.w. auf einem Papier-streifen in gewöhnlicher Druckschrift wiedergeben.[69]

Prosaisch nach Fabrik-Geräusch
Klingts von dem Hughes herüber
Und doch lieb ich die Klaviatur,
Es geht mir nichts darüber.

Verleiht der Hughes doch Menschenwort
Die besten schnellsten Schwingen
Ihn zu bemeistern künstlerhaft,
Welch fröhliches Beginnen!

Der Hugheser steht daher im Rang
Stets auf der höchsten Warte;
Gehört im Telegraphen-Reich
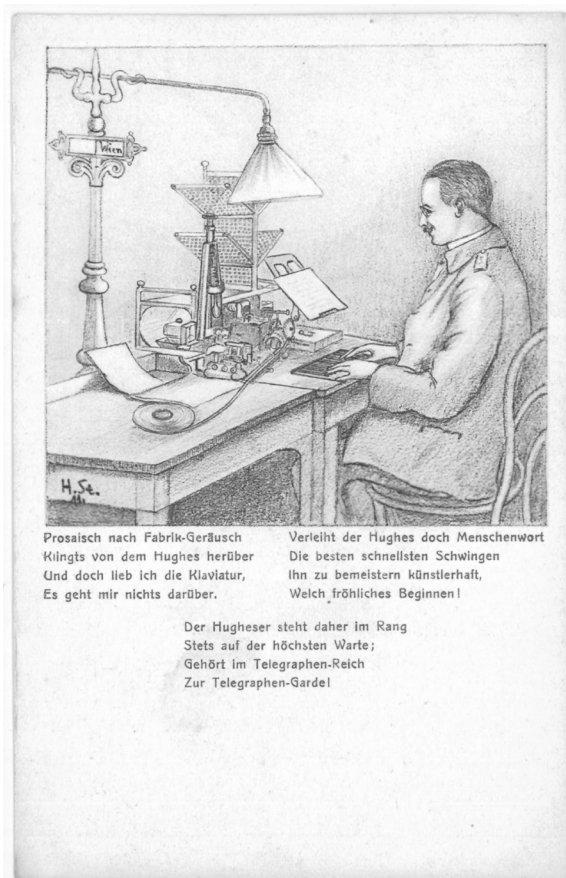Zur Telegraphen-Garde!

Figure 3: Hughes Telegraph (1911)

In the drawing, we can clearly recognise the paper tape on which the message is printed. More-over, we see the fingerboard that was typical for a Hughes telegraph. Although again dressed in some kind of uniform and sitting at a desk, the operator here looks busier and more concentrated

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69   1899: Beschreibung, p. 75.

than his colleagues on the two other postcards. His hands are typing on the keyboard and he is looking at the paper on the bookrest in front of him through his glasses. A lamp illuminates his desk and the lamp base resembles a street sign: Vienna is signposted.

Like the other poems, the poem on this card is also written in three quatrains. Its first stanza corresponds with the first stanza of "Klopfer mit Dampfbetrieb". There, the pipe-steam-driven work at the Morse telegraph is called 'poetic'. Here, the so-called 'fabric sound' of the printing telegraph is termed 'prosaic'. Nevertheless, the persona of the poem declares to love the telegraph's keyboard: "Und doch lieb ich die Klaviatur, / Es geht mir nichts darüber". The second stanza gives the reason by praising the Hughes telegraph for its fast transmission of words. The poem continues: "Ihn zu bemeistern künstlerhaft, / Welch fröhliches Beginnen!" Here, the operator's work is presented as both cheerful and an artistic mastery. Similar to the poem in Figure 1, the last stanza praises the Hughes telegraph as the most high-ranking telegraph: "Der Hugheser steht daher im Rang / Stets auf der höchsten Warte".

As mentioned above, it is often helpful to look at what is not said in the postcards. By looking at the cards described above but also at the rest of the series, one can recognise that a common account of the telegraph and the telephone only marginally appears in Starkloff's cards: He did not create postcards in which the inventors of the telegraph and the telephone were praised. It would not have been surprising if Starkloff's postcard focused on Morse, Reis or Bell, because it was pretty usual to admire the inventors of recent technologies and to praise them as ingenious. Werner von Siemens, for example, was said to be the perfect example "eines tatkräftigen, wissenschaftlich arbeitenden Ingenieurs, eines hohen Vorbildes der deutschen Arbeitsmethode".[70] About Phillip Reis, one author wrote: "Es war ihm bei Lebzeiten nicht vergönnt, den Ruhmeslohn für seine Erfindung zu ernten".[71] The common attitude becomes most evident in the following statement on Samuel Morse:

> Professor Morse, dessen geniale Erfindungen im Telegraphenwesen ihm einen weltberühmten Namen gemacht [haben ...,] hat die Welt mit einer der größten Wohltaten beschenkt, die seit Erfindung der Buchdruckerkunst zu Theil wurden. Er hat gezeigt, was Muth, Ausdauer, Fertigkeit des Willens und beharrliche Thatkraft vermögen. [...] Solange daher die Menschen sich ihrer großen Wohltäter erinnern, wird auch der Name von Samuel Finley Breese Morse unter den größten Beförderern der Civilisation [sic] genannt und geehrt werden [...].[72]

Exemplarily, this quote shows many aspects of the common stance towards the inventors of technologies: They were seen as brilliant and ingenious, as benefactors who advanced civilisation. However, other than many of his contemporaries, Starkloff did not want to praise Samuel Morse, David Edward Hughes, or any other inventor. He did not want to save them from oblivion either.

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70 Strecker, Karl: Werner Siemens' Verdienste um die Entwicklung der Telegraphie und Telephonie, in: *Die Naturwissenschaften* 4 (1916), pp. 803–812, here: 811.
71 Grosse, Oskar: *40 Jahre Fernsprecher. Stephan – Siemens – Rathenau*, Berlin, Heidelberg 1917, p. IV.
72 Meyer, Bruno: *Deutsche Warte. Umschau über das Leben und Schaffen der Gegenwart. Zweiter Band*, Leipzig 1872, pp. 661, 670–671.

Furthermore, Starkloff's telegraph postcards do not really hint at the huge range of influence the technology had. Only the Vienna signpost in Figure 3 could be read as a reference to telegraphy as the first fast global communication medium and to the 'shrinking world' that fascinated so many of his contemporaries (of which more later in Chapter 5). However, the German-speaking and rather close Vienna was certainly not the city one would pick to emphasise the global impact of a technology. Remarkably, it is rather the electrical device that is the centre of attention and Starkloff expresses a deep appreciation towards it. Furthermore, it is the telegraph operators whose competence is emphasised. Starkloff even paints a very positive, almost heroic picture of them: The men in the drawings are depicted as pleasant and diligent although they sometimes have to fulfil stressful tasks. They remain calm although their work environment seems to be rather noisy, filled with "factory sounds". And their concentrated work is an artistic, but cheerful mastery.

The most obvious reason for this positive depiction of the male telegraph operators is not far to seek. Starkloff himself held exactly the office that he recorded in the drawings. A photograph that shows him in front of a Morse telegraph in exactly the same position as the operator in Figure 1 makes this explanation even more plausible.[73] The telegraph operators in the postcards described above represent Starkloff himself, for whom telegraphy was part of his daily routine. However, this parallel can only to some extent explain his stance on the operators. A look at the role of the electrical experts at the beginning of the twentieth century will enrich the interpretation.

In her book *When Old Technologies Were New*, Carolyn Marvin traces the formation of a "priesthood"[74] of electrical professionals in the late nineteenth-century United States. According to her, scientists and electrical engineers created a technological world forging a new identity of professional experts and creating an expert authority of electricians.[75] It is precisely this self-invention "as an *elite*"[76] that we can recognise in Starkloff's postcards. In Germany as well a gap between laymen and professionals came into being. As Bernhard Rieger explains, there were attempts to "familiarize technological laypeople with novel objects",[77] but they frequently were unsuccessful, had undesired effects and created concerns and anxieties. What Rieger shows for different so-called "modern wonders", namely for the cinema, for ocean liners, and for airships, is also true for telegraphy: It was a technology that required experts and remained relatively opaque to non-specialists. Rieger states that

> Complicated mechanisms required complex explanations, which however were beyond
> the layperson. Despite detailed descriptions of their technological environments, innova-

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73 The photograph, according to a hand-written note on the back taken in the Meiningen post office in 1913, is part of the private collection of the private collector Heinrich Munk. Although I only have a bad photocopy of it, the similarity between the operator in Figure 1 and Starkloff in the picture is clearly visible – and striking. Moreover, the image shows a signpost similar to the Vienna one. Here, we see the number of the Meiningen telegraph bureau: 125 – a number that reappears on signposts in several of Starkloff's postcards.

74 Marvin 1988: Old Technologies, p. 10.

75 Ibid., pp. 9–62.

76 Ibid., p. 15. Emphasis in the original.

77 Rieger, Bernhard: 'Modern Wonders'. Technological Innovation and Public Ambivalence in Britain and Germany, 1890s to 1933, in: *History Workshop Journal* 55 (2003), pp. 152–176, here: 159.

tive objects remained opaque because their workings continued to be unintelligible to the non–specialist.[78]

This "mystique surrounding technology"[79], which was only intelligible to electrical experts, was adopted by telegraph operators. Marvin remarks that "[s]ervingmaid to both groups [scientists and engineers] were cadres of operatives from machine tenders to telegraph operators, striving to attach themselves as firmly as possible to this new and highly visible priesthood."[80]

Given this background it is now possible to interpret Starkloff's cards as an attempt to express his pride in the telegraph priesthood. Like the photograph described above, Starkloff's title ("H. Starkloff, Ober-Postassistent in Meiningen") on the back of many of the cards points to the emphasis on his own affiliation with this profession. With the three telegraph postcards Starkloff sought respect for a caste of experts and their technical devices, both of which were threatened by extinction. This attempt to save not only the Morse technology but also the telegraph professionals from oblivion explains the nostalgic, backwards–looking, and quaint atmosphere in both the drawings and the poems.

Only in comparison to Starkloff's depiction of female operators, it will become fully clear that this electrical profession excluded women. Indeed, women were often telephone or sometimes telegraph operators and so they are in Starkloff's postcards. However, only the postcards with male operators in their drawings emphasise the technologies themselves and create the aura of a "priesthood" of electrical professionals. This emphasis on male technical experts was a common attitude that frequently led to complaints about the alleged female electrical incapacity. Marvin notes:

> Endless stories of women's unpreparedness and incapacity in a world of technical expertise time and again demonstrated the reassuring conclusion that women would always depend on male prowess to conquer the world for them, however irritating their ignorance as the price of male mastery.[81]

It would be unfair to accuse Starkloff of a similar stance towards women without looking at his depiction of female operators. However, before I will do so in the second and third chapters, two more postcards that treat telegraphy deserve closer attention.

Reactionary Modernism

Both drawn in 1905, the two postcards are linked not only through their date of origin but also with regard to the content, as their corresponding captions, which both refer to someone who is knocking on something, indicate: "Klopfer mit guten Nerven." and "Klopfer mit schlechten Nerven."[82] However, at first glance the drawings show completely incoherent scenes. In this section

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78   Ibid., p. 160.
79   Ibid., p. 160.
80   Marvin 1988: Old Technologies, p. 10.
81   Ibid., pp. 30f.
82   See footnote 62.

I will illuminate their connection and interpret the cards pertaining to the underlying image of traditional and modern technologies.
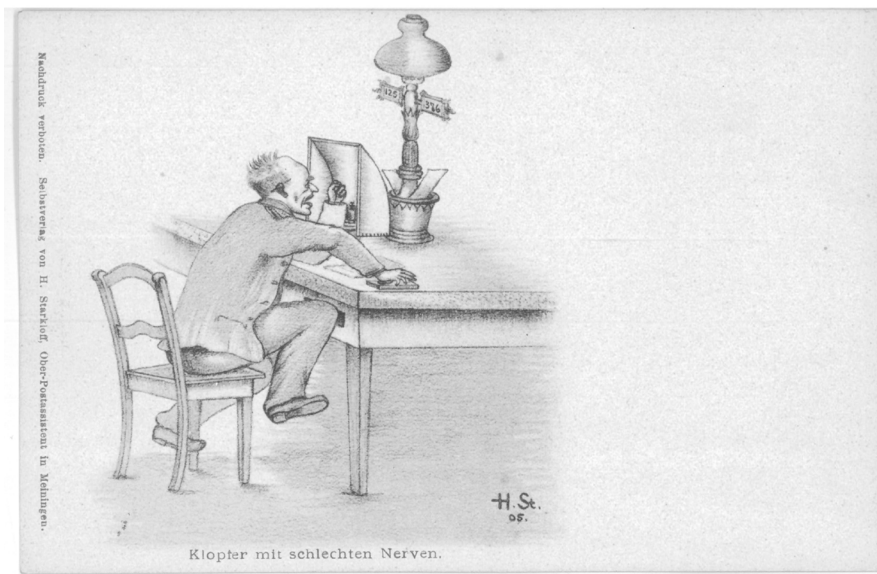

Figure 4: Klopfer mit schlechten Nerven (1905)

Like Figure 2, the scene depicted in Figure 4 shows a telegraph operator at the desk in front of a sounder telegraph. The lamp on the table whose stand only extended into the earlier picture becomes fully visible now. Yet, this time we see no smoke, no smile, no sign of calm or composure. Rather, the operator seems to be what the caption promises: a sounder operator with bad nerves. Uptight, he is sitting on his chair, clenching his fist, and furiously stamping his feet. He is not noting down a message, but the pencil is behind his ear. Unlike the telegraph operators in the postcards examined so far, he looks skinny and haggard.
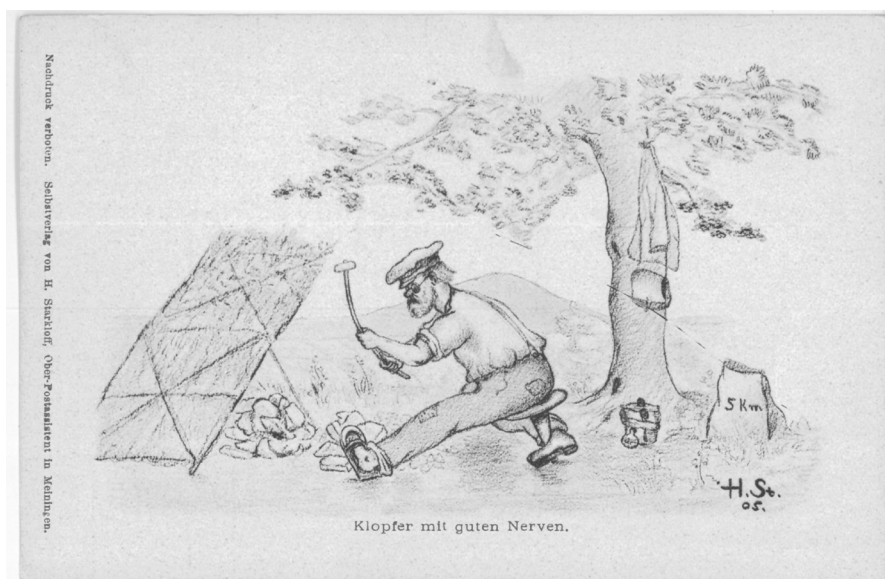

Figure 5: Klopfer mit guten Nerven (1905)

The man in Figure 5 seems to be the very reverse and the whole setting fundamentally differs from the scenes described up until now, because the scene is not situated in the post office but in the countryside. We see a bearded workman in patched work pants, wearing glasses and a cap. He is sitting on a traditional one-leg milking stool while crushing stones, thus, working very hard. Nevertheless, the scene gives the impression of a serene and quaint situation. The jacket and the bag that are hung up on the tree, his picnic basket and a drinking bottle at the foot of the tree, and the landmark in the scenic setting create a placid and stress-free atmosphere.

Despite their apparent incoherence, the two postcards are linked through more than just the wordplay in the caption. It is Starkloff's stance towards tradition and modernity that is negotiated here. The second card depicts a traditional worker working manually. Although his task is hard, the advantages seem to outweigh the onerous task. He is outside, unhurried, and keeps his nerves. Yet, the card only discloses its full meaning in comparison to the other one. There, we see a 'modern' worker with a 'modern' task. Operating the telegraph seems to create anger and nervousness. Obviously, the operator cannot meet the demands of the technology but is unable to cope with it. Only in comparison the two postcards reveal an attitude that is critical about telegraphy.

Given this contrasting depiction of tradition and modernity, one could impute a despair of civilisation to Starkloff, thus a condemnation of the nerve-wracking modern telegraphy and a glorification of the good old times. The connection between the telegraph and the nervous system was not unusual. For example, in 1920 a German author wrote:

> Ein beliebter und in der Tat sehr zutreffender Vergleich nennt das Welttelegraphennetz ein Nervensystem der Menschheit, das alle Regungen jedes einzelnen Gliedes fast in dem-selben Momente zur Gesamtempfindung des ganzen Körpers bringt.[83]

As the quote illustrates, the telegraph system was commonly linked to the nervous system since the middle of the nineteenth century.[84] Moreover, as Joachim Radkau explains, nervousness was widely perceived as a consequence of modern 'Zivilisation' and, especially, of the accelerating technological innovations.[85] In this context, 'Zivilisation' meant the counterpart of 'Kultur', both concepts were commonly juxtaposed in Germany in the first decades of the twentieth century. While Western 'Zivilisation' was connected to a 'soulless' and rationalist modernity influenced by reason, intellect and cosmopolitanism, 'Kultur' was understood as a more 'authentic' and spe-cifically German cultural tradition.[86] So, at first glance it seems to be reasonable to interpret the two postcards in question against the background of a contemporary dichotomy between modern 'Zivilisation' and traditional 'Kultur'.

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83   Schöttle as cited in: Sax 1920: Verkehrsmittel, pp. 344f.
84   See: Ruchartz, Jens: Das Telefon. Ein sprechender Telegraf, in: *Einführung in die Geschichte der Medien*, ed. by Albert Kümmel-Schnur, Paderborn (2004), pp. 125–149, here: 137.
85   See: Radkau, Joachim: Technik im Temporausch der Jahrhundertwende, in: *Moderne Zeiten*, ed. by Michael Salewski, Stuttgart (1994), pp. 61–76.
86   See for example: Herf, Jeffrey: *Reactionary Modernism. Technology, Culture and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* 1984, pp. 1–17.

However, the postcards described in the previous chapter have given a very different picture of Starkloff's stance towards the new technology. Starkloff's positive depiction of the electrical professionals and his praise of the telegraphs themselves clearly contradict this interpretation of a despair of civilisation. This apparent contradiction can be resolved by using Jeffrey Herf's concept "reactionary modernism". With this term the author describes a specifically German tradition that

> consisted of a coherent and meaningful set of metaphors, familiar words, and emotionally laden expressions that had the effect of converting technology from a component of alien, Western *Zivilisation* into an organic part of German *Kultur*.[87]

The reactionary modernists, Herf claims, reconciled technological modernity with a traditional German "Innerlichkeit" and described modern technology "with the jargon of authenticity".[88] Thus, in depicting the nerve-shattered telegraph operator and his even-tempered traditional colleague, Starkloff indeed expresses his scepticism towards modern technology, the "component of alien, Western *Zivilisation*". Yet, at the same time the other postcards show that Starkloff also converted telegraphy into something worth praising, "into an organic part of German *Kultur*".[89] When Starkloff rhymes about the Morse telegraph in Figure 1: "Wie hat er mitgeholfen / Zu Deutschlands Ruhm und Ehr", even the specifically German nationalist notion within this "reconciliation" or "reactionary modernism" that Herf emphasises becomes recognisable.

Moreover, Figure 4 itself hints at a limitation of Starkloff's criticism of the telegraph. The operator's anger is not held against the technology itself, but attributed to his personal weakness, or more specifically, to his bad nerves. The other postcards support this interpretation. There, we see well-nourished and healthier operators with more composure, who can easily cope with the modern technology. Especially the Morse telegraph operator in Figure 1 is a demonstrative example of an incorporation of "modern technology into the cultural system of modern German nationalism, without diminishing the latter's romantic and antirational aspects",[90] as Herf phrases it. There, the telegraph as a manifestation of the modern 'Zivilisation' is no threat, but rather a supporter of Germany's glory and honour. At the same time, the quaint setting and the emphasis on nostalgia signify authenticity and romanticism. This latter, 'reactionary' part of the 'reactionary modernism' becomes most obvious in Figure 2 and Figure 3, where Starkloff highlights the poetic and artistic aspects of telegraph operating as well as calm and composure.

It should not remain unmentioned that with his book, written in 1984, Herf aims at explaining the German 'Sonderweg' to modernity and the rise of Nazi Germany. The rejection of Enlightenment values and the concurrent enthusiasm for modern technology, he argues, "contributed to the nazification of German engineering, and to the primacy of Nazi ideology and politics over technical rationality and means".[91] Herf's argumentation contains flaws that apply to most 'Sonderweg' explanations. First and foremost, he fails to account for similarities and distinctions of 'multiple

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87 Ibid., p. 1. Emphasis in the original.
88 Ibid., p. 224.
89 Ibid., p. 1. Emphasis in the original.
90 Ibid., p. 2.
91 Ibid., pp. 16f.

modernities', writing for example that "[w]hen these cultural patterns have appeared in places other than Germany, it is because Germany's path to modernity has been reproduced outside Europe".[92] It would be beyond the scope of this thesis to offer a detailed criticism of Herf's concept. What is important to me is to emphasise that I neither want to present Starkloff's 'reactionary modernism' as a cause of Nazi Germany nor present his stance towards telegraphy as a specifically German phenomenon. However, although I do not fully agree with Herf's argumentation, his concept of 'reactionary modernism' is unquestionably helpful to harmonise Starkloff's postcards that turn out to be contradictory only at first glance.

In summary, it can be said that Starkloff's account of telegraphy is very much that of a telegraph professional. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he does not praise the inventors of technology. Rather, the devices themselves and the electric professionals who can operate them are the centre of attention. Although including a common critical stance about the nerve-shattering nature of telegraphy in his postcards and altogether creating a rather quaint and old-fashioned atmosphere, Starkloff reconciles this traditional, reactionary thrust in his postcards with the modern and some-times dreaded technology – an attitude that I have described with the term 'reactionary modern-ism'. Eventually, Starkloff's stance towards telegraphy is a perfect example of a narrative of modern technology and modernisation beyond a simple romance or a plain tragedy. He is expressing both pride and scepticism towards the technology. Moreover, his appropriation of telegraphy is also ambivalent in the sense that he depicts the modern devices in a traditional setting. While pointing to the modernness of the technology in contrast to manual work, Starkloff is at the same time framing the telegraph in a traditional way – a modern self-reflection that could hardly be more ambivalent.

92   Ibid., p. 219.

Chapter 2: Telephone Operators

Until the dawn of the twentieth century, the telephone had been in the telegraph's shadow. Frequently, it was conceived as a variation on telegraphy; it was even called a speaking telegraph – "ein sprechender Telegraph".[93] While the telephone was only used for local communication, regional and global messages were still sent via telegraph, which was the less expensive means of communication. In 1886 the author of a technical handbook stated:

> Dieselbe Nachricht kann man durch den Telegraphen um den zehnten Theil des Betrages mit ungefähr der gleichen Schnelligkeit befördern. […] Auf grösseren Distanzen aber wird der Telegraph, so weit wenigstens jetzt zu sehen ist, stets die Oberhand behalten.[94]

The faith in the telegraph which the quote above expresses impeded intensive discussion about telephony until the end of the nineteenth century: The telephone was superimposed by the older telegraphy and, for that reason, did not become a relevant subject in societal debates.[95] Only in the first quarter of the century, Ruchartz states, the telephone was more and more perceived as a distinct medium and entered public debate.[96]

However, then it became a very popular topic and the enthusiasm about the innovation was euphoric. It was frequently called a technical wonder ("Wunder der Technik")[97] and astonished statements about the fast spread of the new technology were legion. For example, in 1907 Johannes Bruns noted: "Keine andere Erfindung hat sich in kurzer Zeit so weit verbreitet und ist im wahrsten Sinne des Wortes so volkstümlich geworden wie der Fernsprecher".[98] However, this perception was not in line with the actual dispersal of telephony, as Jens Ruchartz comments. The pace of modernisation was slower than perceived. It took a long time until this technology was actually spread in the German society. Around 1900 only five in a thousand people owned a telephone, around 1921 it were thirty in a thousand, and yet in 1973 only every second household was cable-connected. That was a rather slow diffusion, especially when compared to the US where the number of telephones was constantly four times higher.[99]

Thus, when Starkloff created his postcards, which are dated from 1900 (Figure 10) until 1918 (Figure 8), there was a lively debate about telephony. Unlike the telegraph postcards, some of Starkloff's telephone postcards depict the users of the telephone instead of the operators. This provides the opportunity to study the cultural appropriation of telephony with regard to private

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93 Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 128.
94 Wietlisbach, Victor: *Die Technik des Fernsprechwesens*, Wien 1886, p. 264.
95 Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 127.
96 However, Caruso contradictorily argues that the invention of the telephone in the 1880s was followed by a period in which the "desired or feared effects that the telephone's spread would have on modern societies" were discussed. The observation is definitely valid for the United States, as Ruchartz concedes. It would be beyond the scope of this paper to balance the arguments for the German public debate.
97 Rothbarth, Philipp: Das Telefon, in: *Kinderland. Blätter für ethische Jugenderziehung (Beilage zur Ethischen Kultur)* (1915), pp. 43f. , here: 43.
98 Bruns, Johannes: *Die Telegraphie in ihrer Entwicklung und Bedeutung*, Leipzig 1907, p. 114, cited in: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 125.
99 Ibid., p. 126.

people instead of operators. However, before I come to this, the following two chapters are dedicated to Starkloff's depiction of female telephone operators, women who, according to Andreas Killen, were "were acutely aware of their modernity".[100] It is not surprising that Starkloff did not only depict telegraph operators but also their colleagues who operated the telephone switchboards, for at the beginning of the twentieth century it was usually the case that manual telephone and telegraph offices were combined.[101] The mere fact that most of the telegraph operators in the postcards are men and all of the telephone operators are women is not surprising and is in accordance with the historical circumstances, since women usually operated telephone switchboards and only in rare cases worked as telegraph operators. Yet, in what way did Starkloff characterise his female colleagues? Were they, for example, part of the electrical priesthood described in the previous chapter? The following sections will bring forth Starkloff's stance towards the female operators and discuss the underlying image of women.

Female Qualities

The number of female switchers increased in the first decades of the twentieth century. Since 1900 it was almost exclusively a female task to operate a telephone switchboard.[102] In 1924 there were already 65.000 female switchers.[103] A renowned German encyclopaedia from 1908 characterised them as follows:

> es werden nur wohlerzogene, vollständig gesunde Mädchen oder kinderlose Witwen von 18–30 Jahren, die richtig Deutsch schreiben und sprechen können und im Beschäftigungsorte Familienanschluß haben, auf Widerruf, bez. vierwöchentliche Kündigung angenommen. Sie erlangen Beamteneigenschaft und erhalten Tagegelder mit Aussicht auf Ruhegehalt. Die Annahmeprüfung erstreckt sich auf deutschen Aufsatz, Rechnen und Geographie.[104]

As the quote shows, the working girls at the switchboards were normally pretty young, well educated and, as another book from 1901 reads, "unbescholten" (fair or spotless) and "gesund" (healthy).[105] Furthermore, they were all unmarried, because civil service and marriage were regarded as to be incompatible. Either a woman was devoted to her work for the state or she was devoted to her family. Since both required her full dedication, a married operator was inconceivable – even for the association of switchers that never fought for an abolition of the bar to marriage.[106] The female operator's salary was about 2 ¼ Mark up to 3 Mark per day, an amount that was much

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100 Killen, Andreas: From Shock to Schreck. Psychiatrists, Telephone Operators and Traumatic Neurosis in Germany, 1900-26, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (2003), pp. 201–220, here: 210.
101 See: Huurdeman 2003: Worldwide History, p. 235.
102 Killen, Andreas: Die Telefonzentrale, in: *Orte der Moderne*, ed. by Alexa Geisthövel / Habbo Knoch, Frankfurt am Main, New York (2005), pp. 81–90, here: 84.
103 See: Killen 2003: Shock, p. 203.
104 Meyers Großes Konversations-Lexikon, Band 16. Leipzig 1908, S. 217-218.
105 Baudissin, Wolf Graf von / Baudissin, Eva Gräfin von: *Spemanns goldenes Buch der Sitte*, Berlin 1901, p. 908.
106 See: Gold, Helmut: 'Fräulein vom Amt'. Eine Einführung zum Thema, in: *Fräulein vom Amt*, ed. by Helmut Gold / Annette Koch / Rolf Barnekow, München (1993), pp. 10–36, here: 25.

lower than men's salary, although it offered them financial independence.[107] Their lower wages must be seen as one main reason for the high number of female operators. The employment of females was first and foremost a matter of cost savings.[108] However, many sources present different, less economic reasons.[109] For example, still in 1937 the author of a telephone history explained why the switching was a primary female task:

> Seelen mit Stehkragen und Schnurrbart sind für diesen Dienst nicht geeignet. Das hatte sich früh gezeigt. Es gehört die Geduld und Sammlung dazu, die eine Frau jahrelang an einer Handarbeit werkeln läßt, um hier fertig zu werden, und auch die Langmut und Beherrschung. Er ist nicht leicht, dieser neue Frauenberuf, der drei Jahrzehnte hindurch so viele wertvolle Arbeitskräfte an sich zieht.[110]

Apparently, working as a telephone operator required a sort of patience and stamina that was commonly ascribed to women. Many people had high regard for the pleasant, melodious voices and their considerate manners.[111] This characterisation of the female operators can also be found in Starkloff's postcards, most explicitly in Figure 6.

Again, the scene is situated in what we take to be the interior of a post office. However, this time there is a female figure that is operating a machine. We see a woman in the shape of an angel, with a long robe and wings on her back. She seems to be younger than the male telegraph operators. The angel is leaning over the switchboard and her eyes are following the right hand that is turning a knob on the switchboard. The other hand is holding a device that might be her telephone mouthpiece. Compared to the telegraphs in the other drawings the switchboard is much bigger. Since the perspective does not allow us to see the whole switchboard and its end is hidden behind the angel, it even seems to be infinite.

To a certain extent, we are already familiar with the content of the poem. Similar to the ones discussed above it praises the operator using the first person plural: "Wir zollen große Dankesschuld". Again, the operator's patience is emphasised, even termed 'angelic' ("engelhaftige Geduld") in correspondence with the pictured angel. Interestingly, unlike in the telegraph postcards, the device itself is not brought up in the poem. It is not the switchboard but only the sound of the female voice and her patience that are extolled. In this regard this postcard is exemplary for all the others: Although Starkloff highlights the importance of the female switchers, only the poems on the postcards with male telegraph operators focus on the significance of the technical devices.

For Starkloff, it seems, the female telephone switchers did not belong to the "priesthood" of electric professionals. In fact, the switchboards are shown in the drawings, sometimes even with

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107 Baudissin, Wolf Graf von et al. 1901: Goldenes Buch, p. 908.; Killen 2003: Shock, p. 204.Killen, Andreas: From Shock to Schreck. Psychiatrists, Telephone Operators and Traumatic Neurosis in Germany, 1900-26, in: *Journal of Contemporary History* 38 (2003), pp. 201–220, here: 204.

108 See: Gold 1993: Fräulein, p. 16.

109 For a more detailed analysis of the connection between this wage discrimination and the bourgeois gender ideology, see: Bühlmann, Yvonne / Zatti, Kathrin: *Frauen im schweizerischen Telegrafen- und Telefonwesen. 1870–1914*, Zürich 1992, pp. 120–148.

110 Heiden, Hermann: *Rund um den Fernsprecher. Ein Buch über das Wesen, Werden u. Wirken unseres volkstümlichten Nachrichtenmittels*, Berlin 1937, p. 81.

111 See: Killen 2003: Shock, p. 203.

an indication of the Berlin-based manufacturer Mix & Genest (see Figure 10 and Figure 11). However, none of the switchboard poems broaches the issue of the technology itself, names the inventors of the telephone or praises any features of the telephone. There is no sign of admiration for the "technical wonder" that many of Starkloff's contemporaries felt with regard to the telephone. The technical wonder for Starkloff was first and foremost the telegraph, as I have outlined in the previous chapter. It is not the innovation, novelty, or the technological progress that Starkloff addresses here, but it is merely the female qualities of the switchers that he accentuates.
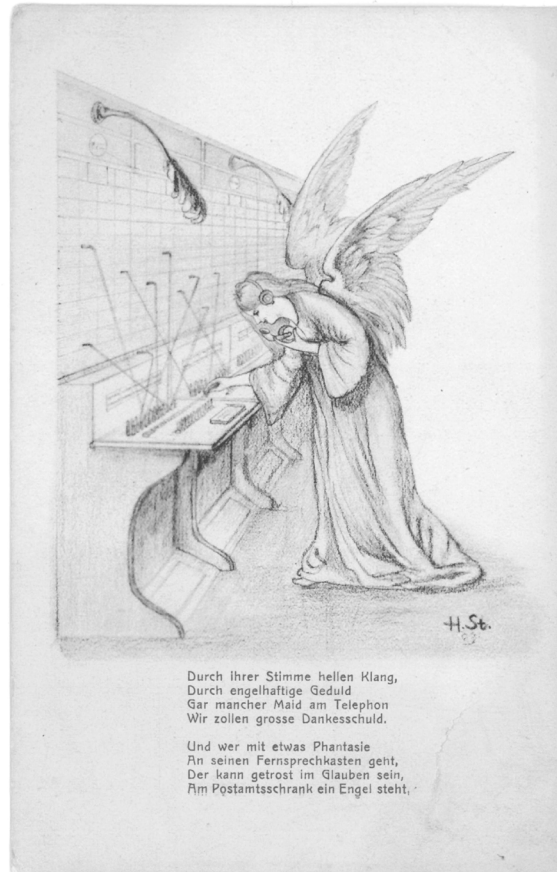

Durch ihrer Stimme hellen Klang,
Durch engelhaftige Geduld
Gar mancher Maid am Telephon
Wir zollen grosse Dankesschuld.

Und wer mit etwas Phantasie
An seinen Fernsprechkasten geht,
Der kann getrost im Glauben sein,
Am Postamtsschrank ein Engel steht,

Figure 6: Telephone Angel (1909)

As I have mentioned above, Marvin points to frequent complaints about women's electrical incapacity in the United States. She even states that "[w]omen appeared as the parasitic consumers of men's labor in most stories of their electrical ignorance".[112] However, this is not an attitude we can recognise in Starkloff's cards. In fact, Starkloff's presentations of male and female operators differ. The female operators are not depicted as electrical professionals like their male colleagues and, yes, Starkloff's depiction of the women switchers accords with a typical discursive pattern that went: "Während – männliche – Ingenieure die Technik entwerfen und kontrollieren, sind die Frauen Dienerinnen der Maschinen."[113] However, neither are the women shown as incompetent nor as technically unskilled. Rather, Starkloff's account is distinguished by a consistently positive char-

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112   Marvin 1988: Old Technologies, p. 24.
113   Bühlmann et al. 1992: Frauen, p. 205.

acterisation of women and a strong emphasis on their female qualities. In the following section, I will discuss if it is correct to accuse Starkloff of a reactionary image of women, like art historian Brigitte Schoch-Joswig does.

A Reactionary Image of Women?

In the 1920s, the telephone operators and similar female white-collar workers like typists were prototypes of the 'modern' woman.[114] With their well-groomed and fashionable appearance that reached beyond the more traditional housewives or gentlewomen they had a very positive image. The 'Neue Frau' or 'flapper' epitomised a new type of an autonomous and independent woman.[115] Their attraction especially for men derived amongst other things from an erotic connotation that was most strongly connected to the telephone operators. The young, unmarried, and invisible women with their soft and dulcet voices stimulated their male customer's phantasies and led at the same time to a dubious reputation.[116] However, this eroticisation of the telephone operators highlighted their femininity and their sex instead of regarding them as fellow citizens, colleagues, or even electrical professionals.[117]

Brigitte Schoch-Joswig accuses Starkloff of being afraid of a type of woman that combined both femininity and diligence. According to her, Starkloff was sluggish and he promoted a reactionary image of women, one in which women can either be sensual, feminine human beings or cold-blooded, emotionless operators.[118] Like many of his contemporaries Starkloff feared a loss of femininity, she argues in her scathing article on a series of six of Starkloff's postcards that is not part of my collection. Looking at the six scenes that depict a miscarried love story between a telephone operator and her male colleague, Schoch-Joswig judges that Starkloff took being a working woman and being a feminine woman to be incompatible. Her main argument: Starkloff's old-fashioned gender image impeded emancipation. Fortunately, my collection contains a postcard with a scene similar to the ones examined by Schoch-Joswig. A closer look at it shows that her interpretation is misleading and brings out what image of the female switchers Starkloff presented.

Figure 7 shows the only female telegraph operator in the whole series. She is sitting at the desk next to a sounder telegraph, ready to note down the transmitted message. The base of the lamp that stands on the table shows the number of the telegraph office. A young man in a uniform is bending over the table, holding a paper in his left and looking her in the eyes. A child is witnessing their encounter. With the bow in his hand, a quiver filled with arrows and wings on the back the boy is easily recognisable as Cupid, the Roman god of desire, love, and affection. The title of the poem "Telegraphie-Amor" confirms this interpretation, since Cupid is Amor in German.

114 See: Koch, Annette: Die weiblichen Angestellten in der Weimarer Republik, in: *Fräulein vom Amt*, ed. by Helmut Gold / Annette Koch / Rolf Barnekow, München (1993), pp. 163–175, here: 165.
115 See: Gold 1993: Fräulein, p. 30.
116 See: Ibid., p. 25.
117 See: Nienhaus, Ursula: Das 'Fräulein vom Amt' im internationalen Vergleich, in: *Fräulein vom Amt*, ed. by Helmut Gold / Annette Koch / Rolf Barnekow, München (1993), pp. 37–55, here: 41.
118 Schoch-Joswig 1993: Klappenschrank.

According to the poem, the three of them centre their attention on different things. While she is listening to the "hard beat" of the telegraph, he is reading in her gaze. Cupid or Amor is listening to the "collation". Normally, the term "collation" in telegraphy referred to a checking of telegrams by transmitting them twice. Starkloff's poem transmits the term to a whole different context. "Sie [die Collation] heißt hier: 'Jugendglück!'" The upshot: The female operator and her male admirer fall in love.
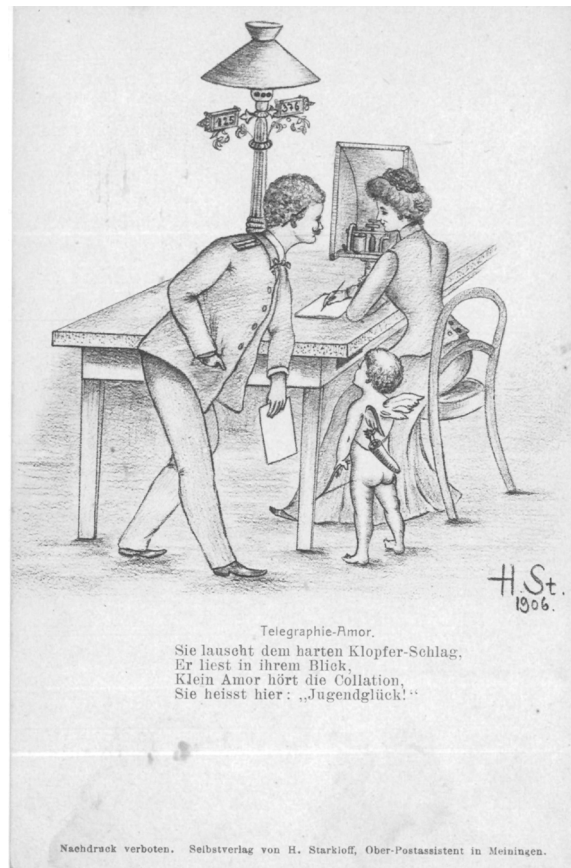

Figure 7: Telegraphie-Amor (1906)

Again, attention to the invisible is a useful first step in the interpretation. In Figure 7 as well as in the rest of Starkloff's postcards we do not find any hint of a salacious picture of the female operators. They all seem to be cheerful and they are well-dressed, but they carry no erotic or sexual signs, nothing that would present a seductive picture. This can easily be explained with the date of origin of the postcards. Although Starkloff promoted his post-postcards during the 1920s, he drew them before that period, more precisely from 1900-1918. In that time, the female telephone operators had not yet become a symbol of a new type of women. In fact, they were pioneers of female white collar workers, but they were not yet the erotic symbol that they would become in the 1920s.

When in her article Schoch-Joswig accuses Starkloff of promoting an anti-emancipatory image of women, she makes a related mistake. She takes the publication date of her six undated postcards (according to her 1928) to be their date of origin. Based on the assumption that Starkloff was influenced by the emergence of a new independent type of woman, Schoch-Joswig hastily judges that

Starkloff was reactionary: "[Es] plagt doch den bräsigen Starkloff […] die gleiche Panik vor dem Verlust der Weiblichkeit durch die gleichberechtigt arbeitende und lebende Frau".[119] However, as my collection shows, Starkloff drew his post-postcards several years before he published and promoted them in the 1920s. When Schoch-Joswig explains Starkloff's allegedly reactionary image of women referring to the emergence of the new type of women described above, this could only be correct if they were really drawn in the 1920 – what I strongly doubt with regard to the style and the topics of the postcards he created before 1918.[120]

Schoch-Joswig argues that Starkloff's cards promote an incompatibility between working and loving women, because in her series, the female operator neglects her duty while falling in love. Pertaining to her cards, one could agree with this argumentation. Yet, Figure 7 shows that this stance is not representative of all of his postcards. There, the female operator is not disturbed by her admirer, but is rather concentrated and listens to the telegraph sound. Starkloff's other depiction of female operators support this interpretation. In none of the postcards the telephone operators are performing their work cold-bloodedly or emotionlessly. Rather, their positive female qualities are underlined. In my eyes, Starkloff's stance towards the female operators was not utterly reactionary. Certainly, his depiction of women differs from the one of men and he cannot be seen as a promoter of gender equality. For Starkloff the female operators did not belong to the electric priesthood. Nevertheless, his postcards reveal a deep appreciation for the female white collar workers referring to their allegedly particular female qualities such as patience, stamina, and a soft voice. That Starkloff acts on the assumption of differences between men and women does not make him 'sluggish' and an objector to emancipation but shows that he was a product of his age. It bespeaks of little historical understanding to judge him for not promoting an image of a not yet existing new woman like Schoch-Joswig does.

Starkloff's stance towards the female telephone operators can better be understood as a form of 'reactionary modernism'. Contrary to Schoch-Joswig's interpretation, I argue that Starkloff's depiction of the women switchers does indeed show diligence in dealing with modern technology as compatible with femininity. Again, in his postcards Starkloff reconciles a romantic, traditional tenor with a modern technology.

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119 Ibid., p. 194.
120 As Richard McCormick notes, there was indeed a male anxiety about changing notions of gender roles and especially about the 'New Woman.' However, he clearly makes this diagnosis only for the 1920s. McCormick, Richard: *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity. Film, Literature, and "New Objectivity"*, New York 2001, pp. 2–7.

Chapter 3: Nervousness

Starkloff defended the highly positive image of the female operators that I have described in the previous chapter with regard to a controversial topic: the common nervousness among telephone operators. Among Starkloff's contemporaries, the illness was commonly perceived as the "quint-essential malady of technological modernity".[121] In the following chapter, I will explain the illness, look for traces in the cards that point to it and try to understand how Starkloff harmonised this downside of the modernisation process with his own positive stance towards the telephone. To begin with, I will take another close look at a postcard and interpret it by connecting the drawing to the poem.

Wenn man am Telephon Dich ärgert,
Als Waffe haft die Zunge Du;
Doch heißt's vorfichtig fie gebrauchen,
Ein falfches Wort entfleucht im Nu.

Viel beffer ift's Du nimmft die Hände,
Hälft fo fie vor Dein Angeficht;
Die Handbewegung fieht ja niemand,
Doch fchafft fie feelfches Gleichgewicht!

Figure 8: Ärger (1918)

Again, we see a female operator in front of a telephone switchboard. However, this time the machine is much smaller: We see the oldest type of switchboards, in German "Klappenschränke", in English simply "switchboard". It could have up to 50 double lines, although the one in the pictures has apparently fewer lines.[122] The woman has short hair and is wearing a long skirt. The head-phones on her head indicate that she is working, as does her gesture: Even though she is smiling,

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121 Killen 2003: Shock, p. 201.
122 Sattelberg, Otto: *Englisch-deutsches und deutsch-englisches Wörterbuch der elektrischen Nachrichtentecknik*, Berlin 1926, p. 132.

she is putting her hand up as if she were angry. The untitled poem below is an advice, given by an unknown lyric person to a second-person reader: If someone picks on you via telephone, be careful when you defend yourself with words because it's easy to overshoot the mark ("Wenn man am Telephon Dich ärgert, / Als Waffe hast die Zunge Du; / Doch heißt's vorsichtig sie gebrauchen / Ein falsches Wort entfleucht im Nu."). Referring to the gesture in the picture the instruction goes on: Better put your hands in front of your face – no one can see it but it keeps you emotionally balanced.

Like the 'Telephone Angel' analysed above, Figure 8 also shows Starkloff's emphasis on the patience of the female operators. Moreover, it adumbrates how stressful and exhausting telephone switching could be. The postcard can be interpreted in two different ways. On the one hand, one may regard the usual telephone users as the addressees of the poem. In this reading, the postcard is similar to many other attempts to convey adequate telephone etiquette or behaviour. Until the 1930s, telephone instruction manuals frequently contained instructions for the telephone conversation besides the technical information. For example, a Swiss brochure from 1927 advised:

> Erst Nummer suchen und dann aufläuten. Achte darauf, dass die Telephonistin die Nummer richtig wiederholt. Sprich klar und deutlich in den Trichter, ohne zu schreien. Gib sofort Antwort, wenn das Telephon läutet. […] Sei am Telephon stets kurz, klar und freundlich.[123]

The common demand not to shout into the ear cap is owed to the fact that many people could not imagine talking to someone remote in a normal voice and tried to bridge the distance by speaking louder.[124] The latter more content-related instruction to be friendly corresponds with Starkloff's advice to remain calm and to let off steam through gestures and not through words.

On the other hand, Starkloff's poem can also be read as an advice to the telephone operators – an interpretation that is even more plausible with regard to the drawing. In order to understand why Starkloff would wish female telephone operators emotional balance ("seelisches Gleichgewicht") it is important to comprehend how exhausting their job was.

An account from *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, Walter Benjamin's autobiography of his early childhood, suggests that the work of the telephone switchers was not an easy one:

> Meinungsverschiedenheiten mit den Ämtern waren die Regel, ganz zu schweigen von den Drohungen und Donnerworten, die mein Vater gegen die Beschwerdestelle ausstieß. Doch seine eigentlichen Orgien galten der Kurbel, der er sich minutenlang und bis zur Selbstvergessenheit verschrieb. Und seine Hand war wie ein Derwisch, der der Wollust seines Taumels unterliegt. Mir aber schlug das Herz, ich war gewiß, in solchen Fällen drohe der Beamtin als Strafe ihrer Säumigkeit ein Schlag.[125]

Benjamin's description gives an idea of the pressure weighing on the telephone operators: Sometimes, customers lost their temper and made threats. As the last sentence indicates, occasionally

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123 "Pro Telephon": *Das Telephon für jedermann,* 1927, p. 14; cited after Stadelmann, Kurt / Hengartner, Thomas: *Ganz Ohr. Telefonische Kommunikation*, Bern 1994, p. 67.

124 Ibid., pp. 65–67.

125 Benjamin, Walter: Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert, in: *Gesammelte Schriften IV,* Frankfurt am Main (1972), here: 242–243.

the operators were even disordered by "a sharp, unpleasant crackling noise or a slight shock".[126] "Unter normalen Verhältnissen", a medical article from 1907 remarks, "merkt die Telephonistin nichts von diesem Strom; aber unter gewissen Umstanden geht der Strom in ihr Telephon über."[127] This could happen when an impatient caller rang the exchange and vehemently turned the crank, which informed the operator about his request, while the operator was switching the line.

Furthermore, the telephone exchanges were extremely exhausting workplaces. A doctor in the early 1900s noted: "speaking, listening, connecting, in rapid unceasing succession the operator carries out her task, completely exhausted by the time she leaves the office".[128] Similarly, an etiquette guidebook from 1901 recorded: "Das Amt einer Telephonistin ist außerordentlich anstrengend und verlangt eine ganz feste Natur, sonst ist das Nervensystem in kurzer Zeit ruiniert".[129] The bigger the exchange was, the louder was the surrounding and the more were the operators under surveillance and under pressure to improve efficiency.[130] Mistakes were recorded in personnel files; operators had to work at night and at the weekend.[131] In bigger cities, an operator at a normal switchboard established approximately 125 connections per day, a number that could increase to 200 connections per minute in peak times.[132] These working conditions were seen as the causes for serious health issues, particularly for nervousness. A medical paper from 1907 states:

> Ich fand nämlich, daß die Klage über Nervosität sehr häufig von den Telephonistinnen vorgebracht wurde; ja, viele unter ihnen waren sogar fest überzeugt, daß das Telephonieren Nervosität herbeirufen müsse, und als Ursache gaben sie verschiedene Verhältnisse an, wie 'Läuten in die Ohren', 'Prüfen', Lärm in dem großen Lokal, Ärger über die Abonnenten usw.[133]

The quote shows that the operators attributed their nervousness to the disturbing noises, the generally loud surrounding, and their anger at impatient or impolite customers. In fact, female telephone and telegraph operators were often diagnosed with nervous exhaustion and traumatic neurosis. Their symptoms ranged from sleeplessness or hearing telephone voices in the sleep as "first signs of severe nervousness"[134] to hypochondria and depression.[135]

It is striking that the instruction for emotional balance in Figure 8 is the only hint at this widespread nervousness among telephone operators that we can find in the drawings and poems. Apart from that, the scenes and verses pertaining to the telephone present all but a stressful and nerve-racking working life. So, is it reasonable to conclude that Starkloff simply was not aware of the severe consequences the operators' work could have on their health? Certainly, the telephone

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126 Killen 2003: Shock, p. 205.
127 Blegvad, N. Rh.: Über die Einwirkung des berufsmässigen Telephonierens auf den Organismus mit besonderer Rücksicht auf das Gehörorgan, in: *Archiv für Ohrenheilkunde* 72 (1907), pp. 205–251, here: 207.
128 *Zeitschrift für Eisenbahn-Telegraphen-Beamten* 6 (1902), p. 43, cited in: Killen 2003: Shock, p. 204.
129 Baudissin, Wolf Graf von et al. 1901: Goldenes Buch, p. 908.
130 See: Killen 2003: Shock, pp. 204f.
131 See: Nienhaus 1993: Fräulein, pp. 45f.
132 See: Blegvad 1907: Einwirkung, pp. 222f.
133 Ibid., p. 236.
134 *Zeitschrift für Eisenbahn-Telegraphen-Beamten* 6 (1902), p. 43, cited in: Killen 2003: Shock, p. 204.
135 See: Blegvad 1907: Einwirkung, p. 237.

exchange in Meiningen was not as big as the ones in Berlin or Frankfurt and, perhaps, the local operators' work routine was not as stressful as their colleagues' in the big cities. However, the female switchers were very popular and their nervousness was rife and a matter of common knowledge.[136] Thus, it is pretty unlikely that this debate simply left the socially committed post officer Starkloff untouched. And in fact, a look at the back of the postcards indicates that Starkloff was well aware of these ambivalent stances towards telephony.
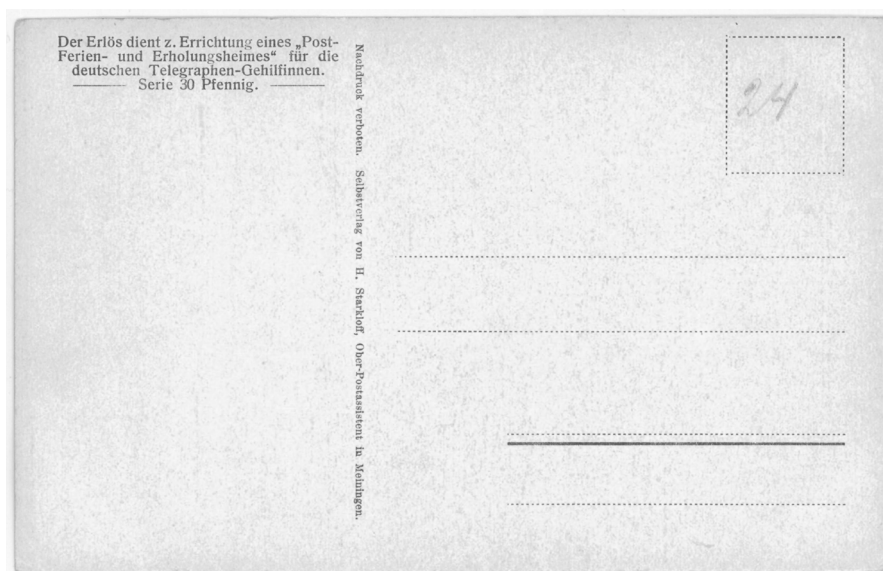

Figure 9: Verso

On the back of five of the twelve postcards in my collection there is a note, saying: "Der Erlös dient z. Errichtung eines 'Post-Ferien- und Erholungsheimes' für die deutschen Telegraphinnen-Gehilfinnen". Thus, apparently Starkloff wanted to support the construction of a recreation home for female operators. The debate about the severe nervousness of the operators that is behind this attempt and the way this debate, in turn, is broached in Starkloff's cards will be the subject of the following two sections. Moreover, I will try to answer the question why Starkloff intentionally created an ideal image of telephone operating.

The Telephone Accident

First, a closer look at the debate about nervousness and especially about telephone neurosis during the time in which Starkloff created his postcards can help to contextualise his ambition. As Karen Johannisson explains, medical diagnoses

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136 See: Gold 1993: Fräulein, p. 36.

mirror more than physiological and biochemical events in the body. They project the contemporary cultural values and social codes, class and gender structures, and expected relations between individual and society.[137]

So did nervousness, sometimes also termed traumatic neurosis or neurasthenia: Around 1900, the illness was seen as an illness nourished by the modernisation process and the overwhelming pace of modern life.[138] In the special case of the female telephone operators who were often diagnosed with traumatic neurosis, a common analogy added to the connection between the modernisation process and their illness. From the beginning of the twentieth century onwards, the abovementioned analogy between the telegraph system and the nervous system was transferred to the telephone system.[139] From then on, the telephone system was seen as the nervous system of the societal body and the telephone exchange functioned in this understanding as its brain:

> As in a telephone station all lines are unified and a connection between two speakers must go via the station, so everything in the human organism […] goes through the brain. All movements are dependent on the normal function of the brain and naturally, of course, on the normal function of telegraph wires and nerves.[140]

The telephone operators were part of this connection between the telephone system and the nerves: They and especially their nerves were seen as the weak points within this nervous system.[141] There were even called "ein Stück vom Gehirn der Stadt".[142] According to the American historian Andreas Killen, the female switchers had internalised this common analogy and believed "in the essential identity between electrical and nervous systems" and "wedded it to their own sense of being uniquely at risk, virtually programmed for nervous breakdown".[143] So closely tied to modern technology, they "were acutely aware of their modernity".[144]

In his article "From Shock to *Schreck*: Psychiatrists, Telephone Operators and Traumatic Neurosis in Germany, 1900-26", Killen describes a shift that took place with regard to the psychiatric attitude towards the diagnosis of nervousness, a shift that was related to "the way that self, body and machine were configured in German psychiatric discourse".[145] Until the First World War, he argues, the nervousness of the female operators was ascribed to the external conditions of technological modernity. Killen notes that the clinical diagnosis was "inextricably linked with a moment of technological breakdown: the so-called 'telephone accident'".[146] Based on the assumption that modern "Zivilisation" led to nervous illness in general and on a mechanistic understanding of the

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137 Johannisson, Karin: Modern Fatigue. A Historical Perspective, in: *Stress in Health and Disease*, ed. by Bengt B. Arnetz / Rolf Ekman, Weinheim (2006), pp. 3–19, here: 17.

138 See: Ibid., pp. 9–11.

139 See: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 138.

140 Wie gewinnt man Energie, geistige Frische und Lebensfreude, in: *Der Fernsprecher* 10 (1912), p. 162, cited in: Killen, Andreas: *Berlin Electropolis. Shock Nerves and German Modernity*, Berkeley 2006, p. 174.

141 See: Killen 2005: Telefonzentrale, p. 85.

142 Naumann, Friedrich: *Ausstellungsbriefe*, Berlin 1909, p. 17.

143 Killen 2006: Berlin, p. 174.

144 Killen 2003: Shock, p. 210.

145 Ibid., p. 202.

146 Ibid., p. 207.

body, the nervous breakdowns were explained by the electric shocks described above that transferred current to the operator's body. A quote from a supervisor of the US-company Bell strikingly demonstrates this worldview (and also shows that to some extent the mechanistic conception endured at least until the 1930s): "The operator must be a paragon of perfection, a kind of human machine".[147] Following this idea, a technical error disturbed the interlacing of human body and machine and led to a human error, too. Thus, the electric shocks were seen as the cause for a somatic illness: the traumatic neurosis or nervousness. An article from 1907 lists four possible causes for the operators' symptoms:

> Einige unter diesen Symptomen beruhen auf einer allgemeinen Nervosität, die sich häufig während des Telephondienstes entwickelt, teils weil die Arbeit zum Stillsitzen in der Stubenluft zwingt, teils weil es sich um junge Individuen weiblichen Geschlechts handelt, und teils endlich auch infolge van den heftigen und plötzlich auftretenden Schallen im Telephon ('Prüfen', 'Läuten', Blitzschlag).[148]

The first cause, a general nervousness, shows the abovementioned widespread conviction of a nervous modern zeitgeist. Second, he mentions the working conditions in a stuffy workplace. The third cause, the mere fact that the operators were women and therefore weaker, was also a common persuasion. For example, in 1904 the author of an etiquette book stated:

> Die Gründlichkeit und Ausdauer der Arbeit eines Mannes besitzen nur ganz wenige Frauen. Selbst diesen aber wird es, trotz aller Energie, gesundheitlich sich immer wiederholend, unmöglich sein, in der Arbeit auszuharren und voll den Beruf auszufüllen. Durchschnittlich [fallen] auf jede Telephonistin laut statistischer Nachweisung jährlich 44 Krankheitstage.[149]

Finally, the last cause mentioned in the first quote is the crackling noises that could happen to the operator even more than the electric shocks. What is important is that all of the mentioned reasons including the shock are external in the sense that they ascribe the nervousness not to the operator's individual psyche, but to mainly external or natural somatic influences. Therefore, from 1901 until 1926 insurance companies accepted traumatic neurosis as a compensable illness, following the conviction that the risks of industrial modernity had to be collectivised.[150] Thus, the insurance law guaranteed the "coverage of medical costs, lengthy rest cures, and in the case of prolonged incapacity, a pension covering up to two-thirds of their original salary".[151]

However, in the years after the First World War the causal relation between the telephone accident and the illness it allegedly caused were more and more called into question. Nervousness was increasingly attributed to internal factors such as personal weakness, predisposition, and the

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147 See: Maddox, Brenda: Women and the Switchboard, in: *The Social Impact of the Telephone*, ed. by Pool, Ithiel de Sola, Cambridge (1977), pp. 262–280, here: 270.
148 Blegvad 1907: Einwirkung, p. 247.
149 Gontard, Otto von: *Wie soll ein weibliches Wesen sich benehmen, um einen Mann zu bezaubern. Praktische Ratschläge eines scharfen Beobachters*, München 1904, pp. 30f.
150 See: Killen 2003: Shock, p. 207.
151 Ibid., p. 207.

attraction of the insurance laws. Already in 1907 the author of a study on nervous telephone operators remarked on the abuse of the diagnosis 'nervousness':

> Indes deckt die Bezeichnung 'Nervosität' in ihrer populären Bemerkung über einen sehr elastischen Begriff, mit dem – und vielleicht besonders unter jungen Damen – ein gewisser Mißbrauch getrieben wird. Es findet sich bekanntlich eine Art von Frauen, die da erwähnen, daß eine 'moderne Frau' notwendig an 'Nervosität' leiden müsse.[152]

Not only does this quote illustrate how closely nervousness was connected to a modern lifestyle but it also shows that the author suspected some of the women to be malingerers. However, he concludes: "Ich zweifle durchaus nicht daran, daß sich unter den Telephonistinnen viele nervöse Individuen finden".[153] These doubts on the honesty of the telephone operators grew stronger with what Anne Harrington has termed the "holistic turn" in German culture and a more vitalist conception of the self.[154] Influenced by increasing numbers of traumatic neuroses, nervous breakdowns, and shell shocks during and after the First World War, psychiatrists and psychologists moved away from a mechanistic understanding of the body to explanations for neuroses that included concepts like, 'attitude', 'will' and 'disposition'.[155] As Killen phrases it, a "shift from soma to psyche"[156] took place. Furthermore, it was the German welfare state that was blamed. Social insurance, a common argument went, created incentives to develop nervousness. Thus, the shift led to the conviction "that personal weakness and the pathologies of the German welfare state lay at the heart of the problem."[157] In the end, it was not the impact of modern life and technology anymore that was seen as the cause for nervousness but the individual switcher's mental condition and the insurance law that reinforced neuroses. Although the female operators formed the 'association of female telephone operators' ('Verband der Telephonistinnen') and justified their disorders with the "'nerve-shattering' nature of their job",[158] eventually, in 1926 traumatic neurosis was disqualified as a compensable illness by Germany's insurance courts.

Recreation

Consequently, Starkloff's attempt to build a recreation home for female operators has to be interpreted against this background of a common connection between telephony and modern nervousness. Here, it is reasonable to speak of telephony in general, although the note on the postcards literally refers to telegraph operators. That the home was supposed to be built for "Telegraphinnen-Gehülfinnen" does not exclude the telephone operators. Quite the contrary, there is much to suggest that this is what Starkloff had in mind. First, telephony was for a long time perceived as

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152 Blegvad 1907: Einwirkung, p. 237.
153 Ibid., p. 237.
154 See: Harrington, Anne: *Reenchanted Science. Holism in German Culture from Wilhelm II to Hitler*, Princeton 1996.
155 See: Killen 2003: Shock, pp. 211f.
156 Killen 2006: Berlin, p. 6.
157 Killen 2003: Shock, p. 219.
158 Ibid., p. 217.

a new type of telegraph rather than a distinct technology.[159] Accordingly, telephone operators were commonly perceived as employees in telegraphy. Second, the remarkable fact that all of the telegraph operators on the postcards are male whereas the telephone switchers are all female confirms the assumption that Starkloff referred mainly to the telephone operators with the term "Telegraphinnen–Gehülfinnen".

Given the background of the debate about the nervousness of the operators, the desired emotional balance ("seelisches Gleichgewicht") in Starkloff's poem becomes comprehensible, but also the atmosphere Starkloff creates with the drawings and poems becomes even more striking. As I have shown, the telephone operators' work was anything but playful. However, Starkloff's drawings tell another story. Whereas the telegraph operator in Figure 4 explicitly shows a man who cannot cope with the modern technology, the depictions of the female telephone operators underline the women's competences instead of their exhaustion. Except from the woman's gesture in Figure 8 the pictures themselves do not point to any nervousness. Quite the contrary: Starkloff displays the post office as a comfortable working place. For example, in Figure 10 he equips the post office with all kinds of comfy and cheerful symbols.
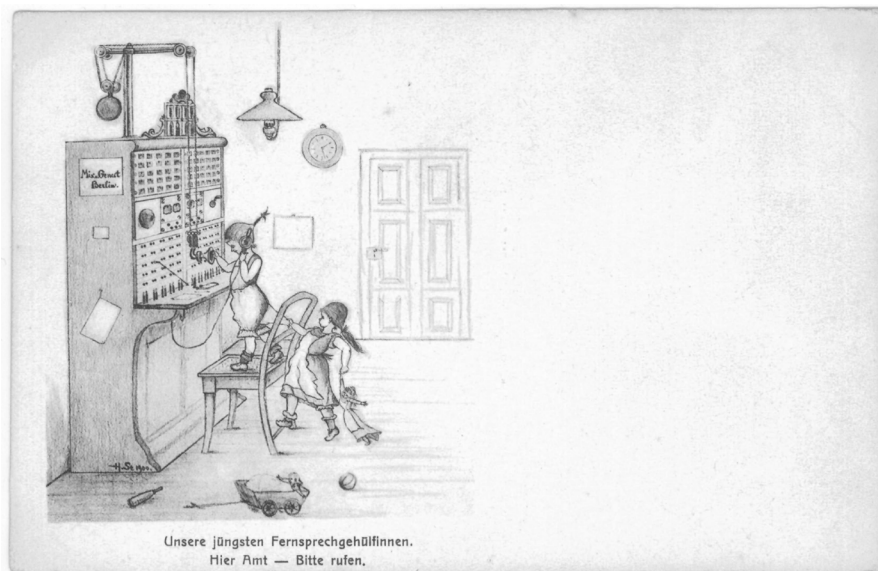

Figure 10: Gehülfinnen (1900)

Like the two telephone postcards described above, Figure 10, drawn around 1900, also shows a calm and restful scene. First and foremost, it is the depiction of children that creates a casual and relaxed atmosphere: We see two cute little girls playing a trick. One of them has climbed on a chair in order to toy with the big switchboard. The other one seems to be trying to keep her from doing that. The doll in her hand and several toys like a ball and a handcart add to the impression that we are witnessing a cute scene in a comfy, homely surrounding. With regard to the poems, Figure 10 is an exception, since the text below the drawing consists of only two lines that do not even

159 See: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, pp. 127f.

rhyme. The first line is a humorous caption. "Unsere jüngsten Fernsprechgehülfinnen" credits the two girls in the picture with affiliation to the telephone switcher's profession. The second line is a quote from the everyday life of telephone operators and their customers. "Hier Amt" and "Bitte rufen" are part of the compulsory conversation a switcher had with the caller, equivalent to the English "Hello Central". Thus, the card combines the playful and cheery atmosphere depicted in the drawing with the working life of the operators.

All the postcards with telephone operators (see also Figure 11 further below) present an ideal image of the operators' working life – in the case of the 'Gehülfinnen' in Figure 10 it is even a pretty fanciful scene. Nevertheless, the reference to anger in Figure 8 and the verso of the cards indicate that Starkloff was aware of the debate on telephone switching, nervousness, and modernity. So, apart from the fact that positive depiction probably made a stronger sales argument for the postcards, why did Starkloff portray the telephone operators so positively? One could interpret the lack of stress and psychic exhaustion in the postcards in combination with the intention to create a recreation home for the female operators as an inconsistency within Starkloff's account. Yet, it is possible to find a comprehensible explanation for this apparent contradiction by giving thought to the point in time at which Starkloff intended to build the recreation home.

It is hard to say when exactly the post officer printed the note on the back of the cards and it is even harder to tell whether there were any serious steps toward the construction of such a building. The note is on five of the postcards, more precisely on those whose drawings were made in 1909. However, it remains uncertain if Starkloff added the poems and published the postcards immediately after drawing the scenes in 1909 or if he did so afterwards, maybe only in 1926 when he promoted his whole post-postcard series to the Swiss post office. In the former case, one could conclude that Starkloff was worried about the hard working conditions of the female operators in general and, in line with a common stance, wanted to erect the home out of pity. The second interpretation assumes that Starkloff raised the money at a time when the operators' honesty was commonly put into question, maybe even in 1926, exactly the same year in which traumatic neurosis ceased to be an accepted illness for insurances. In that case, Starkloff would have taken a fierce stance against the common debate in which the operators were more and more dismissed as nervous wrecks or simulants who did not deserve financial aid and whose illness was a consequence not of working conditions but of "morbid fears and wishes".[160] This increasingly sceptical stance towards the switchers could also be the reason for the thoroughly positive and idealistic depiction of the females, an act of defence.

As I have shown, Starkloff approached the debate on the operators' nervousness as a downside of the modernisation process by supporting the construction of a recreation home and by depicting an ideal image of his female colleagues. Unlike common descriptions of telephone exchanges as extremely exhausting working places, Starkloff presents a pleasantly safe and innocent setting far from every stress or burden connected to modernisation in general and telephony in particu-

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160 Killen 2003: Shock, p. 219.

lar. Again, this stance could be characterised as a form of 'reactionary modernism'. The postcards neither look like a progressive praise of technical progress nor like a rejection of the modernisation process. Rather, Starkloff reconciles this modern technology, which was held accountable for the operators' nervousness, with a traditional-looking idyllic world. He praises the operators of modern technology as angelic, expresses his appreciation for them, and touches drawbacks of modernisation only slightly at the back of the postcards. Here, we can recognise a modern stance that reflects on the ambivalent impact of modern technologies without presenting them as a break with the past. Telephony is not presented as a modern technology that carried overwhelming stress with it and that upset traditional life. Rather, it is depicted as a novelty that people can appropriate and cope with, although it involves certain drawbacks.

Chapter 4: Relationships

Up to this point, I have shown that Starkloff's postcards fit in with a highly positive public stance towards the modernisation process, towards 'ingenuous inventions' and 'technical wonders' like telephony and telegraphy. However, the debate about the connection between nervousness and the two technologies has made clear that Starkloff and his contemporaries also recognised drawbacks of the new technologies. According to Rieger, both perspectives are symptomatic of what was often called "modern wonders",[161] new technologies like telephony, aeroplanes, the cinema, or water power.[162] On the one hand, contemporaries admired the new inventions. On the other hand, they "simultaneously found them beyond their comprehension and thus a worrying source of uncertainty".[163] Many people feared the impact technology could have on their social life. The telephone, for example, was seen as a device that promoted more impersonal and superficial relationships and the feeling of remoteness and loneliness. Hartmut Berghoff makes a diagnosis similar to Rieger's, when he writes: "Ein Superlativ jagte den nächsten […] Anwendung und Konsum von Technik wurden erstmals zur massenhaften Alltagserfahrung, die zugleich faszinierte und erschreckte".[164] This ambivalence towards the countless new technologies characterised public debate about modern technology at the turn of the century.[165] As Rieger argues, both fascination and scepticism are characteristic of the "conviction of living in a time of unparalleled modernity".[166]

So, if the spread of telephony did not only breed enthusiasm but rather caused "ambivalent appreciations"[167] in certain regards, Starkloff's account is to be located in this context. In order to do so, I will concentrate on three aspects pertaining to the telephone's influence on relationships and look for traces of the associated concerns in the postcards. The second and third sections focus on familial and romantic relationships. To begin with, I will take a look at another postcard and show how it hints at privacy issues.

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161 See: Rieger 2003: Modern Wonders.
162 The ambivalence towards the modernisation process found its way even into official promotion for technologies. As Fabian Zimmer outlines using water power as an example, films and booklets on dams mirror not only pride in modernisation but also concerns about the destruction of nature, of 'Heimat', and 'Gemeinschaft'. See: Zimmer, Fabian: "Gefesselte Naturkräfte". Zur filmischen Inszenierung von Wasserkraft und Modernisierung, in: *Das Vorprogramm*, ed. by Philipp Osten, et al., Heidelberg, Strasbourg (2015), pp. 123–140.
163 Rieger 2003: Modern Wonders, p. 153.
164 Berghoff, Hartmut: "Dem Ziele der Menschheit entgegen". Die Verheißungen der Technik an der Wende zum 20. Jahrhundert, in: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft. Sonderheft* (2000), pp. 47–78, here: 50.
165 As Jörg Becker outlines using the example of telephony, these two stances were also reflected in fictional literature. Whereas Jules Vernes, for example, was extremely fascinated by modern technologies, Karl May's books are characterised by a romantic scepticism towards them. See: Becker, Jörg: Akkulturation und Technologietransfer. Das Beispiel der Telekommunikation, in: *Der sprechende Knochen*, ed. by Jürgen Bräunlein, Würzburg (2000), pp. 47–58, here: 48–51.
166 Rieger 2003: Modern Wonders, p. 154.
167 Ibid., p. 153.

Privacy

The increasing separation between public and private sphere is a modern phenomenon that evolved from the eighteenth century onwards together with the increasing individualism. However, only in the nineteenth century, the boundaries between the public and the private were stabilised and family life, private life, intimate relations, and privacy became increasingly important.[168] Making it easier to maintain familial relationships across distances, the diffusion of telephony further privatised life in the early twentieth century.[169] At the same time, people saw their privacy threatened by the "fearful universality"[170] of the telephone, as the English writer Arnold Bennett called it, and developed concerns about the operator's confidentiality.

Figure 11: Amtsgeheimnis (1907)

Figure 11 again shows a female telephonist in front of a switchboard and, indeed, we can recognise the same type of woman we already know from the other postcards. The operator is sitting on a chair in front of another Mix & Genest switchboard, obviously operating it with her left hand. She is wearing a long skirt, a band collar blouse, and headphones. Her long hair is upswept. Again, it

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168 See: *A History of Private Life IV. From the Fires of Revolution to the Great War*, ed. by Philippe Ariès / Georges Duby, Cambridge 1990.
169 See: Betteridge, Jenie: Answering Back. The Telephone, Modernity and Everyday Life, in: *Media Culture Society* 19 (1997), pp. 585–603, here: 595.
170 Kern 1983: Culture, p. 187.

is a gesture that links the drawing with the poem. The telephone operator is leaning towards the viewer and is putting a finger on her lips. Given the noisy surrounding in the telephone exchanges one could interpret this gesture as a plea for silence. However, reading the poem inclines to follow a different reading. The first stanza states that the telephone operator – who is called a 'maid at the whisper-wire' – listens to numberless secrets all day long. Yet, she has to keep them private: "sie muss schließen ein / Es in des Herzens Schrein" – which is according to the poem a horrendous torment.

Starkloff's postcard implies that the customer's secrets are in the best of hands with the operator, since she discloses no secret. The following quote from an official letter to the telephone exchanges in Switzerland from 1899 shows that it was indeed necessary to reassure and to underline the professional confidentiality of the telephone operators:

> Wir haben schon sehr häufig konstatiert, und es sind uns auch seitens der Abonnenten Klagen darüber zugegangen, dass das Personal […] vielfach die zu Stande gekommenen Gespräche ganz mitanhört, deren Inhalt seinen Bekanntenkreisen mitteilt und dadurch Anlass zu Klatschereien gibt.[171]

As the quote illustrates, there was a possibility for the switchboard operator to listen to the conversations and, apparently, some of them did so and even caused problems, because they divulged personal information. This only changed when manual switching was replaced by the automatic system.[172] However, the first automatic exchange was built in Hildesheim in 1908 and only in 1966 the last manual exchange was closed. Thus, when Starkloff published his postcards concerns about eavesdropping operators were quite common. As the last part of the abovementioned letter shows, they led to different concerns:

> Da dieser Unfug einerseits sehr störend auf die Gesprächsabwicklung einwirkt und anderseits geeignet ist, das Vertrauen des Publikums in die diskrete Bedienung des Telephons zu erschüttern und die Verwaltung zu schädigen, fordern wir hiermit das Bedienungspersonal energisch auf, seine Aufmerksamkeit, die es dem Zustandekommen einer verlangten Verbindung zu schenken hat, auf die vorgeschriebene Dauer zu beschränken und die ihm zur Pflicht auferlegte Wahrung des Gesprächsgeheimnisses strenge zu beobachten.[173]

Accordingly, the customers were disturbed while they spoke by the fact that someone might be listening – a very understandable concern. Furthermore, their general confidence in telephony and in the telephone professionals was shaken. Given this background, Starkloff's postcard becomes comprehensible. Again, he aspired to put the operators' profession in perspective. With his reassuring postcard, he tried to save the switchers from a damage of their reputation.

Figure 11 is not the only card in which privacy concerns play a role: Another postcard has a similar thrust but still differs in certain aspects. Unlike all the drawings discussed up until now,

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171 Kreisschreiben an die Telegraphen-Inspektionen und an sämtliche Telephonzentralstationen, Bern, 2. Juni 1899, cited in: Stadelmann et al. 1994: Ganz Ohr, p. 25.
172 See: Ibid., p. 71.
173 Kreisschreiben an die Telegraphen-Inspektionen und an sämtliche Telephonzentralstationen (1899), cited in: Ibid., p. 25.

in Figure 12 we do not see professional operators in a post office or telephone exchange but we behold a scene that shows telephone users. A woman on the left side of the picture and a man on the right sight are each handling a wall mounted telephone apparatus. The woman is wearing an ornate hat, a necklace, and a long dress. With her left hand she holds an umbrella; her right hand presses the earphone against her right ear. Symmetrically, the man holds an epée with his right hand, and his left is pressing the earphone against his left ear. He is wearing a uniform, a pocket watch, and an officer's cap. The two, both of whom are smiling, seem to talk to each other, since their telephones are connected through a line. On the line are sitting four birds that are putting their heads together in couples. In the middle of the line we see two hearts with a flame on top. According to the inscription, they are supposed to represent batteries. Right in the centre of the postcards is an ornamental, simply speaking quite kitschy frame in which the poem is imprinted and, therefore, highlighted.

Figure 12: Liebes-Lispeln (1909)

If we take the big caption to be the title of the poem, it is called "The Telephone". In the three stanzas, the telephone is speaking as a lyric persona. First, it states that lovers frequently communicate their 'love whisper' though the wire and many couples have found their happiness this way. The second couplet describes how a tryst via telephone could work: "Wenn das Büro geschlossen, / man schleicht sich schnell hinein, / Dreht lustig an der Kurbel". Finally, the last stanza is a request to young people to use the telephone. If they only used the phone, they would soon realise its advantages and get to love it. In emphasising that the phone can keep silent, the very last verse adds a new dimension to the postcard: "Und schweigen kann ich auch!"

This last line links the postcard in question to the one described previously. Again, Starkloff indirectly refers to the privacy concerns of many of his contemporaries. However, against a common attitude, he does not express anxieties but rather tries to ease them. With the rather old-fashioned and worthy depiction of the two lovers accompanied by the innocent lovebirds, Starkloff creates

a trustful atmosphere; an atmosphere that almost makes the last verse appear as a source of irritation. Figure 12 shows perfectly how the broader perception of telephony is reflected in Starkloff's postcards: Although he takes a different stance than the concerned among his contemporaries, the postcards respond to the common concern about privacy on the telephone. Hence, both sides of the ambivalent appropriation towards telephony are more or less directly reflected in the postcards.

Privacy was not the only issue that bred such ambivalence. The impact of telephony on social relationships was even more a topic that was assessed both negatively and positively. In the following section, I will sketch the concerns people had in this regard starting with a look at telegraphy. Then, again, I will situate Starkloff's position within this debate.

Intimacy at a Distance

Trying to overcome old accounts in the history of technology that focus on engineers, improvements, or the development of technological systems Carolyn Marvin highlights the importance of a "history of continuous concern about how new media rearrange and imperil social relationships".[174] As did many other new technologies and new media, both telegraphy and telephony caused such concerns. For example, one character in Theodor Fontane's novel *Der Stechlin* remarks pertaining to telegraphy: "Es ist das mit dem Telegraphieren solche [sic] Sache, manches wird besser, aber manches wird auch schlechter, und die feinere Sitte leidet nun schon ganz gewiß".[175] What mainly led to this common objection was the short telegraphic style. Since 1885 customers had to pay per transmitted word, they usually tried to keep the messages as short as possible.[176] For the character in Fontane's book it was clear that this led to an impolite diction: "sich kurz fassen, heißt meistens auch, sich grob fassen. Jede Spur von Verbindlichkeit fällt fort, und das Wort 'Herr' ist beispielsweise gar nicht mehr anzutreffen".[177] In a similar way, other contemporaries were afraid of an increasing impoliteness and a loss of good manners caused by the telegraphic style.

Unlike people who sent telegraphs, telephone users had no incentive to keep their conversations short, because up until World War I, they paid a fixed amount for the access and did not have to pay extra for local phone calls. Nevertheless, telephony caused an even stronger debate about a change in social relationships than telegraphy had done before. Whereas the telegraph transmitted only written messages the telephone allowed listening to another human's voice, thus, a less anonymous communication. Therefore, the telephone was, on the one hand, praised for the possibility to connect people and to intensify contact between distant individuals. Ian Hutchby has called this phenomenon "intimacy at a distance", meaning that via telephone people could talk intimately and as if they were together while actually communicating across vast distances.[178] On the other hand, many people feared more impersonal, alienated relationships, and the

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174   Marvin 1988: Old Technologies, p. 235.
175   Fontane, Theodor: *Der Stechlin. Roman*, Berlin 1899, p. 29.
176   See: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 129.
177   Fontane 1899: Stechlin, p. 29.
178   Hutchby, Ian: *Conversation and Technology. From the Telephone to the Internet*, Cambridge, Malden 2001, p. 83.

feeling of loneliness as a consequence of telephony.[179] Stephen Kern, for example, states that the telephone "brought people into close contact but obliged them also to 'live in wider distances' and created a palpable emptiness across which voices seemed uniquely disembodied and remote".[180] Furthermore, some detractors of the telephone were afraid that telephone calls could replace 'true' personal contact and, in turn, lead to a shallow sociability and, eventually, to a destruction of the community.[181]

How can we situate Starkloff's account within this array of technology assessment? The cards on telegraphy that I have analysed above show no concerns about the telegraphy style or a loss of good manners. Is Starkloff's image of telephony in a similar way insouciant? A look at Figure 13 can give a first indication.

Durch's Telephon pumpt
sich's so schön,
Man braucht nicht zu er-
röten,
Wenn man mal schwach
im Portemonai
Und schwebt in Geldes-
nöten.

Den lieben Onkel ruft
man an,
Er hilft in bangen
Stunden;
Es lebe hoch das
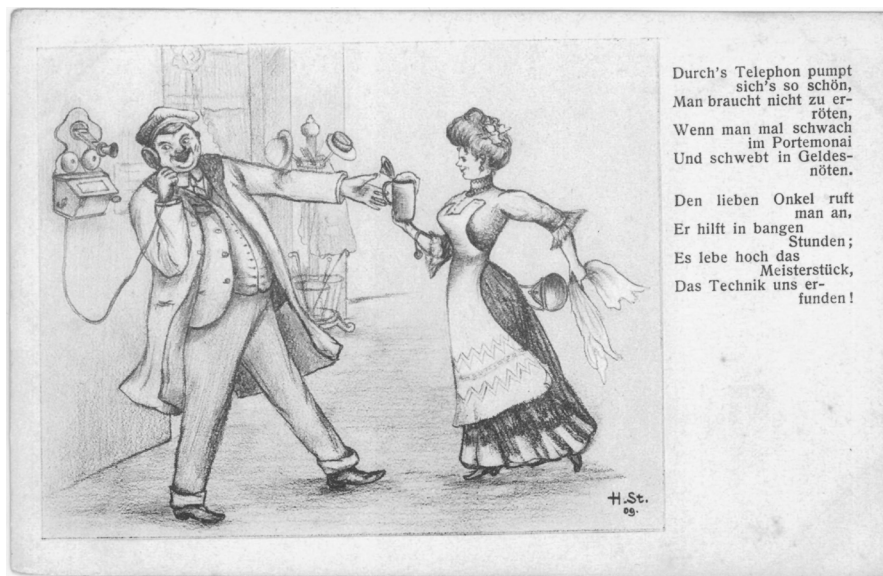Meisterstück,
Das Technik uns er-
funden!

Figure 13: Geldesnöte (1909)

The drawing shows a scene that is situated in some kind of public place as the umbrella stand and the coat rack with several hats on top indicate. In the foreground, we see a man with a beer belly and a woman wearing a dress and an apron. The money bag tied to her hips and the tea towel in her left hand suggest that she is a waitress. Hence, we can suggest that the public room is a tavern, not an unusual place for a public telephone at the beginning of the century.[182] The man is talking on the phone and at the same time making a step towards the waitress, because he is reaching out for a beer mug she is about to hand him.

The telephone gives us an indication of the subject of the phone call, saying that it is easy to ask someone for money via telephone. Apparently, the man is calling his uncle for financial aid: "Durch's Telephon pumpt sich's so schön, […] Den lieben Onkel ruft man an". The lines continue

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179 See for example: Heßler 2012: Kulturgeschichte, p. 128.; Fischer 1992: America Calling, p. 25.
180 Kern 1983: Culture, p. 216.
181 See: Mercer, David: *The Telephone. The Life Story of a Technology*, Westport 2006, p. 92.
182 See: Zelger, Sabine: *"Das Pferd frißt keinen Gurkensalat". Eine Kulturgeschichte des Telefonierens*, Wien, Köln, Weimar 1997, pp. 108–112.

in a blithe tone, emphasising that there is no need to blush for shame when one is broke. In doing so the poem hints at the invisibility on the phone, since the uncle at the other end of the telephone line simply cannot see that the man is spending his money on beer. One might expect that the postcards criticises this dishonesty that becomes possible with the advent of the telephone. Yet, the generally cheerful depiction and the last two verses speak against this interpretation. The latter praise the telephone technology in a manner that we already know from the telegraph postcards: "Es lebe hoch das Meisterstück, / Das Technik uns erfunden!"

The postcard shows a primarily positive assessment of "intimacy at a distance". The very personal and sensitive issue of lending money becomes casual and easy by use of the telephone. That the scene is situated in a tavern, very much a symbol of sociability, seems to invalidate fears pertaining to shallow relationships or the loss of social bonds. Like Figure 13, all of Starkloff's depictions of telephone users show more than one person and, in doing so, contradict a common perception of the telephone as a "symbol of loneliness". Quite the contrary, Starkloff seems to belong to the enthusiasts for whom the telephone supported relationships.

Figure 14 substantiates this interpretation with regard to a more private setting: family life. Representative of many of his contemporaries, Walter Benjamin described in *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*, the autobiography of his early childhood, how telephone calls could disturb family life:

> Nicht viele, die heute ihn [den Telephonapparat] benutzen, wissen noch, welche Verheerungen einst sein Erscheinen im Schoße der Familien verursacht hat. Der Laut, mit dem er zwischen zwei und vier, wenn wieder ein Schulfreund mich zu sprechen wünschte, anschlug, war ein Alarmsignal, das nicht allein die Mittagsruhe meiner Eltern, sondern die weltgeschichtliche Epoche störte, in deren Mitte sie sich ihr ergaben.[183]

Even more explicitly although less literarily, Philipp Rothbarth described this disturbance in 1915: "Wer hat nicht schon gelegentlich das Telefon als Störenfried verwünscht?"[184] Interestingly, there is no similar complaint in Starkloff's postcards. Instead of regarding the telephone as an intruder onto familial retreat, he emphasises the telephone's capability to maintain familial relationships across distances.

The drawing in Figure 14 postcard is a diptych. On the left side of the picture, we see a mother and her baby. The woman is smiling and holding the child in a flouncy sleeping bag towards a wall-mounted telephone. The wire runs from this device to another one on the right side of the picture and, in doing so, connects the two pictures. Half way between the two telephones hangs a little bell with a little heart on top. The right side of the diptych shows an old couple. The man is sitting in an armchair holding the earphone. In the bottom left corner, we see smoke rising, probably from a pipe at the feet of the man. The elderly woman is standing next to the chair and bending over the arm rest. She seems to be waving her hand. All the characters are well-dressed

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183 Benjamin 1972: Berliner Kindheit, pp. 242f.
184 Rothbarth 1915: Telefon, pp. 43f. It has to be noted, that Rothbarth uses this question merely as a figure of speech. In his article, he does not generally lament over the telephone but praises the 'technical wonder' and its inventors. See also p. 26.

and have a smile on their faces. The poem consists of two quatrains. The first explains what kind of scene is put on record in the picture: Grandparents are listening to the first cry of their grandchild via telephone. The second stanza informs us about the emotional significance of this call. The actually unpleasant cry of the baby sounds like a sweet melody in their ears, because it conjures up a memory of their own "may", of their own youth.
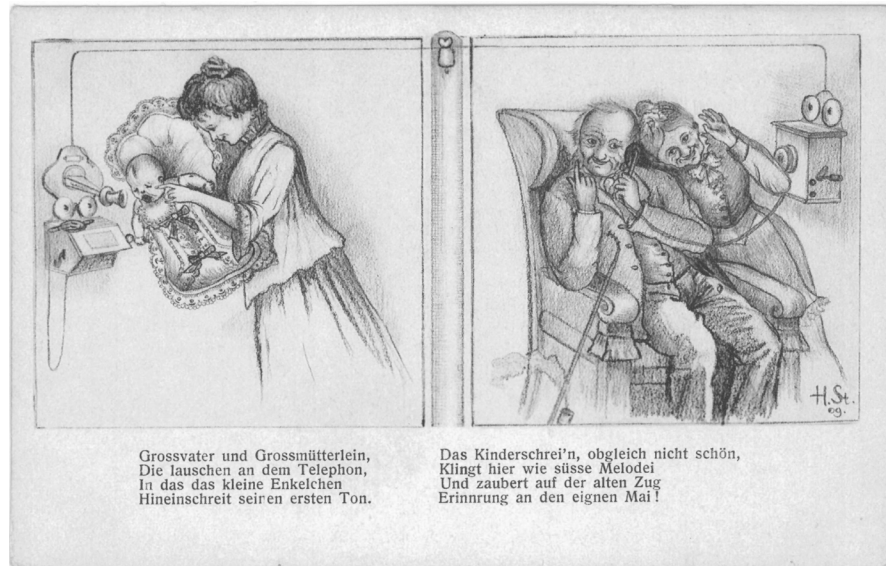

Grossvater und Grossmütterlein,
Die lauschen an dem Telephon,
In das das kleine Enkelchen
Hineinschreit seinen ersten Ton.

Das Kinderschrei'n, obgleich nicht schön,
Klingt hier wie süsse Melodei
Und zaubert auf der alten Zug
Erinnrung an den eignen Mai!

Figure 14: Großeltern (1909)

The postcard elucidates Starkloff's image of the family. In the nineteenth and twentieth century the 'modern' nuclear family evolved. Extended families became less common; family life was increasingly separated from working life; public schooling and job training took over former familial tasks. More and more, a family culture developed that emphasised the private sphere, intimacy, and love.[185] The unbundling of extended families was fostered by transportation infrastructure and communication means such as the telephone. However, as I have outlined above, only few, mainly bourgeois families had telephone connections. Thus, the family in Figure 14 is probably a bourgeois or at least petit bourgeois family – a social stratum that matches Starkloff's own one as a civil servant and post officer. The postcards point to the fact that making telephone calls was still the exception rather than the rule. The scene does not show an everyday life scene, but a very special occasion, that is to say the first cry of the grandchild. Remarkable is also that the father who was commonly regarded as the head of the family is not depicted. This is probably down to the fact that communication and the responsibility for emotional bonds were primarily the housewife's tasks.

The reference to the grandparent's memory again creates a nostalgic atmosphere. This leads away from any concerns about the technology in question. Interestingly, the nostalgic stance in the postcard does not seem to refer to the traditional family life. The grandparents do not mourn the disappearance of the extended family, but enjoy the memory of their own youth triggered by

185 See: Gestrich, Andreas: *Geschichte der Familie im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, München ²2010, p. 72.

the telephone conversation. The telephone offers the grandparents the possibility to stay in contact with their descendants. Figure 14 clearly shows that Starkloff was not worried about a shallowness of familial relationships that the telephone might cause. Quite the contrary, he emphasises the possibility to stay in contact and to maintain family bonds and 'intimacy at a distance'.

Gar manches holde
        Mägdelein,
Das sich der Post ver-
                schrieb,
Nicht für das ganze
            Leben lang
Ihr immer treu auch
                blieb.

Wenn erst der „richt'ge
            Anschluss" da,
Der Post entsagt man
                schon
Und schnell wird dann
        vertauscht in Lust
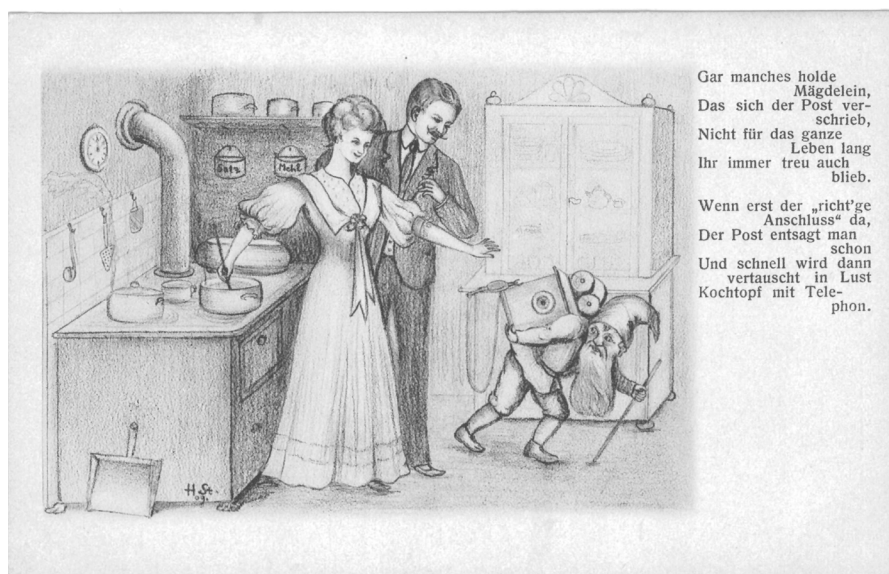Kochtopf mit Tele-
                phon.

Figure 15: Kochtopf (1909)

This reoccurring trust in the positive impact of telephony is detectable in yet another postcard pertaining to private life. In Figure 15, we see a woman in a dress and a man in a suit, standing closely together in a kitchen. While the poem calls the woman a maidservant, the posture of the two and the woman's appearance rather suggest that she is the housewife. The two are surrounded by a stove, a sideboard, pots, supplies of wheat and salt on the left and by a cabinet with tableware on the right. Most striking at first glance is definitely the third character in the picture: a dwarf who is carrying a telephone on his back. However, the illustration of the dwarf becomes to some extent understandable with a look at Starkloff's postcards on the postal service.[186] There, he frequently depicted post office clerks as dwarfs. The poem underlines this connection with mailing. Many women, it says, give up their loyalty to mailing in favour of the telephone. But there is more: "Wenn erst der 'richt'ge Anschluss' da, / Der Post entsagt man schon / Und schnell wird dann vertauscht in Lust / Kochtopf mit Telephon." The poem suggests that the telephone animates women to become disloyal – not only to mailing but also to cooking, thus, to their household chores.

Given his generally nostalgic attitude, one could have expected that Starkloff, like some of his tradition-conscious contemporaries, mourned a decline in letter writing or accused housewives of chatting on the phone and disregarding their chores. In fact, the poem points to the anxieties that women could disregard their traditional role. However, the postcard does not indicate any serious concerns about these issues and Starkloff does not present the telephone as a serious threat to family

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186 Many of Starkloff's postcards can be viewed and purchased from online shops. Quite a big number offers Bartko-Reher-OHG: http://www.ak-ansichtskarten.de.

life. Like the other cards, the scene is presented in a cheerful, carefree way. The telephone appears rather as a temptation than as a threat. Again, the two postcards on family life show that Starkloff's account of telephony is ambivalent. It contains widespread concerns; yet, they are downplayed and the advantages of the technology are highlighted. For Starkloff, modern technology did not contradict traditional values although his cards point to changes in everyday life caused by the spread of telephony. The following section will examine Starkloff's stance towards telephony with regard to romantic love.

Lovers

Especially pertaining to romantic relationships, the spread of the telephone entailed highly ambivalent attitudes. Here, even more than in 'normal' familiar relationships, the 'intimacy at a distance' caused both amazement and despair. The transmission of the intimate voice could be both a promise and a torture. In 1912, Franz Kafka encapsulated this feeling in a letter to his later fiancée Felice Bauer – a beautiful and stirring excerpt that is worth being quoted at length:

> Wie gut mußt Du das Telephonieren verstehn, wenn Du vor dem Telephon so lachen kannst. Mir vergeht das Lachen schon, wenn ich ans Telephon nur denke. Was würde mich sonst hindern zur Post zu laufen und Dir einen guten Abend zu wünschen? Aber dort eine Stunde auf den Anschluß warten, sich an der Bank vor Unruhe festhalten, endlich gerufen werden und zum Telephon laufen, daß alles zittert, dann mit schwacher Stimme nach Dir fragen, endlich Dich hören und vielleicht nicht imstande zu sein zu antworten, Gott danken, daß die 3 Minuten vorüber sind und mit einem jetzt aber schon unerträglichen Verlangen nachhause zu gehn [sic], wirklich mit Dir zu reden – nein, das lasse ich lieber sein.[187]

Granted, Kafka's conclusion to completely refrain from telephoning is an extreme one. Yet, the quote underlines not only the effort it took to make a phone call around 1912, but also the emotional excitement it could cause to call the beloved. Representative of many contemporaries, Kafka also perceived a phone call not as a 'real' conversation, but rather as one that triggered the longing for the person at the other end of the line.

Figure 12 has already indicated that Starkloff does present the telephone as a device that is first and foremost beneficial to lovers. There, the 'love whisper' was depicted as something exclusively positive, even a 'merry' action. Figure 16 seems to confirm this impression. Again, we see a diptych in the picture and, again, it shows a man and a woman talking through wall mounted telephones. Above the two portraits that are surrounded by roses floats a slender winged child on a cloud, easily recognisable as Cupid thanks to his appearance and the quiver for his arrows. One of his hands is holding two hearts on a string. The other hand is holding a box that, by reading the caption, turns out to be a mouse trap: "Telephon-Amor mit der Liebes-Mausefalle". The poem first makes a reference to former times in which a telephone connection was unimaginable. Back then, it was hard to connect to people who were spatially separated. However, Cupid continues

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187 Kafka, Franz: Briefe an Felice und andere Korrespondenz aus der Verlobungszeit, in: *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. by Max Brod (1967), here: 91–92.

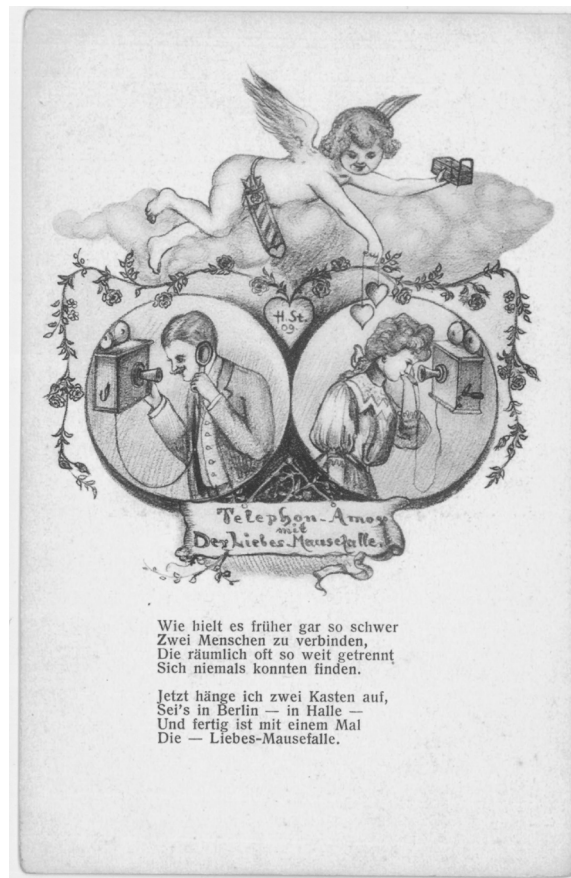as the lyric persona of the second stanza, nowadays he needs only two boxes and the 'love mouse trap' is ready.

Figure 16: Liebes-Mausefalle (1909)

In general, the postcard conveys an entirely affirmative image of the telephone as a means of communication between lovers. Indeed, one could interpret the 'love mouse trap' analogy as a hint to the negative sides of a long distance relationship, since a trap is usually a mean trick. To me, however, it rather seems as if Cupid has accomplished a lucky mission. The visual imagery with all its love symbols is a highly positive one and the poem tells a success story about the positive effects of technological progress on romantic relationships. So, can we say that Starkloff perceived the telephone as an innocuous communication medium or that he was even completely indifferent to the distinction Kafka made between a 'real' conversation and a phone call? It seems so, because the postcards examined up until now contain no signs of criticism of telephone calls or even an addressing of face to face contact. Yet, there is one postcard that shows that Starkloff indeed broached the issue of closeness.

The postcard in question, Figure 17, allows again an insight into the interior of a post office, as the Morse telegraph on the desk and a wall-mounted telephone indicate. Moreover, the lamp stand in the picture is the same as in Figure 2, Figure 4, and Figure 7 – probably all the depictions resemble Starkloff's own work place in Meiningen. Like in Figure 10, we see children playing in the office, at least they seem to have knocked over a chair. This time, it is a little boy and a little

girl. While she – dressed in a gown – is standing on a chair, holding the telephone earphone in her hand, and touching the boy's arm with the other, he – dressed in a suit – is hugging her and giving her a kiss on her cheek. At the bottom fringe of the drawing we see a book lying on the floor. Looking closely, the title says "Kleine Tel Schule v. Haddenbrock". Indubitably, Starkloff makes reference to the book *Kleine Telegraphen-Schule für jüngere Post- und Telegraphenbeamte* by Adalbert Haddenbrock.[188]
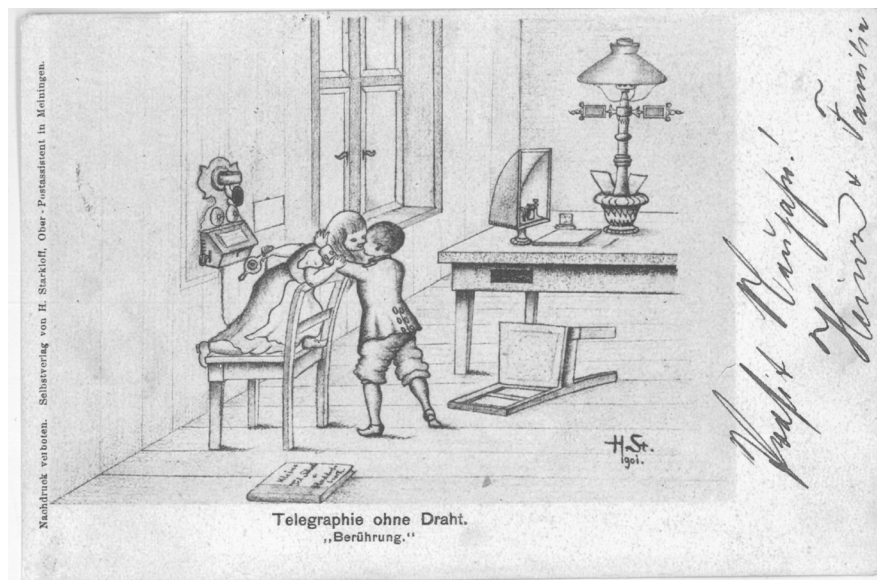

Figure 17: Berührung (1901)

Certainly, this postcard is only to some extent similar to the other depictions of lovers. Though we witness a scene of affection and even a kiss, the mere fact that the characters are children distinguishes this card from Figure 12 or Figure 16. Furthermore, all the symbols of romantic love, Cupid and the roses, are missing here. Nevertheless, the two kids look like a children's version of the couple in Figure 7, since in both cases he is dressed in a suit and making advances to her. Whether one classifies this postcard as a depiction of lovers or not, what is really important is the caption that says "telegraphy without wire". And then below in quotation marks: "touch". As I have outlined above (see chapter 2), around 1900 the telephone was still perceived as another type of telegraph, so that the caption refers to both telephone calls and telegraph messages. Here, touch is humorously presented as a sort of telegraph or telephone communication, yet, without the wire in between the two lovers. For Starkloff, the previous card showed that communication via telephone is no threat to romantic relationships. Here in Figure 17, we can see that he in fact cared about face-to-face communication. It is remarkable that he underlines the importance of touch; a sense that only personal contact can provide. Although Starkloff's postcards do not contain the despair that amongst others Kafka described as a cause of calling a beloved and focuses mainly on

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188 Haddenbrock, Adalbert: *Kleine Telegraphen-Schule für jüngere Post- und Telegraphenbeamte*, Magdeburg [16]1915.

the positive sides, he is fully aware of the difference between direct contact that allows touch and communication per wire.

In summary, Starkloff's view of the telephone's impact on social life could, in Hård's and Jamison's terms, be called a 'romance' of technological progress. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he neither regarded the telephone as an intruder into private life nor as a device that promoted shallow relationships or even despair. Rather, his postcards create a trustful atmosphere and present the new technology as an opportunity to maintain relationships across distances. Unlike Kafka, Starkloff did not regard telephone communication as inconsistent with romantic love. Although he also highlights the importance of face-to-face contact, the telephone appears as an opportunity, not as torture. Yet, although he takes a different stance than the concerned among his contemporaries, the postcards seem to respond to the common concerns and, thus, reflect the ambivalent attitudes towards telephony at the dawn of the century. Indirectly, Starkloff's account contains the widespread concerns about the telephone as a threat to social life, although the advantages are emphasised. Starkloff's account shows that, in the contemporary perception, the appreciation of modern technology did not necessarily conflict with an appreciation of values such as close familial bonds or romantic love. Again, one could stretch Herf's original understanding of the term 'reactionary modernism' a bit to grasp this appropriation of telephony: Despite his often nostalgic attitude and the importance he ascribes to personal relationships, Starkloff does not go along with the common fears about impersonality and alienation caused by modern technology. Rather, he harmonises telephony with the romantic, traditional, and nostalgic thrust in his postcards.

Chapter 5: Time & Space

Besides the technical progress itself, the major reasons to regard the telephone as an epitome of modernity were the 'acceleration of life' and the 'shrinking of the world'. Contemporaries even spoke of an 'overcoming of space and time' ("Überwindung von Raum und Zeit").[189] Also at present, many historians argue that the 'modern wonders', including telegraphy and telephony, accelerated everyday life, connected and shrunk the earth, and, therefore, led to an unprecedented perception of time and space as well as to novel orientation patterns.[190] During the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, the idea became prevalent that modernity meant an accelerated moving across space and constant communication.[191] The telegraph and the telephone both added to this development by making it possible to communicate across vast distances and to transmit information rapidly. These developments were common subjects of the contemporary debate. For example, in 1879 Werner von Siemens stated:

> Wer findet es heute noch überraschend, dass der Telegraph ihm in wenigen Minuten oder doch Stunden ersehnte Nachricht von weit entfernten Freunden bringt, dass er täglich in den Zeitungen eine Zusammenstellung aller am gleich oder vorhergegangenen Tage vorgekommenen wichtigen Ereignisse aus allen Ländern der Erde findet.[192]

While Siemens focuses mainly on the temporal aspect of the abovementioned developments, the German author Heinrich Eduard Jacob expressed the blurring notions of space and time more with regard to space:

> Mit Freunden, die in Paris oder Rom Vorlesungen hören, verknüpft uns das Telephon [...] Im Münchner Hauptbahnhof harrt der Blitzzug, der auf den Brenner rauscht [...] Und bald wird vielleicht der elektrische Fernseher erfunden sein, dieser Traum der Liebe, durch den man [...] aus dem Berliner November die Bläue des Ligurenmeeres sehen kann oder die Geliebte in einer fernen Stadt![193]

This quote articulates a widespread fascination that drew upon a variety of technological innovations, such as, besides telegraphy and telephony, the increasing speed of trains, the beginning of atom physics, new mass media, or automotive and aeronautical engineering.[194] As already outlined above, the 'modern wonders' not only bred fascination but also more ambivalent feelings. The nervous zeitgeist was seen as one consequence of the changing scale and pace of life. For example, Alois Riedler, headmaster of the Royal Technical College in Berlin, stated in 1898:

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189 Strecker 1916: Werner Siemen's Verdienste, p. 812.
190 See, for example: Geppert, Alexander / Jensen, Uffa / Weinhold, Jörn: Verräumlichung. Kommunikative Praktiken in historischer Perspektive, 1840–1930, in: *Ortsgespräche*, ed. by Alexander Geppert, Bielefeld (2005), pp. 15–49, here: 27.
191 Ibid., p. 37.
192 Siemens, Werner: Die Elektricität im Dienste des Lebens, in: *Zeitschrift für angewandte Elektricitätslehre* 1 (1879), S. 344, cited in: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 140.
193 As cited in: Berghoff 2000: Ziele der Menschheit, p. 61.
194 See: Ibid., p. 50.

> Es ist alltäglich zu beobachten, wie Telegraph, Telephon, Eisenbahn und Post zu übertriebener, weit über das natürliche Leistungsvermögen hinaus gesteigerter Arbeit, zum Zusammenraffen immer neuer Erwerbsmittel ausgenutzt werden. Dabei hat die gewaltige Zeit- und Raumverkürzung dahin geführt, dass kein Geschlecht je weniger Zeit hatte als das moderne, nervöse, das Erholung in weiten Reisen sucht und dabei, den Telegraphen hinter sich her, die Alltagshetze fortsetzt.[195]

As Riedler's statement makes clear, the new technologies were not only praised but also perceived as intruders in a traditional lifestyle. For many critics of 'Zivilisation', like Riedler, the possibilities to travel and to communicate across the globe were more disturbing than alluring. So, which position did Starkloff take in this debate? Moreover, do his postcards represent the acceleration of time and the shrinking of the world at all? Where are the traces of an unprecedented perception of time and space in Starkloff's cards? To answer these questions is the purpose of the following sections, of which the first deals with time, the second with space, and the third with the closely related topic of urbanity.

Acceleration of Life

At large, Starkloff's postcards make an unhurried impression. The unexcited, mainly static scenes do not point to a radically new perception of time. Yet, there are a few hints in the postcards that one could interpret as signs of a perceived acceleration. First, the poem in Figure 2 indicates that Starkloff indeed recognised haste. Its main message is: It would be a blessing if only people remained calm instead of being impatient. Although the poem does not make a forthright statement, we can discern a sceptical stance towards what Riedler termed the 'everyday life hustle' of the 'modern' and 'nervous' man. Second, also the two corresponding cards showing telegraph operators with bad (Figure 4) and good nerves (Figure 5) can be interpreted as indications of such scepticism. As mentioned above, the contrast between the relaxed traditional worker and the telegraph operator with shattered nerves expresses a critical stance towards the consequences of telegraphy. Given the commonly established relation between the modern pace and the nervousness, the postcards seem to criticise the acceleration caused by modern technologies. Together with Starkloff's often nostalgic depictions this seems to contradict the excitement many of his contemporaries felt about the rapid communication that was now possible and the enthusiasm about technological progress that was a common sentiment at the beginning of the twentieth century.[196]

However, there is also a trace of fascination with the acceleration. In Figure 3, Starkloff praises the Hughes telegraph with the words: "Verleiht der Hughes doch Menschenwort / Die besten schnellsten Schwingen". This emphasis on the speed of telegraphy is the only time that Starkloff admires the possibility of communicating rapidly. Although the speed of telephony or telegraphy is not highlighted in any other postcard, Starkloff's mostly affirmative depiction of the modern

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195 Riedler, Alois: *Unsere Hochschulen und die Anforderungen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Berlin 1898, p. 59, cited in: Ibid., pp. 73f.
196 See for example: Ibid.

technologies indicates that his scepticism was not paramount. Yet, the postcards show that he was well aware of critical attitudes and shared these sentiments to some extent. Assuming that he was aware of the concerns about the acceleration and its causes, one could read the cards as a reaction to it, as an attempt to pour oil on troubled waters and spread composure instead of hastiness.

Again, we can detect an attitude in Starkloff's postcards that is contradictory at first glance. Both, fascination and scepticism about acceleration are expressed. However, both sentiments are not central in the postcards. The 'acceleration of life' had apparently entered Starkloff's own life, too. Nevertheless, it was no development that seems to have overwhelmed him or something that seems to have entirely changed his perception of time. Most of the postcards create a peaceful and neither fascinated nor concerned atmosphere. So, again we can describe Starkloff's stance as an ambivalent appropriation of technology. He was neither a staunch defender of the modernisation process nor a completely hidebound cultural critic. Once more, the term 'reactionary modernism' helps to reconcile the alleged contradiction.

Shrinking of the World

With regard to space, the postcards are more explicit. Starkloff's fascination for the technologies' capability to bridge distances is easy to discover. The poem in Figure 16 is the most obvious admiration of the overcoming of spatial distance. It says:

> Wie hielt es früher gar so schwer / Zwei Menschen zu verbinden, / Die räumlich oft so weit getrennt / Sich niemals konnten finden. / Jetzt hänge ich zwei Kasten auf / Sei's in Berlin – in Halle – / Und fertig ist mit einem Mal / Die – Liebes-Mausefalle.

Here, the bridging of distances by telephones is clearly emphasised. Furthermore, Starkloff underlines the novelty of the possibility to connect two people who are spatially separated. While that was unimaginable in former times it only needs two telephones now. Again, this positive stance indicated Starkloff's positive stance towards the modernisation process. A comparable positive stance contains, albeit less explicitly, Figure 14, where the grandparents can hear their grandchild's first cry across an unspecified distance, and Figure 12, where two lovers are connected.

Interestingly, Starkloff's ken is not global at all, unlike, for example, Werner von Siemens', who was fascinated by the connections between 'all the countries in the world'. Starkloff's fascination does not aim at the commonly praised worldwide connections that were supposed to tie the whole globe closer together. Take, for example, the poem cited above. Here, Starkloff praises a connection between Berlin and Halle, two cities with less than 180 km distance, both within the German Empire. Yet, this can be explained by the actual use of the telephone in the first decades of the twentieth century: A common enthusiasm about worldwide telegraph connections was frequently transferred to the telephone. The German term for the telephone, "Fernsprecher" (far-speaker), was even officially introduced in 1877.[197] However, the term and the idea it conveyed did not meet

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197 See: Becker, Jörg: Einleitung. Über die Fernnähe beim Sprechen in die Ferne, in: *Fern-Sprechen*, ed. by Jörg Becker, Berlin (1994), pp. 11–25, here: 16.

the actual range of telephony. During the first decades of the twentieth century, the telephone was rather a 'near-speaker', because speaking across long distances still caused many technical problems.[198] Moreover, the vast majority of all telephone calls were local calls.[199] The idea of the telephone as a world-spanning means of communication, thus, was only wishful thinking until the mid-twentieth century.[200] So, the short distance between Berlin and Halle in Figure 16 becomes comprehensible.

However, we can find a similarly small ken in a telegraph postcard: The Vienna signpost in Figure 3 bespeaks not a global perspective but rather one that is limited to the German-speaking world. Other than the telephone, the telegraph was indeed a communication medium that made it possible to communicate across the globe. However, the global scope of telegraphy did apparently not have a huge influence on Starkloff. Maybe his perception of space had become broader – it still only reached to Vienna. This gap between the alleged shrinking of the world and the actual scope of a telegraph operator shows that the 'globalisation of the systems did not involve the globalisation of communication' for everyone.[201]

The City

One more spatial aspect that is absent in Starkloff's postcards can add to an understanding of Starkloff's account. Usually, the telephone was perceived as an urban communication medium.[202] For example, in 1896 the politician Friedrich Naumann remarked:

> Das Telephon ist die modernste Form des Gespräches. Was für die Tiroler Hirten der Jodelruf ist, den sie von Alm zu Alm senden, das ist der Draht zwischen mir und meinem Bekannten; er überwindet die Entfernungen der Großstadt in spielerischer Weise. […] Der Verkehr der Großstädter tritt mit dem Telephon in ein neues Stadium.[203]

This quote does not only show that the telephone was very much connected with modernity, but also that this modernity was taken to be an urban phenomenon. In Naumann's eyes, it is only the metropolitans' traffic that enters a new stage. And, in fact, the telephone entered more rural regions with temporal delay.[204] Certainly, Meiningen had only around 17 000 inhabitants in 1910 and, for that reason, cannot be considered a metropolis. Nevertheless, it is noticeable that Starkloff's post-cards do not reflect the urban aura that usually surrounded the telephone at all. There is no sky-scraper, no giant clock, no traffic jam; there are no mass events and no other signs of metropolitan life in the postcards. Rather, Starkloff's images – with the operator with good nerves (Figure 5)

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198 See: Becker, Jörg: Die Anfänge der Telefonie. Zur Industrie- und Sozialgeschichte des Telefons im ausgehenden 19. Jahrhundert, in: *Telefonieren*, ed. by Jörg Becker, Marburg (1989), pp. 63–87, here: 71.

199 As Becker notes, also nowadays the majority of all telephone calls are made within a distance of 3 km. See: Becker 1994: Fernnähe, p. 20.

200 See: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 144.

201 Zimmermann 2000: Kommunikationsmedien, p. 367.

202 See: Ruchartz 2004: Telefon, p. 132.

203 Naumann 1909: Ausstellungsbriefe, pp. 16f.

204 See: Zimmermann 2000: Kommunikationsmedien, pp. 377–383.

leading the way – convey a provincial impression. Consistently, Starkloff's self-perception does not seem to be that of a townsman. The postcards seem to confirm the 'deep contrast' between metropolitan life and small-town life that sociologist Georg Simmel discerned in 1903:

> Indem die Großstadt gerade diese psychologischen Bedingungen schafft – mit jedem Gang über die Straße, mit dem Tempo und den Mannigfaltigkeiten des wirtschaftlichen, beruflichen, gesellschaftlichen Lebens – stiftet sie […] einen tiefen Gegensatz gegen die Kleinstadt und das Landleben, mit dem langsameren, gewohnteren, gleichmäßiger fließenden Rhythmus ihres sinnlich-geistigen Lebensbildes.[205]

Simmel declared the 'intensification of nervous stimulation' to be the 'psychological fundament' of the metropolitan type of individual and, in turn, of this 'deep contrast'.[206] Given this common link between nervousness and modern city-life, it is remarkable that the nervousness, nevertheless, found its way into Starkloff's provincial depictions, as I have shown above. Once more, Starkloff's position does not fall in line with the common perception. Whereas many people regarded big cities as hubs of global telephony and as sources of nervousness, the postcards tell a different story. Starkloff's telephone world is a more provincial one – one which the nervousness has entered but is counterbalanced by composure, quaintness, and idyll.

What this all amounts to is that Starkloff's postcards do not mirror a perception of time and space that is radically new or explicitly 'modern'. Although the postcards bear traces of both fascination and scepticism about the 'acceleration of life', he managed to harmonise these developments with his unhurried small-town life. Although he operated devices that on a large scale 'shrunk the world' and made the whole globe accessible, he maintained his own, smaller ken. And although it was most often metropolitan life that was linked to telephony, Starkloff integrated modern technology into his provincial and idyllic world.

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205 Simmel, Georg: Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben, in: *Die Grossstadt*, ed. by Thomas Petermann, Dresden (1903)
206 Ibid.

Conclusion

Starkloff's stance towards telegraphy and telephony has turned out to be ambivalent. His appropriation of modern technology is characterised by apparent inconsistencies. Expressing both enthusiasm and scepticism, Starkloff is neither a staunch advocate of the modernisation process nor a convinced cultural critic. Several aspects have elucidated this ambivalent cultural appropriation. In his postcards on telegraph operators, Starkloff reconciles the scepticism about the nerve-shattering nature of telegraphy with his pride in the devices and in his profession. Although his images and poems create a nostalgic atmosphere, although Starkloff prefers composure over speed, and although he praises a traditional kind of work, the postcards express very much an affirmative stance towards modernisation, as his pride in his affiliation to the elite of electrical professionals clearly demonstrates. Like most of his contemporaries, Starkloff does not regard his female colleagues as part of this profession. Yet, instead of accusing them of technical incapability, he praises their qualities and highlights their importance for telephony. His characterisation of women is a consistently positive one, which presents diligence in dealing with the modern technology as compatible with a traditional femininity. The male and, especially, the female operators in the postcards are threatened by nervousness, an illness that was closely linked to the advent of modernity. Starkloff's intention to finance a recreation home for female switchers indicates that he was well aware of the drawbacks of the modernisation process. Nevertheless, an idyllic, peaceful, and traditional thrust far from stress that might be caused by modernisation dominates Starkloff's depictions. This applies especially to the images dealing with relationships. Starkloff does not go along with the concerns about impersonality and alienation caused by modern technology. Rather, the postcards create a trustful atmosphere and present telephony as an opportunity to maintain relationships across distances. Finally, that Starkloff harmonises the consequences of modernisation with his own sometimes backward-looking and romantic worldview and integrated modern technology into his own rather provincial world has become clear with regard to his perception of space and time. Relatively unimpressed by the alleged acceleration of life and the increasing globalisation caused by telegraphy and telephony, he integrates modern technology into his unhurried small-town life.

As we have seen, Starkloff recognised telephony and telegraphy as modern or novel phenomena and touched upon their positive as well as negative consequences. He expresses both enthusiasm and scepticism and, in doing so, provides a historical narrative of modern technology that is beyond a plain romance of technological progress or a mere tragedy of social destruction. As we could see, concerns about the modernisation process can not only be found in the accounts of reactionary cultural critics but also found their way into the cultural appropriation of an enthusiastic electrical professional. Hence, the middle ground between cultural critics and technological optimists that Hård and Jamison are striving to establish can be found in the historical debate on modern technology.

My thesis has been a contribution to cultural history in yet three more aspects. First, the use of Starkloff's postcards as a source basis has introduced new sources. Trying to do justice to the material, I have provided a close reading of the drawings and poems that has unfolded the ambivalences in Starkloff's stance towards modernisation. It has become clear that visual sources are indeed an advantageous carrier of information about the past. However, many of the images' details would have remained obscure without the poems on the postcards that facilitated the interpretation and without the written sources that I have used to sketch the historical context. Only by contrasting Starkloff's depictions with the debate about technology and modernity at his time, I have been able to trace the invisible in the postcards and to highlight the specific characteristics of Starkloff's account. The results of this thesis prove that postcards, especially when presenting a combination of image and text, are very valuable sources for cultural historians.

Second, my focus on Starkloff's account refrained from a focus on big cities that is common in the historiography of telephony and of modernisation in general as well as in the debate amongst Starkloff's contemporaries. Focusing on Meiningen, my analysis has helped to carve out the meaning of modernisation for a small town, which was neither unaffected by modernisation nor completely taken in by excitement about the advance of modernity.

The third point concerns our understanding of modernity and deserves a more detailed explanation. Throughout this thesis, I have perceived Starkloff's postcards as one cultural appropriation of telegraphy and telephony, thus, as an attempt to make the modern technologies fit into his lifeworld. A concept that proved to be useful to grasp the ambivalence in Starkloff's appropriation was "the paradox of reactionary modernism", as Herf phrases it.[207] 'Reactionary modernism' implies both the traditional and the progressive attitude that we can find in the postcards; both the scepticism and the enthusiasm about modernisation. However, Starkloff himself, apparently, did not perceive the ambivalences as inconsistencies. To recognise the contradictions in Starkloff's account as contradictions or as a paradox and to attest to reconciliation between backwardness and modernity only works in hindsight and with a benchmark for what these terms mean.

Modernity, I have argued above, usually designates the idea of a novelty, a rupture, or even a revolution. Accordingly, the telegraph and the telephone, like other modern technologies, were often said to be revolutionary.[208] Yet, even though Starkloff's postcards prove that he recognised, praised, and worried about changes caused by telegraphy and telephony, they indicate anything but a perceived rupture. Instead of presenting the advent of modern technology as a break with the past, Starkloff integrates them into his traditional lifeworld. His account is not a mere praise of novelty and modernity but mainly an emphasis on continuity. Should we, in consequence, add the 'reactionary' to our notion of modernity? Yes. But, in doing so, our notion of modernity will be challenged.

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207 Herf 1984: Reactionary Modernism, p. 1.
208 See, for example: Rösener, Werner: Einleitung, in: *Kommunikation in der ländlichen Gesellschaft vom Mittelalter bis zur Moderne*, ed. by Werner Rösener, Göttingen (2000), pp. 9–20, here: 14. Or : Zelger 1997: Gurkensalat, p. 20. Or: Fischer, Claude Serge / Crews, Judith / Flichy, Patrice / Lorrain, Dominique / Offner, Jean-Marc: From Technical Networks to Social Networks. An Interview with Claude S. Fischer, in: *Flux* 8 (1992), pp. 46–50, here: 46.

The intention of this thesis was to take the postcards seriously as a self-reflexive modern narrative. Yet, if a contemporary account harmonises the traditional with the modern, can we still maintain the distinction between tradition and modernity? What my thesis has shown is that attitudes we take to be reactionary and attitudes we take to be modern have coexisted. Modern technology, for Starkloff, did not spark off a revolution. His ambivalent appropriation shows that innovations – although they were indeed perceived as novel – did not radically change everything, but that they were incorporated into sometimes quaint and traditional lifeworlds. Starkloff's ambivalent depictions show that the distinction between 'reactionary' and 'modern', which is also implied with the term 'reactionary modernism', does not meet the contemporary viewpoint. For Starkloff, there was no contradiction between tradition and modernisation. To acknowledge Starkloff's ambivalent stance as a modern, self-reflexive narrative means to acknowledge that, for him, modernity included tradition. To incorporate the reactionary in our notion of modernity means to acknowledge that modernisation does not imply a break with the past. To acknowledge that tradition does not contradict modernity means, as a final consequence, to acknowledge that "we have never been modern".[209]

When analysing Starkloff's postcards I have taken on a micro perspective. Nevertheless or perhaps for this very reason, my thesis can serve as an example of a cultural history that pays attention to ambivalences, inconsistencies, and local variations in the process of cultural appropriation of technology. Only a history of technology that refrains from presenting technical innovation as revolutionary and its consequences as unalterable can abstain from presenting technology as a fixed, ahistorical, and determining force outside society. This is especially relevant with regard to the many parallels between the debate about telephony at the beginning of the twentieth century and the one about the Internet and 'new media' a hundred years later.[210] Concerns about privacy, shallow relationships, and the pace of life, but also fascination with the globalisation of communication and enthusiasm about technical progress are popular in current public debate. Throughout the making of this thesis, I have thought about these and more similarities and – given the many differences that there are as well – I have been uncertain how to assess the parallels for a long time. Yet, although the relation between the present discourse on new means of communication and former ones is definitely a topic for further research, one conclusion has already become clear to me: Only if we regard technology as something that is given meaning by humans, as something that people appropriate and incorporate into their everyday life instead of regarding it as a fixed entity that imposes its consequences on us, we will have the capability to shape new technologies, such as the Internet, according to our ideas and ideals. A cultural history of the appropriation of technology is one step in this direction.

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209 Latour, Bruno: *We Have Never Been Modern*, New York 1993.

210 For a very dedicated and convincing argumentation pertaining to the present-day influence of history of technology, see: Morozov, Evgeny: *To Save Everything, Click Here. Technology, Solutionism and the Urge to Fix Problems That Don't Exist*, London 2014, pp. 52–57 and the whole book.

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