

MAKING A WORLD FOR AMERICA:
ELECTRIC COMMUNICATION, EXPANSIVE PROTESTANTISM, AND
GLOBALIZATION IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

JENNA SUPP-MONTGOMERIE: Making a World for America: Electric Communication, Expansive Protestantism, and Globalization in the Nineteenth Century
(Under the direction of Randall Styers)

On August 12, 1858, the Atlantic Telegraph Cable was laid across the ocean from the west coast of Ireland to Newfoundland, Canada. Claims that distance had been annihilated, peace was imminent, and the world would unite through this new medium for intercontinental communication took America by storm. These promises of unity were particularly strange because the cable failed after only twenty-three days, colonial conflict rocked the world, and the Civil War loomed. This study explores this early form of globalization in America at the advent of the first opportunity for Americans to communicate with Europe in a matter of hours rather than weeks.

The “world” is not a given or natural entity. Americans in the mid-nineteenth century produced a modern global imaginary: a constellation of symbols, meanings, practices, and material objects that was structured and sustained in dynamic form by practices of variable affective investment that shaped how Americans conceived of and lived in the world. This study demonstrates how global imaginaries come into being through processes of declaration and deferral, how affective investment structured and sustained this imaginary in a particular formation organized around failure, and how expansive Protestantism contributed to the forms of globalization that now dominate American culture.

The cultural practices and products of the imaginary of a world united by communication technology made use of expansive American Protestantism in the storehouse of images, symbols, and vocabularies they drew on, in the eschatological logics that produced a perfected world that was both already arriving and yet to come, and in the ways that religion marshaled social investment to sustain these impossible dreams for total global unity.

This dissertation makes use of archival research of nineteenth century religious and political writing from the Oneida Community (a utopian community in New York), the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions (then the primary engine of American international mission), and public texts on the telegraph in the burgeoning national discourse of the time.

To Katrin Tiitsman, through whom I came to wonder at all that the Atlantic Ocean has carried.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the 2005 national bestseller hailing the blessings of globalization, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century*, Thomas Friedman declares that the world in which we live is “shrinking...from a size small to a size tiny and flattening the playing field at the same time.” The cause of this radical shift in geography is, he insists, “the creation of a global fiber-optic network that has made us all next-door neighbors.”¹ Friedman claims that this shrinking planet, united by the space-collapsing majesty of communication technology, is the newest element in the “the era of Globalization 3.0.” But as this study will demonstrate, there is nothing new about a global imaginary that posits unity as the direct result of communication technology. One hundred and fifty years before Friedman’s exuberant claims, many Americans were declaring a world united by a much earlier technology of communication: the telegraph.

On August 12, 1858, the Atlantic Telegraph Cable was successfully laid across the ocean from the west coast of Ireland to Newfoundland, Canada. Claims that the world would unite through this new medium for intercontinental communication took America by storm. In a telegram sent on the cable, President Buchanan declared that the Atlantic

¹ Thomas L. Friedman, *The World is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2005), 10.

Telegraph would be “an instrument destined by Divine Providence to diffuse religion, civilization, liberty, and law throughout the world” through which “the nations of Christendom [would] spontaneously unite.”² The American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM), the primary engine of nineteenth-century American Christian mission activities, declared that the Atlantic Telegraph clearly indicated God’s support for their work to Christianize the globe since it had brought Japan, China, and Africa “to our doors.”³ A headline in the newspaper of the Oneida Community, a new religious movement of Christian communists, proclaimed the ends of distance and war: “NO MORE DISTANCE! NO MORE WAR! The Continents United. Instant Communication with Europe, Asia, & Africa by Means of the Ocean Telegraph.”⁴ Across the young nation, Americans extolled the cable that they claimed heralded a new shape to the world, a united humanity, and a radical proximity to heaven.

While it may not be surprising to find such utopian declarations issued from the ABCFM, an organization dedicated to converting the world to Christianity, nor from the Oneida Community, a utopian Christian community founded on the assertion that moral perfection was possible in the members’ lifetime, scores of Americans marked the middle of the nineteenth century with impassioned celebrations of a shrinking planet. On

² James Buchanan to Victoria, telegram, Washington City, 16 August 1858, quoted in George Prescott, *History, Theory, and Practice of the Electric Telegraph* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1860), 189.

³ N. G. Clark, “Our Great Trust,” in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Seventy-First Annual Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: The Riverside Press, 1881), xiv.

⁴ “An Oneida Journal,” *Circular*, August 12, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137439629/13D8304E8C749A6F2CE/17?accountid=14244>.

September 1, 1858, cities up and down the east coast held “jubilees” for the Atlantic Telegraph Cable. A parade for Cyrus W. Field, the cable’s mastermind, swept up Broadway to Forty-Second Street in New York City, while one hundred miles south the Honorable William D. Kelley, Judge of the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas and a founder of the Republican Party, rose to give the oration at the Philadelphia jubilee. “What is the event we celebrate?” he asked. “One which has made the whole earth vocal...It has not destroyed or obliterated space; it has not dried up oceans: and yet it has brought the nations of the earth face to face, that they may enter into social converse.”⁵ The Atlantic Cable, according to Kelley, was God’s “last great blessing” given to the world and it was accomplished by humankind at God’s directive.⁶ This nineteenth-century American global imaginary offers a unity, achieved through communication, similar to Friedman’s claims about globalization 3.0. But in this earlier form of globalization, we find American religion hard at work offering imagery, vocabulary, structure, and power to the idea of a unified globe.

It is particularly strange that this mid-nineteenth-century excitement over a newly united global humanity diverged so dramatically from the reality most of these celebrants experienced: this America—despite its claims of nascent global peace—was embroiled in wars between Native Americans and the U.S. Army; Kansas was in its third year of bloody conflict over slavery; and colonial and anti-colonial violence rocked the world.⁷

⁵ William D. Kelley, *Oration Delivered by Hon. William D. Kelley at the Celebration of the Laying of the Atlantic Cable, Held at Philadelphia, September 1, 1858* (n.p.:1858), 2.

⁶ Kelley, *Oration*, 8-11.

⁷ Wars between the U.S. Army and Native Americans in the 1850s include the Navajo War (1846-1864), Cayuse War (1847-1855), Apache Wars (1849-1924),

God's last great blessing was falling short. In fact, as Justice Kelley closed his address at the Philadelphia Jubilee and sat down amid "vociferous applause" (duly noted by the enthusiastic phonographer), the Atlantic Cable itself was falling silent. Cyrus Field, busily feasting at the banquet thrown to hail his radical success, received one of the last messages that would pass over those oceanic wires, but it was too garbled to be deciphered. In an effort to power messages across the Atlantic, the engineers used such high voltage that the insulation of the cable melted. That evening, twenty-three days after the first transatlantic telegraph message was received, the signal failed. This first successful attempt at crossing the Atlantic with a medium for electric communication was lauded as an instrument of God, the unifier of humanity, and a guarantee for a lasting global peace, and yet it lasted for less than one month. Not until 1866, after Field had regained the faith of investors, after new cables were manufactured, and after the American Civil War had passed, was the cable successfully laid again.

The peaceful, unified, vocal world that Americans imagined in the middle of the nineteenth century was a fiction but one with real and lasting effects. The "world" is not a given or natural entity. Rather, we live in a world shaped by a constellation of symbols, meanings, and affect. In other words, the world is a particular kind of social imaginary.⁸

California Indian Wars (1850-1856), Battle of Ash Hollow (1855), Rogue River Wars (1855-1856), Puget Sound War (1855-1856), Third Seminole War (1855-1858), Yakima War (1855-1858), 1857 Cheyenne Expedition, Utah War (1857-1858), Coeur d'Alene War (1858), and Fraser Canyon War (1858). Colonial conflicts in the 1850s include the Xhosa War between the Xhosa and Europeans (1779-1879), Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864), Second Anglo-Burmese War (1852), Crimean War (1853 to 1856), French Conquest of Senegal (1854-1860), Anglo-Persian War (1856-1857), Campaign of 1856-1857 in Nicaragua and Costa Rica, Second Opium War (1856-1860), Indian Rebellion of 1857, and the Cochinchina Campaign (1858-1862).

⁸ This term comes from a recent body of literature in the field of public culture. See Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004),

According to Dilip Gaonkar in his introduction to *Public Culture*'s 2002 special issue on new imaginaries, a social imaginary is "an enabling but not fully explicable symbolic matrix within which a people imagine and act as world-making collective agents."⁹ To this, I would add that social imaginaries are structured and sustained in dynamic form by practices of variable affective investment. Imaginaries are related to symbolic structures, ideology, and discourse, but the concept of imaginaries affords the opportunity for a better understanding of the kinds of cultural work that shape and sustain social practices of producing and negotiating symbolic structures, ideology, and discourse in ways that never achieve stasis.

This study focuses on the imaginary of the whole world unified by communication technology that circulated with the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph and will illustrate how the promise of a world united by communication technology was shaped by images and vocabularies grounded in new forms of Protestantism in America. These religious resources molded this imaginary according to particular commitments, lent it importance through particular avenues to legitimacy, and framed it in an eschatological promise of a perfected world that was both already arriving and yet to come. This study explores the imaginary of the whole world that the telegraph would purportedly unify to propose that these cultural practices and products made use of religion in the storehouse of images, symbols, and vocabularies they drew on, in the logics of promise and eschatology through which this world was framed, and in the ways

Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 2006), and Dilip Paremshwar Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries: An Introduction," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 (Winter 2002): 1-19.

⁹ Gaonkar, "Toward New Imaginaries," 1.

that religion marshaled social investment to sustain these impossible dreams for total global unity.

To argue that this early form of globalization is best understood as a social imaginary is to argue that globalization does not describe the *fact* of global commerce and networked communication. Positing globalization as a description of how things are naturalizes one particular way to configure political and financial relationships among people, countries, and corporations. Globalization as description thus offers a sneaky teleology of salvation to a legacy of colonialism and imperialism. The world of networked communication, multinational corporations, and global capital is not the natural result of a progressive history but was built through practices of empire. Moreover, if this networked world of global capital is understood as a given reality, then improving the world can only consist of more investment in communication, connection, and commerce without the opportunity to explore alternative meanings and values for these elements.

Positing globalization as a social imaginary encourages us to think of globalization as one particular way of giving meaning to the technologies, practices, flows, structures, and people who participate in the world according to a specific set of limits and possibilities. For example, the link between communication and unity is not a natural affiliation but one way of making communication meaningful. This way of making communication meaningful is pedagogic: it teaches us to value communication as a form of connection, to aim toward global unity, and to accept the terms of

globalization's promise that the more we communicate, the more we will unify, and the more we unify, the more peace and prosperity there will be.¹⁰

Framing this early form of globalization as a social imaginary allows us to distance ourselves from the weight of inevitability that we have attached to its demands and allows us to note the particular strangeness of a social form that posited itself as *both* the status quo and a utopian future. This social imaginary declared itself and deferred itself in the same breath and demanded that Americans dream of it as their desired future because it was already a fact of their present. This double location in present and future and the double grounding in fact and desire entrenched certain ways of living and forms of life as the only possible and the only desirable ones. This study endeavors to open such forms up to inquiry and contingency.

In addition, recognizing this form of globalization as a social imaginary allows us to trace the path of its networked connections without assuming faith in its networked logic in which connectivity was naturalized as the only path to world membership. As the links forged by telegraphs and steam travel weaved a web that would net the world, a mode of thought that prioritized connection itself came to prevail. This study denaturalizes this network logic in order to explore how miscommunication,

¹⁰ This concept of pedagogy is modeled on Sarah Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010). She offers a helpful study of the pedagogical role of the promise of happiness. While this study does not focus on happiness, per se, the allure of a universal happy future certainly grounds much of how we value globalization. Ahmed's work highlights the close relationships between promise, pedagogy, and demand. She argues that the promise of happiness teaches us what we should want and how we should want it and directs us to a set of objects already deemed to be happy ones. Thus, the promise of happiness works by demanding that we be a certain kind of subject who wants certain objects in certain ways. This is a helpful model for understanding the demands an imaginary of globalization makes on us. We must become the kinds of subjects who can live and thrive in the world we are imagining.

disconnection, and, indeed, the failures of communication technology participated in generating and sustaining this way of thinking about and living in the world.

Finally, understanding this early form of globalization as a social imaginary also opens the door to exploring how this particular way of imagining and inhabiting the world became so important, entrenched, and positively valued. How did certain forms of networked communication become tethered to ideas of unity? How did the speed of communication become affiliated with ideas of world peace? How did proximity become a stand-in for agreement? These associations tell us a great deal about the contours of globalization and its demanding, pedagogic promises. These associations also allow us to locate the primary role played by religion in American culture, particularly if we think of religion as a means of making things meaningful. This project examines religious practices and discourses that emerge from both explicitly religious communities and the diffuse forms of theologically-inflected speech that emerged in American public culture. “Religion” describes the confluence of discourses, logics, institutions, identities, habits, practices, and affective investments that were born by and orbited social groups that instituted themselves through religious histories and traditions. In this study, these histories are significantly marked by Protestantism and its development in America.

Jaques Lacan once wryly declared that religion’s function is to “unearth correlations between everything” and to “mak[e] meaning out of things.”¹¹ An enormous body of scholarship has demonstrated the importance of religion in American history and culture in which religion is considered as practice, belief, community, and/or identity. This study will consider religion to be a practice of making things meaningful; religion in

¹¹ Jacques Lacan, “Press Conference by Doctor Jacques Lacan at the French Cultural Center,” *Lettres de l’École Freudienne* 16 (1975): 6-26.

this study serves as a particular way of attributing meaning to certain objects and investing them with particular weights and values. Certainly, religion's work to attribute and weight certain social meanings is possible only because religion functions simultaneously as identity, community, and a specific, if fluxing, conglomeration of belief and practice. The rhetorical and cultural approach to religion in this study intends to serve as a supplement to other understandings of religion. The role of religion as a producer of social meaning and a vector of social force has often been overlooked by scholars, but it holds great promise in clarifying more precisely the unique ways in which American religion participated in creating this global imaginary in the nineteenth century.

The imaginary of a world united by communication technology thrived in a time marked by tremendous religious innovation and the introduction of Christian discourse into public cultures made possible by new modes of circulating texts, including the rise of the national newspaper.¹² The religion that appeared in renditions of this modern global imaginary thus reflected new forms of American Protestantism that veered from theological orthodoxy and established practices. The religion at work in this imaginary also reflected the growing cultural dominance of American Protestantism in American culture. In other words, the religious influence on this imaginary is historically, geographically, and culturally specific. Christianity was not necessarily a primary cause of this modern global imaginary but, rather, Christianity was an excellent vehicle for the cultural ideas and practices that comprised this imaginary.¹³

¹² For a helpful discussion of the role of Protestantism in the nascent American national public, see Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

¹³ This argument about non-causality parallels Webb Keane's argument that Calvinism was not necessarily a source of secularism and modernity, but served as an

Religion played three very important roles in producing the widely-held belief that global communication would produce global community. First, Christian groups were vocal and influential participants in the modern discourse on technological change. From small communities, such as that of the utopian Oneida Community in upstate New York, to mainstream Protestant institutions, such as the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, religious institutions specifically and religious Americans more broadly were at the forefront of a culture that claimed that communication would unite the world.

Second, American Christianity provided critical vocabularies and images with which communication technology was endowed with cultural meaning. This idea builds on arguments from media studies, cultural studies, and the history of technology.¹⁴ The fact that electricity could pass through wire is itself a neutral fact. It only gains meaning through practices of making this fact important to a culture. I would amplify this assertion to say that, as a critically important American cultural institution, religion—in this case American Protestantism—offered weighted meanings that stabilized the meaning of the telegraph and other forms of communication as the unifiers of the globe.

“especially clear vehicle” for these phenomena. Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2007), 40.

¹⁴ For excellent versions of this approach, see James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992); Carolyn Marvin, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964); Lisa Parks, *Cultures in Orbit: Satellites and the Televisual* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005); Lynn Spigel, *Welcome to the Dreamhouse: Popular Media and Postwar Suburbs* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); and Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

Because of religion's cultural importance in modern America, religion not only provided meanings that would adhere to technologies, but religion also served to secure these religiously inflected meanings as primary.

Third, religion helps to explain how Americans sustained this imaginary in the face of its overwhelming unlikelihood. The idea that global community would emerge from a communication network was suffused with impossibility. The cable's slow and faulty transmission of messages, its ultimate failure, the impending Civil War, the infinite miscommunications and conflicts of colonial expansion, and the rise of anti-colonial resistance all indicated that there was nothing likely about an imminent world community. The shared participation in this imaginary cannot be understood through models of reasoned decision-making. There was little reasonable about it. Yet it was a very profitable idea for many Americans because it promised the inclusion of the new nation in a tightly woven global community in which American technology would be at the vanguard. Participation in this imaginary should be understood as an investment of social energy that did not depend on reason alone. Religion marshaled that energy and directed the avenues for its application.

This study focuses on one modern global imaginary of a world united by communication. While other global imaginaries existed, such as the British vision of their own sunlit empire, in America a world united by communication was a dominant imaginary, and it remains so. Religion and technology cooperated in particular ways to create and sustain this modern global imaginary. The process that this study explores is not comprehensive; there are other processes and contributing elements that this study does not discuss, such as new forms of industry, colonial commerce, and the expansion

and consolidation of America. While the crucial relationship of religion and technology in this modern global imaginary does not comprehensively describe the way in which this modern global imaginary was created and sustained, no description of this imaginary is complete without attention to this relationship. It is a relationship that has long been overlooked or misunderstood by scholars who assume that technology is merely instrumental or that religion is primarily about belief or identity.

This study speaks to conversations in cultural studies of religion, American religious history, history of technology, public culture, and globalization. It draws together the elements of religion, communication technology, and public culture to provide a robust account of a significant cultural production of the imaginary of a world united by electric communication into a desirable, divinely ordained totality. This study demonstrates how global imaginaries come into being through declaration and deferral, the ways affective investment structured and sustained this imaginary in a particular formation organized around failure, and how expansive Protestantism contributed to the forms of globalization that now dominate American culture.

Imaginaries and Imagination

Global imaginaries are enactments whose performance and effects extend far beyond the work of ideas. This dissertation is not merely a study of *thinking* about the world; social imaginaries structured elements of modern American life and organized the investment of energy—what mattered, how, and to whom—that animated what it meant

to be modern and American.¹⁵ While imaginaries may appear to function as ideas merely describing the world, they do something quite different. First, in many cases, these imaginaries actually failed at description quite dramatically. At the advent of the Atlantic Cable, the global imaginary produced by Americans “described” a world made instantly peaceful by the telegraph even as that world was embroiled in the violence of various colonial incursions and was poised for the beginning of the American Civil War. The imaginary “described” a lasting realization of divine destiny that depended on a cable that survived only twenty-three days before burning out and leaving eight years of silence in its wake. Thus, global imaginaries come into being not as accurate depictions of the world but, rather, as social realities lived through the symbols, images, and commitments that a group of people articulate in a particular global form. Therefore, imaginaries are best understood not as descriptions but as enactments. “Enact” bears the double meaning of “to perform” and “to make into law”: modern global imaginaries are performed in ways that institute particular social forms. Similar to how laws are enacted, imaginaries institute a world through acts of declaration, and similar to how plays are enacted, imaginaries function through performance of them.

There is no quintessential or original version of the modern global imaginary that is the focus of this study. As a lived enactment, this imaginary was never performed the same way twice. Yet many of the global imaginaries produced around the Atlantic

¹⁵ This study assumes this way of thinking about energy as producing the way things matter from Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place: Popular Conservatism and Postmodern Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1992). He defines the term “mattering map” as “a socially determined structure of affect which defines the things that do and can matter to those living within the map” (398). This study takes the notion of investment from Christian Lundberg’s work on affective economy in Christian Lundberg, “Enjoying God’s Death: *The Passion of the Christ* and the Practices of an Evangelical Public,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95, no. 4 (2009): 387-411.

Telegraph share key elements: communication technology (not speech but the material technology itself) would unify the world, this unified world would be Christian, unity would entail agreement and peace, and this unified world would culminate in a progressive history ordained by God. These elements repeat like motifs in the diverse renditions of this imaginary. To identify this as an imaginary in the singular rather than imaginaries in the plural is a slight misnomer. The intention is only to indicate the important ways that distinct imaginaries of the world at the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph held certain elements, commitments, and effects in common. The family resemblance of these imaginaries forms them into a set. These imaginaries contributed to each other by substantiating and strengthening a diverse body of practices aimed toward a similar global whole. Each rendition that appears in this study is one aspect of a widespread and heterogeneous cultural habit.

Imagination enabled this inventive process. Imagination, as it has been understood by key figures of Western philosophy, is an ambiguous practice situated between sensation and creation. From Aristotle to Kant to Heidegger to recent theorists of social imaginaries such as Cornelius Castoriadis, imagination is suspended between reliable sensation of the material world and invention of something else entirely. For Aristotle, imagination is a movement sparked by the use of sensation. Whereas sensation is always true, imagination can be true or false. In this manner, imagination is dependent on sensation but also not fully determined by it. In the absence of a sensory object, imagination can also potentially create what Aristotle calls a *phantasm* (from *phaos*,

light, to reflect the priority given to sight in the image).¹⁶ Kant similarly situates imagination between sensation and creation. For Kant, imagination requires sensation but is not fully determined by it.¹⁷ According to Heidegger, imagination is both receptive and creative, and is situated between the reception of sensation and the spontaneity of understanding.¹⁸ Castoriadis embraces the indeterminacy of imagination in his work on social imaginaries. Castoriadis understands imagination to draw the natural world into its creative frame. In this way, imagination makes the natural world meaningful, and imagination escapes determination by material reality. Imagination is creative and thus participates in the constant regeneration of society as a process of institution that is always able to configure itself in a new form (what Castoriadis calls the *eidōs*).¹⁹

Modern global imaginaries draw the natural world into themselves but can boast of neither a promise to mirror reality nor an offer of the immediate presence of the world they institute. Because of the gap between perception and creation that fuels imagination, social imaginaries always declare the presence of a world that is not entirely present. This

¹⁶ Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (New York: Penguin Books, 1986). This interpretation of Aristotle's phantasm is taken from Cornelius Castoriadis, *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*, trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 216-245.

¹⁷ In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant locates imagination between sensation and apperception. Sensation gives the manifold a priori, imagination synthesizes the manifold by ordering it in time, and apperception unifies the synthesis thereby producing knowledge. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1965).

¹⁸ Heidegger highlights this in his reading of Kant's use of imagination in *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*. Heidegger cautions, though, that imagination cannot create ontologically. Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, trans. Richard Taft (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

¹⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998).

study argues that this modern global imaginary instituted the imagined world through deferral. They declared the advent of a world just about to arrive. It may very well be that the constitutive deferral of modern social imaginaries is exactly what makes them so modern. Arjun Appadurai begins his 1996 *Modernity at Large* by announcing that “modernity belongs to that small family of theories that both declares and desires universal applicability for itself.”²⁰ Foucault names something similar in his essay on Kant’s foundational text on the public as an exchange of texts, “An Answer to the Question, What is Enlightenment?,” when he states that modernity defines a means of using imagination to know and violate the real.²¹ The location of imagination between knowing and transgressing the real raises a critical question for modern social imaginaries: do they describe something real, or do they function to call something into being? This is a defining tension for modern global imaginaries; they are enacted through an eschatological rendering of a new epoch suspended between now-here and not-yet.

Declaration, Deferral, and Investment

It is most helpful to think about the work of modern global imaginaries in terms of *declaration*, *deferral*, and *investment*. Declaration is the announcement that a new world is arriving now. The act of declaration institutes society in a new form. Declaration is shaped by the limits and resources of the present but also creates beyond the reality it

²⁰ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 1.

²¹ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 41.

encounters. In the modern global imaginary that this study explores, Americans declared the advent of a world united and pacified by communication technology as a present reality. They drew on the new Atlantic Cable and other technologies of speech and travel to produce the imaginary of a world that far exceeded the world around them. The Oneida Community's announcement of global peace in 1858 at the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable provides an excellent example of declaration. The Oneida Community's understanding of the advent of a new global unity in 1858 was typical of many American responses to this telecommunications event. The Oneida Community serves as a particularly useful lens through which to explore declaration because, in accordance with their belief that the kingdom of God had already arrived, they grounded a common understanding of the telegraph within a Christian eschatology that prioritized the now-here.

The presence promised by declaration is met by a constitutive deferral of the promised world. Deferral describes a new world and permanently sets it in the future. In the imaginary built around the 1858 Atlantic Cable, Americans spoke of a world that would unite as soon as certain conditions—such as missionary work for worldwide Christian conversion—were met. This world was understood to be just out of reach in the near future. For example, the ABCFM, which aimed toward a teleological horizon of global Christianity, announced that they would convert the world in less than fifty years and continued to announce that forty years later.²² The ABCFM offers a noteworthy

²² See American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, "Thirty-fifth Annual Meeting, Part 1," *Missionary Herald* 40, no. 10 (October 1844): 325, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136974000/13DADEEE4527F20AD9/1?accountid=14244>; Kincaid William, "National Beneficence the Safeguard of National Life," *Missionary Herald* 82, no. 12 (December 1886): 490, <http://search.proquest.com>

rendition of this imaginary because the ABCFM was a culturally and politically significant institution in America in the nineteenth century and the primary national group that thought of Christianity in explicitly global terms. Akin to the Oneida Community, the ABCFM promised a world united through communication. For the ABCFM, though, this perfect world lay just ahead and, thus, required labor to spread technology and Christianity throughout the globe.

This contradiction—the now-here and not-yet— of this modern imaginary holds open a tense gap at the heart of its dual temporal location. The contradiction between declaration and deferral raises a critical question for this modern global imaginary: how did this system, with all its tension and contradiction, not collapse? Modern global imaginaries demand a great deal of effort and work from their participants; predominantly, imaginaries demand investment. This imaginary of a globe unified by communication technology withstood the minor failures of faulty telegraph transmissions, miscommunication between missionaries and the locals they encountered, and a struggling nation attempting to construct an identity for itself in the world. The imaginary also weathered the grand failures of the transatlantic cable melting beneath the ocean and the persistent ruptures of national and global relations. In the face of irrefutable evidence of the impossibility of a world united by communication technology, investment offered an avenue for generating and directing social energy toward the compelling dream of world community. Failure, as it suffused the cable and its promises, served the important role of motivating such social investment. The lengths to which nineteenth-century Americans repeatedly sought to make sense of conflict,

.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137182144/13DADF1107E5C7DD3F3/37?accountid=14244.

miscommunication, and the failure of technology in a world they had already declared to be unified illustrate that reason alone could not support this impossible promise. Rather, an investment of social energy in the face of contradiction sustained this global imaginary.

The eschatological triad of *declaration* (the announcement of the new world as a present reality), *deferral* (the delay of the new world to the near future), and *investment* (the requirement of commitment to overcome the inevitable contradictions contained by this imaginary) structured this modern American global imaginary around the Atlantic Telegraph Cable. This triad continues to shape more recent imaginaries of a united world in the forms of globalization, the democratic planet, the global village, the universal family, and the “flat earth” that appear to describe the world of the internet today.²³

Religion in Modernity

The first telegram sent by Samuel Morse travelled from Washington, D.C. to Baltimore, Maryland and read, “What hath God wrought?”²⁴ Religious language suffused discourse on the telegraph and shaped the world that the telegraph would forge. This project focuses on religious thinking and practice beyond formal identities or beliefs, and, therefore, develops new ways of exploring the role of religion in public life. This study

²³ For such imaginaries of the world today, see Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2005) and Friedman, *The World is Flat*.

²⁴ Samuel Morse to Alfred Vail, telegram, 24 May 1844, Washington, D.C., Samuel F.B. Morse Papers 1793-1919, Library of Congress, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=mmorse&fileName=071/071009/071009page.db&recNum=0>.

conceptualizes religion as world-making and meaning-making rather than merely an instantiation of particular identities or systems of beliefs and practices. The work of religion in global imaginaries requires an examination of the ways certain figurations of the world are invested with meaning through religious concepts and symbols (e.g., how religious imagery of the *eschaton* transformed a string of copper cable into the herald of global unity) and the ways that religion marshaled social investment in ideas that contradicted experienced reality. These appearances of religion rarely followed doctrinal, denominational, or practical orthodoxies; religion appeared in this modern global imaginary in the heterogeneous forms that emerge from diverse appropriation.²⁵ The task will not be to match the appearance of religious tropes with religious norms; rather, this study will examine the appearances of religion for the work they did in constructing, organizing, and making sense of the world for modern Americans.

This study participates in a broader conversation about the relationship of religion to science and technology in modernity. It takes as its starting point that religion is not a natural category.²⁶ In *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World*, Randall Styers demonstrates how religion in modernity came to be understood as a “cross-cultural, and potentially universal, phenomenon” focused largely on belief.²⁷ Ideas of the world and ideas of what religion could be in the world co-arose as crucial elements of western modernity. This new idea of religion was forged against the foils of magic and

²⁵ See Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).

²⁶ J.Z. Smith, “Religion, Religions, Religious,” in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 269.

²⁷ Randall Styers, *Making Magic: Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 4.

science, but these foils have proven to be just as unsound and dependent themselves.²⁸ Religion, magic, and science emerged in their modern forms as if they were stable and discrete, but all the work to distinguish them only served to complicate their entwined relationships. This study is an exploration of one part of those relationships as the modern categories of religion and science were joined in the service of producing the very universality they both assumed.

The religion that fueled this global imaginary had its roots in Protestantism. While the ABCFM proudly claimed their pan-Protestantism, other groups included in this study, such as the Oneida Community, did not fit as easily in the boundaries of Protestantism. Similarly, public speech that used Christian vocabularies about God and humankind and relied on Christian logics of eschatology and salvation did not claim any particular Protestant provenance. Nineteenth-century America witnessed new religious movements, and religious public speech emerged from Protestant environments of revivalism and a new Protestant-inflected nationalism. Protestantism expanded both in the sense of its movement around the globe through evangelical endeavors and in the sense of its unprecedented appearances in new religious movements and a burgeoning national public. These forms of religion drew on Protestant resources and, yet, often diverged from doctrinal orthodoxy. These appearances of religion, especially as they are expressed by the ABCFM, the Oneida Community, and public speech about the telegraph, will be designated in this study as “expansive Protestantism.”

This study examines this diffuse form of expansive Protestantism and offers an account of how such religion—in imagery, logics, and structures—influenced the social

²⁸ Ibid., 8-9.

forms that arose in American modernity. In particular, this work seeks to address three critical functions of religion in modernity that have been overlooked in discussions of public culture: (1) the use of religious language to legitimate and inform modern imaginaries of the world united by communications technologies; (2) the eschatological organization of modern global imaginaries as simultaneously present and future events; and (3) the form of investment that sustained such imaginaries in the face of overwhelming evidence of their impossibility. This perspective on modern religion opens new possibilities for understanding the archives of the Oneida Community and the ABCFM. While much critical research has been conducted using archival resources on both religious groups, very little has focused on their imaginaries of the world or their discussion of communication technologies.²⁹ By exploring the way these groups envisioned the world at the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable, this study will consider unexamined ways in which the Oneida Community lived out their perfectionism and in which they constructed their American identity in a globalizing world. Similarly, this project will explore new questions concerning the ways imaginaries of the world informed the ABCFM's articulation of their mission work and the global ends to which their work aimed.

²⁹ The only exception I have found to this is Ian Tyrrell's recently published *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire*, in which Tyrrell discusses how the ABCFM and other mission groups made use of advances in technologies of travel and communication to establish a global Christian empire. His work only peripherally addresses the idea of global imaginaries and understands the telegraph to be a fixed technology whereas this study understands the protocols for intercontinental transatlantic speech to be developed through these imaginaries. Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010).

Global Sociality

This study seeks to offer a robust account of how modern global imaginaries function, what possibilities they open, and what effects they produce. Many theorists of modern social formations (such as Charles Taylor and Michael Warner) focus almost entirely on modes of sociality within the world (e.g. nations, publics) without attending to the totalities that emerge when the whole world is claimed as a social unit. This study of modern global imaginaries draws heavily on the literature of publics as modern modes of stranger sociality based on textual exchange. In this argument, however, the public is not organized to critique the state (as in the paradigmatic work of Jürgen Habermas) but rather is a critical part of how Americans configured the nation and the world that surrounded it.³⁰ Nor does this study take up the perspective adopted by theorists of modern social imaginaries who have posited transnational imaginaries as new configurations of sociality.³¹ Transnational imaginaries are not new; they have long been imbricated with the work of imagining nations. Decrying the persistence of the nation in a transnational age or posing national imaginaries against transnational imaginaries masks the ways that modern national imaginaries have made use of global imaginaries since the advent of the nation-state. This perspective draws on the work of Dilip Gaonkar. While Gaonkar posits national imaginaries as a paradigmatic case, he states that a

³⁰ Jürgen Habermas, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1991).

³¹ See Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, and Stuart Hall, “The Local and the Global,” *Culture, Globalization and the World-System: Contemporary Conditions for the Representation of Identity*, ed. Anthony King (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 19-39.

distinctive feature of a national people is “its posited environment of mutuality with other national peoples,” which points to the need for a global imaginary as a condition for national imaginaries.³² Americans could never have invented a nation without the particular imaginaries of the world that they claimed surrounded the new country. The argument proposed here is that imaginaries of the world link the local to the global in a way that not only instantiates a particular imaginary of the world but also a particular relationship of scale between local and global.

This study will also make use of another recent theoretical turn that argues against social cohesion as a function of discourse alone. Lawrence Grossberg offers the concept of affect as a means to think about how social energy is differentially invested in cultural life and how the structure of such investments determines what can and does matter to the people living within that particular context.³³ In 1858, many Americans invested their attention and energy in the imaginary of a united globe. Whether or not this unity was possible, it mattered. The circulating energy that Americans invested in this imaginary was a material requirement for this imaginary to come into being and survive. This imaginary was contingent on the discourse and affect with which it was created and sustained. The fragile cable of 1858 and the united “whole world” it was said to create point to the materiality and contingency inherent in the discursive and affective labor of making a public, a nation, and a world. This study explores *what* world was called into being through discourse and affect and *how* discourse and affect produced such a united world through the articulation of religion and technology.

³² Gaonkar, “Toward New Imaginaries,” 5.

³³ Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out*.

Methods

This study applies methods from history, critical theory, cultural studies, and religious studies to archival materials. The approach draws on a wide range of texts and cultural artifacts from these cases to explore their theological commitments, historical context, and cultural productions. The primary methodology is an analysis of practices and texts using close readings that focus on the enactment of the religious imaginary of a world united by communication technology. This research attends to the way people described this new world and how they inhabited it. In particular, this study explores the imagery, vocabularies, and logics of this imaginary and the ways that emotional investment mobilized particular practices and language about the world.

This study is located in the relatively young field of religion and media. Scholars of this field hail from sociology, mass communication, communication studies, art history, and media studies as well as religious studies, and they have made tremendous progress toward opening the study of religion to cultural examinations of representation and public display.³⁴ This study hopefully augments their work by advocating a turn to the study of media technology as a supplement to the dominant focus on media content.³⁵ This study will not explore how telegrams represented the people involved in this early form of globalization. Rather, this study will address how technologies were made

³⁴ Such scholars include David Chidester, Lynn Schofield Clark, Stewart Hoover, Peter Horsfield, Birgit Meyer, Jolyon Mitchell, David Morgan, S. Brent Plate, Joyce Smith, Diane Winston, and Angela Zito.

³⁵ This is a recent shift in the field. See Jeremy Stolow, ed., *Deus in Machina: Religion, Technology, and the Things in Between* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) and John Lardas Modern, *Secularism in Antebellum America* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011).

socially meaningful through religion and how, thus religiously meaningful, the technologies became important agents of a new way to think of and live in the world as a connected whole. This is not a study of a technology (the telegraph) but rather the social context that emerged around it. In the legacy of scholars of communication such as Marshall McLuhan and Carolyn Marvin, this is a study of the cultural work that makes technology hold a particular meaning and the cultural life that is reflected in the manner in which certain technologies are adopted and used.

The research for this project was largely conducted using archival sources of texts and artifacts. A primary source was the private collection of Bill Burns, one of the largest collections of original materials on the Atlantic Cables, including texts of the telegrams sent on the cable, sermons, early histories, and broadsides concerning the new technology. Mr. Burns has made much of this material available digitally. I made extensive use of the primary archive of the ABCFM (including personal papers, letters, and publications) housed at Harvard University and now available digitally. For the Oneida Community, I traveled to the Community's main communal home in order to access the archive of material artifacts there, conducted extended research at the archive of papers, publications, and letters housed at the Syracuse University Library, and made use of their digitally available publications. This research also utilized public texts about the Atlantic Telegraph that are available in published and digital forms. This study focuses on the broader cultural patterns that are reflected in this diverse set of texts and practices in order to explore the religious language and logics that these communities employed to imagine the world.

This study includes a direct engagement with critical theories of utopia, technology, rhetoric, deferral, desire, promise, and social imaginaries. Posing these theories against the histories of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable serves to clarify how this modern global imaginary functioned, how it was organized, and what resources it used. This project attends to the way religious imagery and logic have served as crucial resources for the forms of globalization that emerged in the nineteenth century. Reading these histories and theories alongside each other offers a helpful frame for the cultural work done in 1858 as a set of variable practices of imagining and inhabiting a connected world.

Organization

This study is organized according to the structuring triad of imaginaries—*declaration, desire, and investment*. These aspects always work together, but to clarify their operations, each chapter will address one aspect by focusing on an illustrative case study. The first chapter, “Declaration: The Oneida Community Announces the End of Distance and the End of War,” addresses the American motif of announcing the arrival of an ideal world unified and pacified by the Atlantic Telegraph Cable of 1858. Here, the concept of utopia serves as a lens through which to understand the practice of constructing an ideal impossible reality. The Oneida Community, “Bible Communists” who emerged from the waves of revivals and religious innovation in upstate New York in the 1840s, articulated a global imaginary with all the idealism utopia has come to connote but without the spatial or temporal inaccessibility that we traditionally associate with the

“no-place” coined by Thomas More in his 1516 *Utopia*. In most formulations, utopia is set in a far-off land or distant future. Yet for the Oneida Community, the moment the Atlantic Telegraph Cable was strung across the ocean and Morse code was sent pulsing beneath the waves, this utopian global imaginary began to arrive. This chapter offers a study of Oneidan constructions of the world around the Atlantic Telegraph through their speeches, published essays, newspaper articles, and first-hand accounts (in letters and journals) of their community celebrations of the telegraph. The chapter presents the argument that in an American context utopia cannot be understood as a distant land or future event. Rather, the kinds of utopia declared in this American modern global imaginary demand a redefinition of utopia as proximate.

The second chapter, “Deferral: An American Missionary Imaginary,” addresses the constitutive role of deferral in this modern global imaginary. This chapter consists of a close study of the ABCFM’s writing on the global as a social form in letters, reports, and publications of the ABCFM and its member missionaries, with special attention to the archive of writings and letters of one missionary, Cyrus Hamlin, who was responsible for bringing Morse’s telegraph machine to the Ottoman Empire. Of particular focus is the missionary claim that the whole world was their mission field and the missionary interest in technology as part of their project of global Christian conversion. Missionary documents described the telegraph as the “opportunity” that had been lacking and now would finally allow missionaries to establish “a living Christianity everywhere.”³⁶ Even in instances in which members of the ABCFM understood the telegraph to have made the

³⁶ Rufus Anderson, *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions* (Boston: American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1862), 385.

nations of the world accessible, the task of Christianizing them lay ahead. In this way, their global imaginary of a world united through technology and Christianity made use of deferral; the subjectivity enacted through mission relied on the work yet to be accomplished. Deferral offers a fixed end to the future so that the world to come in this missionary imaginary looked a great deal like an idealized form of Protestant America and England.

The third chapter, “The Great Fizzle: The Role of Failure and Investment in Sustaining Impossible Imaginaries,” illustrates the role of affect in overcoming evidence of the impossibility of a world unified by communication. The very transatlantic speech that seemed to promise immediate peace, unity, and common religion was riddled with miscommunications and technical failures. The cable itself failed after only twenty-three days of use. Public texts and speeches about the cable lauded the cable’s ability to unite the world while simultaneously revealing the difficulty of this telegraphic venture and how much closer the world was to conflict than to peace.³⁷ The telegraph did significantly alter the way communication related to space and time and gave rise to new forms of connection such as the network.³⁸ But it did not prove particularly useful in uniting the world. Thus, the imaginary of global unity was not held together by cable but

³⁷ For example, President Buchanan’s telegram to Queen Victoria on the Atlantic Cable reveals his concerns that the telegraph cable itself would become a pawn in the ripe tensions that still sat between these recently separated nations: “that [the transatlantic cable] shall be forever neutral, and that its communications shall be held sacred in passing to the place of their destination.” Buchanan to Victoria, 16 August 1858.

³⁸ For more on the dramatic changes in communication inaugurated by the telegraph, see James W. Carey, “Technology and Ideology: The Case of the Telegraph” in *Communication as Culture*, 201-230. For a discussion of the birth of the metaphor of the network in the nineteenth century, see Laura Otis, *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001).

by investment of social energy. This chapter demonstrates the ways that the social energy sustained this modern global imaginary not despite the failures that besieged it but because of them.

The conclusion raises the question of the relationship of this modern global imaginary to the current imaginary of a connected peaceful world. This last chapter proposes that the relationship between these imaginaries is not causal but one of resonance. The dreams for the telegraph echo in the dreams for the internet and social media. Similar to the way early meanings follow words into new contexts, the motifs of the modern global imaginary of the Atlantic Cable shadow the global imaginary of “Globalization 3.0.” In the current cries that we are all now neighbors reverberates the electric pulse of the Atlantic Telegraph.

CHAPTER TWO

DECLARATION: THE ONEIDA COMMUNITY ANNOUNCES THE END OF DISTANCE AND THE END OF WAR

By thy divine Messiah—
That true celestial wire—
 To Heaven we're bound!

Whisper thy message low,
Swift let the tidings go,
Till grace run to and fro,
 The whole earth round.

With thy word-woven cord,
Bind all men to the Lord,
 And Man to Man!

—Hymn sung at celebration of the Atlantic Telegraph in Walpole, N.H. on August 19, 1858, reprinted in the Oneida Community *Circular*, September 2, 1858.

Only a cough stands between us and utopia, or, at least, that is how readers of the first edition of *Utopia* would have encountered the island in Sir Thomas More's landmark text of 1516. Just as the traveler Raphael Hythloday is about to reveal the location of the magical island to the narrator, one man whispers, another coughs, and access to Utopia is rendered unintelligible.³⁹ More pokes fun at his readers by repeatedly ushering access to

³⁹ The original edition of More's *Utopia* was prefixed by a letter from Peter Giles to Jerome de Busleyden in which Giles joins More in pretending the island is a real place. The letter includes the following: "More seems embarrassed not to be able to report the location of the island. Raphael made no attempt to conceal it, but he did mention it only briefly and incidentally, as if he was saving it for another time. And then unfortunately neither of us took in what he did say. For while Raphael was talking about it one of More's servants came over and whispered something or other in his ear. Of course I

Utopia out of reach: he loses track of characters who know where Utopia is, he structures the text to confuse fact and fiction, and he presents his account as the transcript of another's report and admits that it is likely full of errors.

The determined distance of the island Utopia reflects a problem that haunts the concept of utopia: utopia provides an alternative to the status quo, but we can never reach it from where we are. This double meaning of inaccessibility and idealism can perhaps be blamed on Thomas More himself since he coined the term “utopia” with this essential ambiguity. In the text, utopia is no-place, prefixing the Greek *topos* (place) with *ou-*, a prefix of negation. However, More included an introductory poem with a pun that draws on the Greek prefix *eu* (good).⁴⁰ Much of the scholarly literature on utopia as well as the colloquial use of the term posit utopia as an inaccessible happy future or an impossible ideal. We inherit the concept of utopia as a good place *and* as no-place such that its promises of the good life are premised on its spatial or temporal inaccessibility.

This meaning of utopia as both ideal and inaccessible is critically important to modern global imaginaries, the constellations of images, symbols, and commitments through which we envision and inhabit the world. The distinctive modern global imaginary developed in America around communication technology—an imaginary that promised universal unity, global peace, and the end of distance itself—should be

listened all the more carefully, but one of the people present, who had, I think, caught a chill while at sea, coughed so loudly that he prevented me from hearing some of what Raphael was saying.” Peter Giles to Jerome de Busleyden, 1516, in *Utopia* by Thomas More, trans. and ed. David Wooten (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1999), 50.

⁴⁰ “‘No-Place’ (*Utopia*) I once was named, by reason of my solitude;/ But now I rival Plato’s state, perhaps exceed her, for/ What he sketched out in words, that I alone exemplify/ In men and skills, and the most excellent laws:/ By the name of ‘Happy Place’ (*Eutopia*)/ I do deserve to be called.” More, *Utopia*, 48.

understood as utopian. It offered important ruptures with the status quo and enacted the desires of a population on the brink of a technological revolution and a civil war. This imaginary described a world that would solve the problems plaguing the age. Yet to say that modern global imaginaries are utopian appears also to say that they are ideals that are inaccessible in space and time, the no-place of More's original (if sublimated) formulation of utopia as *ou-topia*. Indeed, these imaginaries self-consciously reach for the impossible and offer a world that is remarkable because it is radically new. That said, the participants in this modern global imaginary understood it as neither distant nor future but present in both space and time. Their investment in the novelty of this imaginary never equated impossibility with inaccessibility. Rather, the impossibility of a unified, peaceful world was precisely what made the announcement of its arrival so important.

The modern global imaginary that emerged in mid-nineteenth-century America at the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable came into being as it was lived through processes of inventing the world otherwise and negotiating with a stubborn reality. Invention and negotiation took the form of a process of declaration, which announced a new world now, and deferral, which pushed that new world's arrival into the near future. Social investment sustained this imaginary in the tense gap between declaration and deferral. This chapter will highlight the work of declaration for this modern global imaginary by dislocating it from deferral and investment. To be clear, these three mechanisms of modern global imaginaries work together. This chapter will focus on declaration, but deferral and investment will appear in the background.

Declaration here is an announcement of arrival. When modern Americans declared this global imaginary of world-wide unity and peace, they accomplished two

things simultaneously. First, they invented. The world whose reality they announced resembled little of what they saw around them just ten years after the Mexican-American War and three years before the American Civil War. Second, they instated that fiction as their lived reality. Declaration served as a calling-into-being of an impossible ideal. This is not to say that the world was actually peaceful or unified. Rather, the Americans who participated in this modern global imaginary declared—and thus inhabited—a world that had only a little to do with what they encountered.

This chapter offers a close examination of declaration in the particular modern global imaginary built around the first instance of nearly immediate transatlantic communication, the Atlantic Telegraph Cable of 1858. Utopia will prove to be a useful construct to explain the declaration of modern global imaginaries but only with the caveat that modern American utopias are wrongly configured as temporally and spatially inaccessible. This chapter will highlight an alternative definition of utopia as proximate. The mode of utopia that emerged in mid-nineteenth-century America—whether that of utopian communities that emerged across the young country or that of the idea of America itself—refigures the classical conception of utopia in favor of the now-here over the no-where.⁴¹ Reconfiguring utopia as neither future nor distant allows us to delve into the instituting work of imagination with a particular focus on its appropriation of the impossible. Declaring the arrival of the impossible—in this case, a globe united by

⁴¹ I am referring here to Deleuze and Guattari's reading of utopia in Samuel Butler's *Erewhon* as now-here and not no-where. Gille Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 100; Samuel Butler, *Erewhon, or, Over the Range* (Northridge, CA: Aegypan Press, 2009).

communication technology—created a world for modern Americans. This chapter will examine how such an impossible world was created and what logics enabled it.

To explore the work of declaration for modern global imaginaries and to explicate the salient motifs of this modern global imaginary (unity, impossibility, a global modeled on the local, and the role of communication technology), this chapter offers a study of one community's rendition of a whole world unified by the telegraph. This chapter will examine the imaginary of a world unified by the Atlantic Telegraph in the Oneida Community, a utopian Christian community that emerged from the wave of revivals known as the Second Great Awakening. In many ways, the Oneida Community's global imaginary, as illustrated below, was emblematic of widespread American rhetoric about the world once electric transatlantic communication became possible. Similar to other renditions of this modern global imaginary, the Oneida imaginary used religious logic to announce the advent of a world impossibly unified through communication. By employing a mode of Christian sense-making in which the impossible (e.g., the incarnation, death, and resurrection of God) functions as the particularly achievable, the Oneida Community declared the arrival of a world that exceeded any experience of reality.

While the Oneida Community's global imaginary is illustrative of a popular American global imaginary of the time, their version of the world was undeniably particular to them. As an intentional community founded on the belief that Christ had already returned and that moral perfection was possible, the Oneida Community provides a unique lens into the work accomplished by a declaration of utopia's arrival. To understand their global imaginary requires understanding their commitments and logics

as well as how their particular storehouse of images and symbols undergirds their version of a whole unified world. This does not imply that other renderings of this modern global imaginary share their beliefs, commitments, logics, and symbols. Rather, the Oneida Community provides one version of a modern global imaginary that is expressed in diverse renderings, none of which stand as the exemplary version. In this particular performance, we find a number of motifs true to other performances of this modern global imaginary. At the same time, we are able to highlight the work of utopian declaration by focusing on a community that was intentionally living out their utopian vision for the world.

The Oneida Community's theological and practical commitment to perfectionism found a novel application in the global imaginary they constructed around the Atlantic Telegraph Cable. Their vision of a world made new by transatlantic communication technology offers an illustrative vision of the way modern global imaginaries construct an impossible ideal as an accessible reality. On August 12, 1858, the day the Atlantic Cable was first successfully strung across the ocean, a headline in the Oneida Community's newspaper, *The Circular*, proclaimed—in all capital letters and with multiple exclamation points—the end of distance and the end of war. The article was no less grand in its claims for what this single cable could accomplish: “Thus humanity, under God, marches grandly on to its destiny; step by step the barriers of nature fall, and we enter upon the kingly inheritance that God intended for us when He made the world.”⁴² The *Circular* was not alone in proclaiming a radically new era on a globe now threaded with this copper cable. For nearly one month, newspapers across the country buzzed with

⁴² “An Oneida Journal,” *Circular*, August 12, 1858.

reports that the cable heralded a new shape to the globe, a united humanity, and a radical proximity to heaven. While the Oneidans celebrated this milestone with a day-long event that included a parade, a lecture on telegraphy, music by the Oneida Community Brass Band, toasts, and supper under the Butternut Tree, the cable was conveying its last garbled messages.⁴³

This chapter begins by offering an account of why it is useful to redefine utopia as proximate for modern global imaginaries. It will then turn to the Oneida Community as a case study that highlights the particular role of declaration for this imaginary. Much of this chapter is the result of archival research that focuses on the theology of their founder, John Humphrey Noyes, in his major text, *The Berean*, and the reports of daily life and diligent reporting on the Atlantic Telegraph in the community's biweekly paper, the *Circular*, printed in Brooklyn, NY from 1851-1870.⁴⁴ From 1851, the *Circular's* inception, until 1854, the *Circular* was edited by Noyes himself. From 1854-1856, it was edited by J.H. Noyes and G.W. Noyes. The following year, the editorial signature was printed "by A Community" and thereafter as "By the Oneida Community."⁴⁵ In deference to the Oneidan self-understanding as speaking with one voice, the unsigned articles of the *Circular*, while not without contradiction, are attributed to the community as a whole in this study. This chapter will highlight the key elements of their theology and practice that serve as a background to the way they imagined and inhabited the

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ John Humphrey Noyes, *The Berean: A Manual for the Help of Those Who Seek the Faith of the Primitive Church* (Putney, VT: Office of the Spiritual Magazine, 1847).

⁴⁵ Constance Noyes Robertson, ed., *Oneida Community: An Autobiography, 1851-1876* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1970), 361.

world. A few critical contours of this modern global imaginary will take center-stage in this discussion: the proximity of utopia, the religious logic of achieving the impossible, the unity forged by communication technology, and the access of the future in the present. This chapter will address each in turn. The chapter closes with a discussion of useful implications of this case study for a broader understanding of modern global imaginaries as they mobilize impossible visions with real effects.

Proximate Utopia

Utopia, particularly in its original coinage by More, is ideal and inaccessible. In both its perfection and its distance, utopia promises a radical rupture with life as we know it. The value of utopia, then, is its distance from the status quo.⁴⁶ However, this value is also utopia's primary challenge: how can we invent a society utterly different from our own when we are limited to creating it out of the materials at hand? Constrained to local construction, utopia emerges from and responds to our society as it stands, which calls into question whether utopia can really provide the radical rupture it promises. In its most pessimistic renderings, utopia is reduced to a feeble restructuring of our contemporary failures. Yet, even in its most productive renderings, utopia is suspended between absolute alterity and potentially useless domesticity. In neither case can utopia make any legitimate appearance.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ For other modern utopias that position the good place out of reach, see Butler, *Erewhon*, and Voltaire, *Candide, or, Optimism*, trans. Robert M. Adams (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991).

⁴⁷ Scholars who conceptualize utopia between these two conditions of impossibility include Louis Marin, Sigmund Freud, and Ruth Levitas. Marin, in his study

Understanding utopia as inaccessible cannot account for the kinds of utopia that emerged in America after the Second Great Awakening. The wave of revivals that swept through the early republic birthed a series of religious movements, including the Shakers, Mormons (known today as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints), Millerites (the root of the Seventh-day Adventists), and the Oneida Community. The revivalism that spread through America in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was deeply influenced by John Wesley's perfectionist theology, the urgency of salvation stressed by Jonathan Edwards and other New Light theologians, and the shifts in Calvinism that promoted a person's ability to act for his or her own salvation.⁴⁸ Many of the groups that emerged from these revivals professed some kind of accessible perfection, particularly the Millerites, who predicted that the second coming of Christ would occur in 1844, and the

of More's *Utopia*, argues that utopia is absolutely other and a neutral third term, e.g., neither America nor England but an island in between. Utopia, then, is always a double negation, a not-this-and-not-that, and thus determined by the bracketing function of its two primary exclusions. Louis Marin, *Utopias: The Semiological Play of Textual Places*, trans. Robert A. Vollrath (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press International, 1990), 3-30 and 85-98. Freud also posits utopia's impossibility. For Freud, no future can escape the determining power of the past, specifically the past out of which Eros and the death drive are born. In other words, no utopia could radically alter humankind enough to stand in the way of the determining role of the primal father. While Freud appears to posit utopia's impossibility on its absolute domesticity, the underlying logic here is that a utopia determined by the past is no utopia at all because it cannot achieve its defining alterity. Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961), and *The Future of an Illusion*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1961). Levitas defines utopia as the desire for a better way of living and being. Unlike Marin and Freud, Levitas understands utopia as political possibility that can be achieved but for which achievement—here the satisfaction of desire—signals its end. While Levitas opens the door to realizing utopia, utopia itself remains just as inaccessible and disappears the moment we grasp it. Ruth Levitas, *Concept of Utopia* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

⁴⁸ Melvin E. Dieter, *The Holiness Revival of the Nineteenth Century*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1996).

Oneida Community, who believed all people could achieve moral perfection in their lifetime.

The utopian perspectives of these groups require a less absolute approach to the distance between the society they knew and the society they wanted. First, one must refuse any absolutely impassable division between the familiar and the ideal, or, as is explained below, the present and the future. Second, one must refuse the suspension of utopia between alterity and domesticity if that tension is understood to render utopia stagnant or useless. Rather, the concept of utopia that will be most helpful in a reading of modern global imaginaries presents the desired ideal to be accessible and utopia's tense place between alterity and domesticity as productive and dynamic. Our understanding of utopia must turn from absolutism so that its necessary intelligibility does not result in something too local and too familiar to ever achieve any rupture of the status quo and, at the same time, its necessary alterity does not render it too distant to ever to be grasped. Only in this way could utopia's suspension between the known and the strange in nineteenth-century America have become an empowering mode in which utopia's constitutive deferral gave it momentum.

This momentum can be invoked in a number of ways. One of the great American thinkers of utopia, Fredric Jameson, understands utopia's very impossibility to motivate a radical politics toward a new future. For Jameson, we are restricted to create utopia out of the limited resources we find in the present. Utopian creation is a process of bricolage, and the utopias produced respond directly to the failures of the status quo.⁴⁹ In this way, the primary condition of utopia is its restriction to familiar terms such that "even our

⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review* 25 (2004): 40.

wildest imaginings are all collages of experience, constructs made up of bits and pieces of the here and now.”⁵⁰ Our “incapacity to imagine the future,” specifically a future that escapes the determination of the present, becomes the only thing that utopia can demonstrate:

[The Utopian genre]’s deepest vocation is to bring home, in local and determinate ways, and with a fullness of concrete detail, our constitutional inability to imagine Utopia itself, and this, not owing to any individual failure of imagination but as the result of the systemic, cultural, and ideological closure of which we are all in one way or another prisoners.⁵¹

Faced with the closure of the present, utopia’s only possibility is “to succeed by failure.”⁵² This refrain of utopia’s failure in Jameson’s thought demands that the only authentic utopia—viable or not—is the one we cannot think, or, in his words, the best utopias are those that “fail the most comprehensively.”⁵³

This does not leave us without hope; rather, we must invest in utopian impossibility and the failures it entails if we are ever to escape present politics. In Jameson’s words: “This clearly does not mean that, even if we succeed in reviving Utopia itself, the outlines of a new and effective practical politics for the era of globalization will at once become visible; but only that we will never come to one without it.”⁵⁴ Impossibility here serves as a condition for utopia’s success to offer a

⁵⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future* (New York: Verso, 2005), xiii.

⁵¹ Fredric Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia; Or, Can We Imagine the Future?” *Science Fiction Studies* 9, no. 2 (1982): 153.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, xiii.

⁵⁴ Jameson, “The Politics of Utopia,” 36.

radical alternative to the status quo. If utopia were not impossible—that is, outside the possibilities presented by the present politics—it would serve no purpose at all.

This thinking of the possibilities offered by impossibility owes a great deal to the work of Jacques Derrida on alterity, the Other, and impossibility. Jameson makes this reference himself in a footnote in the “Introduction” to *Archaeologies of the Future* in which he discusses the Derridean “trace.” The “trace” for Derrida is a mark of absence; Jameson here focuses on the mark of the absence of the past in the present. This is one of the rare moments in which Jameson offers a way to think about the effectiveness of the impossible:

The presumption is that Utopia, whose business is the future, or not-being, exists only in the present, where it leads the relatively feeble life of desire and fantasy. But this is to reckon without the amphibiousness of being and its temporality: in respect of which Utopia is philosophically analogous to the trace, only from the other end of time. The aporia of the trace is to belong to past and present all at once, and this to constitute a mixture of being and not-being quite different from the traditional category of Becoming and thereby mildly scandalous for analytical Reason. Utopia, which combines the not-yet-being of the future with a textual existence in the present is no less worthy of the archaeological paradoxes we are willing to grant to the trace.⁵⁵

For utopia, the present is marked by the absence of the future we cannot imagine. Taking seriously Jameson’s indication of what we might produce if we were willing to “scandalize” reason opens a possibility for a refiguration of utopia as present.

A productive frame for thinking the possible impossibilities of utopia can be found in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. Their work is particularly valuable here because it opens a way to think of utopia as both radically different (impossible) and proximate. For them, utopia answers a need for thinking our world otherwise. Their call is for a productive alterity outside the logic of absolutes: “We lack

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, xv-xvi, note 12.

creation. *We lack resistance to the present.* The creation of concepts in itself calls for a future form, for a new earth and people that do not exist.”⁵⁶ However, for Deleuze and Guattari, this creation of concepts does not remain out of reach of the present but rather can intervene here and now. To engage in this kind of creation is to resist the present without collapsing the power of utopia’s difference from the present into an absolute, and therefore unreachable, alterity. In their words, setting such utopian thinking into the context of late capitalism, we can engage “revolution as plane of immanence, infinite movement and absolute survey, but to the extent that these features connect up with what is real here and now in the struggle against capitalism, relaunching new struggles whenever the earlier one is betrayed.”⁵⁷ Utopia is thus understood as a future unfolding at the cusp of our present through our imaginative action now: “It is not that the actual is the utopian prefiguration of a future that is still part of our history. Rather it is the now of our becoming.”⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari open space for the movement of an always arriving utopia by refusing fixed ontologies; thus utopia can be arriving without a static telos—what Jameson would call the “attempt to colonize the future”⁵⁹—and exist in a productive suspension between alterity and limited bricolage.

Imagination provides a key conceptual tool to render utopia proximate. The essential ambiguity of imagination suspends it between familiarity and alterity, and imagination’s inherent creativity ensures that this suspension is productive. To

⁵⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 108.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 112.

⁵⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies*, 228.

understand the relationship between imagination and utopia, it will be helpful to turn to the work of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur. Ricoeur understands imagination to take two forms: ideology, by which the status quo is preserved, and utopia, in which it is radically interrupted. In other words, utopia and ideology are parallel forms of imagination. Together they constitute our present as an oscillation of imagination between the two.⁶⁰ Utopia, in this case, makes the world strange by posing a new possibility against our present experience. However, utopia can only do so insofar as it is put into relationship with the status quo by imagination. In this way, the alterity of utopia is always connected to the world as it is. This connection is supplied by imagination, which, according to Ricoeur, serves to impassion society. In ideology, imagination preserves through representation. In utopia, imagination invents fictions of a different life. In its movement between the two, imagination can impassion society to constantly recreate itself.⁶¹

In nineteenth-century America, we find a turn to utopia that was arriving. In this context, utopia appeared in the present without losing its impossibility and without ever arriving in completion. If utopia arrives completely, it becomes a teleological project that ultimately calls for stasis. Rather, as we will see with the Oneida Community, utopia was arriving in the mode of desire, which always calls for more. Modern global imaginaries and the proximate utopias through which they function hold declaration and desire in a tense, productive balance. Utopia always calls for more, for the new, for alterity, but utopia also never permits such desire to result in complete deferral. Declaration ensures

⁶⁰ Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 310-314.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 314.

that the new is arriving now. Imagination holds a tension between what we desire and what we declare so that society is instituted by drawing upon and creating beyond what we encounter in the world.⁶² In other words, we come to inhabit this impossible utopia.

The Religious Logic of an Accessible Impossibility

The Oneidans' announcement of global peace and the eradication of distance at the first successful laying of the Atlantic Telegraph should not be read as the dotty pronouncements of a misguided and short-lived religious fringe. Their reading of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable reflected a broader American excitement and enthusiasm over what the telegraph could make possible. The way that they described the Atlantic Cable and the celebratory practices they developed around it echoed and mimicked descriptions and practices from around the country. Missionaries of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions also announced the end of distance. In the words of Judson Smith: "With the network of telegraph lines covering the great continents, and sunk beneath the seas, and binding all parts of the world into the circuits of swift intelligence, space and time are almost annihilated."⁶³ Similarly, the *San Antonio Ledger* reported that the success of the Atlantic Telegraph "will be an annihilation of time and space that will bring the eastern and western hemispheres within hailing distance of each

⁶² Cornelius Castoriadis considers imagination a critical condition for the institution of society as it draws on and creates beyond the natural world. Castoriadis, *World in Fragments* and Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*.

⁶³ Judson Smith, "The Missionary Outlook," *Missionary Herald* 86 (November 1890): 465, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137227509/13DADC83C60528BB1D1/8?accountid=14244>.

other.”⁶⁴ The Oneida Community shared in the imagination of a world united and pacified by electric communication technology. Moreover, the Oneidans viewed this world as both here and yet to come and developed protocols for managing this temporal gap. Thus the Oneida description represents a broader American practice.

The Oneida Community provides a lens into a central role of religion for this modern global imaginary of a world united by communication technology: the Christian logic of an accessible impossibility. The Oneida Community imagined an impossible world and understood that world as arriving not despite but because of its impossibility. This imaginative work relied heavily on their Christianity, and they understood the Atlantic Telegraph to play a crucial role in realizing their Christian vision for the world.

The Oneida Community, founded in upstate New York in the middle of the nineteenth century, is rightfully described as utopian. The Oneida Community and other new religious movements that emerged from the waves of revivals associated with the Second Great Awakening offered radically new theologies and established ways of living that differed significantly from their Christian forebears. Many of these religious groups—Mormons, Shakers, Millerites, and Spiritualists—have been similarly described as utopian.⁶⁵ This label, with all its accompanying weight of impossibility and futurity, must attend to the crucial ways in which these religious groups reconfigured both the

⁶⁴ Unattributed quotation, “The Atlantic Telegraph,” *San Antonio Ledger*, April 3, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.882004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=10FA5E3F31AFCD88&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

⁶⁵ See Ira L. Mandelker, *Religion, Society, and Utopia in Nineteenth-Century America* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1984) and Donald E. Pitzer, ed., *America's Communal Utopias* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

present and the world at large. These groups used Christianity's declaration of the radical rupture of the status quo with the incarnation of God in Christ to enable their radical reconstruction of life in the present. In this context, the Oneida Community represents a broader movement that saw an ideal reality accessible in unprecedented ways.

The Oneida Community was deeply influenced by the increasingly popular transatlantic phenomenon of holiness revivals that preached Wesleyan perfectionism, the belief that some degree of perfection is accessible to humankind.⁶⁶ Charles Fourier, who wrote his *Design for Utopia* in the 1830s, was also a significant source of inspiration for the Oneida Community and its founder, John Humphrey Noyes.⁶⁷ Fourier intended his utopian vision as a thought experiment concerning the destiny of humankind. In the text, he laid out elaborate plans for a society organized around certain modes of agrarian labor in which communication and pleasure would meet the needs of society without ever falling into equality and agreement.⁶⁸ Fourier presented his work as a realizable (nearly inevitable) telos and many phalansteries (the community buildings at the heart of Fourier's plan for utopia) were built across Europe and America according to his descriptions. However, in Fourier's understanding of utopia, the agrarian civilization he

⁶⁶ In a sermon delivered on January 1, 1733 and later printed in his landmark text on perfectionism, Wesley defines holiness: "that habitual disposition of the soul which, in the sacred writings, is termed holiness, and which directly implies being cleansed from sin, from all filthiness both of flesh and spirit, and, by consequence, being endued with those virtues which were in Christ Jesus, being so *renewed in the image of our mind*, as to be *perfect as our Father in heaven is perfect*." John Wesley, *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection, as Believed and Taught, by the Rev. Mr. John Wesley, from the Year 1725, to the Year 1777*, 7th ed. (Dublin: Robert Napper, 1794), 4.

⁶⁷ Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 81.

⁶⁸ Charles Fourier, *Design for Utopia: Selected Writings of Charles Fourier*, trans. Julia Franklin (New York: Schocken Books, 1971).

described is only a near goal that remains far from the ultimate utopian destiny of humankind.⁶⁹ For Fourier, the alterity of that future is so extreme that he could only offer a mid-step in the form of his text. As in More's *Utopia*, the alterity served to withhold the arrival of a utopian telos. But in the Oneidan elaboration on Fourierism the distant and unrecognizable future became daily life in the present.

The Oneida Community was founded on John Humphrey Noyes's assertion that the second coming of Christ had already occurred and, therefore, moral perfection was possible in the members' lifetime.⁷⁰ As a young theology student at Yale, Noyes resolved to calculate the date of Christ's return. After statements he found in the Gospels that Christ promised his own return within the apostolic age, Noyes was convinced that, as promised, Christ returned while the first generation of his disciples was still alive.⁷¹ For Noyes, Christ's return was the condition of possibility for moral perfection, and the religious community that he founded and led endeavored to live out this possibility.

⁶⁹ Fourier ultimately thought that "humankind would evolve through no less than thirty-two phases covering the 80,000-year life span of the globe." Guarneri, *Utopian Alternative*, 17.

⁷⁰ Oneida Community, *Handbook of the Oneida Community, 1867 & 1871 Bound with Mutual Criticism*, ed. Oneida Community (New York: AMS Press, 1976), 40.

⁷¹ Noyes describes his realization thus: "This view was altogether new and surprising to me; but accumulating proof was stronger than the fright of novelty, and at the end of the examination, my mind was clear. I no longer *conjectured* or *believed*, in the inferior sense of that word; but I *knew* that the time appointed for the Second Advent [coming of Christ] was within one generation from the time of Christ's personal ministry." John Humphrey Noyes, *Confessions of John H. Noyes, Part I: Confession of Religious Experience: Including a History of Modern Perfectionism* (Oneida Reserve, NY: Leonard, 1849), 8. See also George Wallingford Noyes, ed., *Religious Experience of John Humphrey Noyes, Founder of the Oneida Community* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1971), 69-99; and Robert David Thomas, *The Man Who Would Be Perfect: John Humphrey Noyes and the Utopian Impulse* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1977), 27-28.

The Oneida Community as well as the smaller communities at Putney, Vermont, and Brooklyn, New York, were known as Bible Communists. They lived together under a commitment to perfectionism, which they primarily oriented to eradicating the sin of selfishness. They shared all property and work in common, and more famously, refused what they saw as the selfishness of having a single marital partner. They developed a system of “complex marriage” in which all the adult men of the community were married to all the adult women and vice-versa. Later in the life of the community, the Oneidans attempted to breed more perfect human beings through “stirpiculture,” the arrangement of mating pairs regarded as morally advanced by a special committee.⁷²

These practices were grounded in their conviction that moral perfection was made possible by Christ’s coming. According to Noyes, God reconciled all of humanity to God in the first and second coming of Christ. Christ both forgave all sin and purified humankind, and thus made moral perfection an attainable goal for the primitive church (the early Christian church) and its successors.⁷³ However, according to Noyes, the second coming of Christ made a certain kind of redemption possible but did not secure perfection permanently. In his words, the second coming meant Christ’s “coming in the power of judgment, to *reckon with, reward, and punish, those to whom he delivered the gospel at his first coming—we mean the day of judgment for the primitive church and the Jewish nation.*” Noyes was adamant that the second coming was not Christ’s final

⁷² Louis J. Kern, *An Ordered Love: Sex Roles and Sexuality in Victorian Utopias: The Shakers, the Mormons, and the Oneida Community* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); Mandelker, *Religion, Society, and Utopia*; Robertson, *Oneida Community: 1851-1876*; Constance Noyes Robertson, *Oneida Community: The Breakup, 1876-1881* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1972); and Oneida Community, *Handbook*.

⁷³ Noyes, *Berean*, 160-161.

appearance, “*We do NOT mean by the second coming of Christ, the FINAL AND GENERAL JUDGMENT.*”⁷⁴ According to Noyes, the second coming of Christ marked the judgment of the primitive church and the Jews. He predicted a third coming of Christ that would provide a parallel judgment of Christians.⁷⁵ For Noyes and his followers, therefore, the second coming of Christ enabled moral perfection but did not signal the end of time. That date still lay ahead.

This constitutive deferral between the second and third coming of Christ in Oneidan theology highlights something that is overlooked by understandings of utopia as physically or temporally distant. Here, the impossible future, while incomplete, was being realized in the present. Its arrival was underway but its closure still stretched ahead. For Noyes, the future was not distant but achieved already in seminal form: “The truth is, in both of these events—viz., the resurrection of Christ, and his second coming—the great last victory over the powers of death and hell, was achieved *in the seed.*”⁷⁶ Here, the metaphor of the embryonic plant offered an image of the future as neither present nor inaccessible but as arriving.

The telegraph ignited the dreams of the Oneida Community for what this new world could be. For a small residential community, their excitement for the telegraph was notable. The Oneidans’ self-description shifted with the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph; a vocabulary of electricity and telegraphy began to infuse their speech. For example, one

⁷⁴ Ibid., 276. Italics, capitalization and punctuation are in the original text unless noted otherwise.

⁷⁵ Noyes does not specify exactly when this third coming will take place. See Noyes, *Berean*, 275-300; George Wallingford Noyes, ed., *John Humphrey Noyes: The Putney Community* (Oneida, 1931), 236.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 335.

author recalls the “Bible-Game” in which community members read from the Bible every day: “If the letter of the Bible is a telegraph wire or a conductor for God’s spirit, then a good work was done of laying down cable in that old Bible-Game.”⁷⁷ This advent of telegraphic vocabulary into Oneidan speech reflected the mundane ways the telegraph became a compelling metaphor for understanding their religious experiment and the world in which they located themselves.

The *Circular* began to report diligently and regularly on the first Atlantic Telegraph Cable six years before its first success. The Atlantic Cable struck a particularly pertinent note for the Oneidans. From the first report, an article reprinted from the *N.Y. Observer* in November of 1852, through the 570 articles that followed on telegraph technology and the possibilities it opened, the Atlantic Telegraph became a focal point of Oneida attention and a critical means to frame their own religious endeavors.⁷⁸ Almost half of the articles printed in the *Circular* that referenced telegraphy focused on the crossing of the Atlantic by telegraphic communication (237 out of 570). Many of the articles printed on the telegraph provide highly technical information on elements of telegraph technology that one might doubt had anything at all to do with the isolated religious experiment of the Oneida Community, including details such as the laying of cable lines between Agra and Calcutta, the extension of the Morse patent, and the total

⁷⁷ “An Oneida Journal: Ocean Telegraph Jubilee!!” *Circular*, September 9, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137428230/13D834E7C5D69BF17AF/16?accountid=14244>.

⁷⁸ “Ocean Telegraph,” *N.Y. Observer*, reprinted in the *Circular*, November 20, 1852, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137420716/13D83515E5435079DE8/3?accountid=14244>. I arrived at the figure of 570 articles through key word searches of the digital archive of the *Circular* available through the American Periodical Series accessed through ProQuest. I read each article to verify pertinent content. <http://www.proquest.com/>.

miles of Western Union telegraph lines (112,191 as of July 1, 1870).⁷⁹ Such highly technical articles illustrate the Oneidans' interest in telegraphy, but they do not explain it.

⁷⁹ "Items," *Circular*, May 23, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137611795/13D8352632F125E98C3/8?accountid=14244>; "Matters of Mention," *Circular*, June 20 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137614844/13D835286BA5F2EEDBE/15?accountid=14244>; "News Items," *Circular*, October 17, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137635831/13D8356175417B36344/26?accountid=14244>. For additional examples, see reports printed in the *Circular* on the construction of new telegraph lines in "Article 1—No Title," August 31, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137422874/13D835871C71B896655/8?accountid=14244>; "The King of Nations," October 1, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137604199/13D83BA081B5017B213/12?accountid=14244>; "Submarine Telegraph to Cuba," *Tribune*, reprinted in the *Circular*, October 5, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137602350/13D839DFD046BA2A6CB/8?accountid=14244>; "Newspaper Enterprise," October 29, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137655003/13D8358AF127CD33668/9?accountid=14244>; "A Scriptural Illustration," June 27, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137667319/13D8358D4714B14C900/13?accountid=14244>; "Matters of Mention," August 12, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137601267/13D8358FA2E43F91108/10?accountid=14244>; "Matters of Mention," August 19, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137660650/13D83590C6976F357CC/12?accountid=14244>; "Article 1—No Title," August 26, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137617483/13D83591F1F2E5787A8/20?accountid=14244>; "Passing Topics," February 8, 1855, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137603276/13D8359481E5B2FFDAD/15?accountid=14244>; "Facts and Topics," July 5, 1855, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137442602/13D835969DF38357953/8?accountid=14244>; "Facts and Topics," September 20, 1855, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137442821/13D835986062BFEB7F/7?accountid=14244>; "Extension of the Telegraph to Australia," June 26, 1856, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137439763/13D8359AC8020431C5C/20?accountid=14244>; "Items," June 26, 1856, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137443903/13D83A3E4677E17BF2B/8?accountid=14244>; "Graceful," September 11, 1856, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137671276/13D83A4266C5F7961F0/8?accountid=14244>; "Miscellany," December 11, 1856, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137674986/13D83A48DBF75830648/6?accountid=14244>; "News Items," April 9, 1857, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137432097/13D83A4C18F41ADC986/9?accountid=14244>; T.L.P., "A Spark of Light," May 7, 1857, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137434984/13D83A4DDB22907AF02/10?accountid=14244>; "Latest News," December 24, 1857,

<http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137436605/13D83A4FA1969F9B7CD/8?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” July 1, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137427436/13D83A971BBB5BD242/13?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” September 23, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137440053/13D83A996063494D427/15?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” September 30, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137442417/13D83A9B85247B6493F/12?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” February 10, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137673137/13D83A9E41E6317A909/8?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” March 10, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137683079/13D83A9F7FE3DC65C79/14?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” June 16, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137440543/13D83AA147275A8BAC5/10?accountid=14244>; “Facts and Topics,” July 28, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137681057/13D83AA2DA2261F25F2/7?accountid=14244>; “The Amoor Country,” September 29, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137685280/13D83A4573174BDFF43/5?accountid=14244>; “News of the Week,” November 17, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137443438/13D83AA5BEAAD69D8E/8?accountid=14244>; “Matters of Mention,” February 9, 1860, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137447093/13D83AA8F584BF6ABA9/10?accountid=14244>; “Matters of Mention,” February 23, 1860, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137443426/13D83AAA7BC7D863A22/8?accountid=14244>; “The Orient,” March 1, 1860, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137686285/13D83AAC27C6BA27E53/20?accountid=14244>; “Facts and Topics,” October 4, 1860, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137444835/13D83AAE3E51A4B789/6?accountid=14244>; “Matters of Mention,” December 6, 1860, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137445478/13D83AB17087610BD3F/16?accountid=14244>; “Items on Various Topics,” January 24, 1861, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137438322/13D83AB41AD3546F9D2/8?accountid=14244>; “The Nearest Route to India,” October 3, 1861, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137442333/13D83AB712F7F016FA0/13?accountid=14244>; “Brief Mention,” November 28, 1861, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137623181/13D83B8C9314A6F272D/10?accountid=14244>; “Article 1—No Title,” January 9, 1862, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137621798/13D83B8FE422D54D4B0/10?accountid=14244>; “Late News,” August 21, 1862, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137623435/13D83B927926D00197B/11?accountid=14244>; “Late News,” January 8, 1863, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137694590/13D83B9569434AFE4DE/8?accountid=14244>; “Revolution in Poland,” March 12, 1863, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137693009/13D83B98B4C4E861824/10?accountid=14244>; “Important Events in Eastern Asia,” January 14, 1864, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137608748/13D83BA5F0221A2F0C9/18?accountid=14244>; “News Items,”

However, these articles were accompanied by a number of other articles that explicitly link telegraphic communication to Noyes's dreams of salvation in the form of global unity, the primary importance placed on communication with heaven, and the framing of

June 20, 1864, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137450780/13D83BA855D7C0FEB0/16?accountid=14244>; "Article 1—No Title," December 26, 1864, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137432814/13D83BAA6C31FB7E2AD/8?accountid=14244>; "Article 1—No Title," March 13, 1865, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137664509/13D83BAD7606AA4FAF4/10?accountid=14244>; "Article 1—No Title," October 22, 1866, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137667456/13D83BB057F16B53FE7/9?accountid=14244>; "The Amazon," *Scientific American*, reprinted in the *Circular*, February 4, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137672203/13D83D200D02C184DB8/16?accountid=14244>; "Article 1—No Title," May 27, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137672425/13D83D22BF47345EDC2/10?accountid=14244>; "News Items," August 26, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137437915/13D83D24DF017BC7324/19?accountid=14244>; "Query," December 9, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137671261/13D83D267AE74CDBB4A/24?accountid=14244>; "News Items," May 25, 1868, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137454645/13D83A5612549C3E1E2/19?accountid=14244>; "News Items," October 12, 1868, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137624123/13D83D294B472CCD2B9/18?accountid=14244>; "Items," August 23, 1869, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137676255/13D83D2C6AB77F176F6/18?accountid=14244>; "Items," September 13, 1869, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137625467/13D83D2DF5A7325EE10/13?accountid=14244>; "Items," January 31, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137684121/13D83D3242E6092EBC3/23?accountid=14244>; "Items," February 14, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137459962/13D83D33DAB27A31B64/14?accountid=14244>; "Items," March 28, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137460296/13D83D35B277F714A8D/27?accountid=14244>; "Items," May 16, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137683852/13D83D3758A70312FC/20?accountid=14244>; "Items," June 27, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137688607/13D83D395646E1E5EED/21?accountid=14244>; "Progress in New Zealand," August 22, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137440502/13D83D3AC33FD6642B/13?accountid=14244>; and "Matters of Mention," November 14, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137662934/13D83D3C1B242A3F2A8/24?accountid=14244>.

their religious endeavor as overcoming what was thought impossible.⁸⁰ On the night of September 1, 1858, at the Oneida Community's celebration of the Atlantic Telegraph's

⁸⁰ For reports on the telegraph as a mechanism of global unity, see "The Age of Unity," July 11, 1852, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137429181/13D8407A56458D73228/9?accountid=14244>; "A Universal Language," *Home Journal*, reprinted in the *Circular*, May 21, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137421266/13D8407D0071859BD81/18?accountid=14244>; "Unity, the Measure of Power," October 29, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137655481/13D8407F4F336479AE0/11?accountid=14244>; E. L. Blanchard, "Song of the Electric Telegraph," *Reynolds' Newspaper*, reprinted in the *Circular*, July 15, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137616897/13D845B906E3908E054/28?accountid=14244>; T. L. P.; "The Future of Commerce," January 13, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137428759/13D840960A9E5BFF4C/9?accountid=14244>; "Andrew Crosse, Electrician," May 2, 1864, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137445721/13D840833111816EE07/5?accountid=14244>; "The Good Time," September 6, 1869, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137630379/13D840858F4378CC7F4/3?accountid=14244>. For uses of the telegraph as a metaphor for ideal communication with the heavens, see "About the Convention," February 15, 1852, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137597278/13D84857F2226E3A5E/4?accountid=14244>; John Humphrey Noyes, "Table-Talk," May 23, 1852, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137600232/13D847E5E7158ED398C/13?accountid=14244>; W., "Progress," December 11, 1852, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137420237/13D847F277C1689294F/5?accountid=14244>; H. J. S., "Communications," September 19, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137657597/13D847F05AE101BC7E6/10?accountid=14244>; H. N. L., "Morning Thoughts," October 28, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137438351/13D847DA049F519F0E/22?accountid=14244>; J. R. M., "Lesson in a Telegraph Office," January 24, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137660344/13D847E018B33B3A971/14?accountid=14244>; E. G. H., "Community Paragraphs," September 23, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137442842/13D847D2F8330BA445F/19?accountid=14244>; John Humphrey Noyes, "Noon Discourses," May 27, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137668200/13D847E9F2F1658C44C/3?accountid=14244>; John Humphrey Noyes, "Noon Discourses," June 3, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137675848/13D847EC238B907680/3?accountid=14244>; "The Good Time." For examples of the telegraph understood as a gift from God, see W., "Talk about the Press," March 23, 1853, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137601873/13D848A6EC1D17D684/14?accountid=14244>; H. J. S., "A Look at Society," December 10, 1857, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137438784/13D848B98752FD004A7/6?accountid=14244>; "Our Relation to Inspiration," March 28, 1864, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview>

apparent success, H.M. Waters closed his toast after dinner with an illustrative junction of the Oneidan and telegraphic projects: “J.H. Noyes and Cyrus W. Field—one the layer of the spiritual telegraph; and the other of the Atlantic telegraph. May God send us more such men.”⁸¹ This toast reflects three important ways in which the Oneidans understood the significance of the Atlantic Telegraph: as a compelling metaphor for their own utopian endeavor, as a sign of the bridging of this world with God’s, and as a primary means for the unification of humanity through communication technology. This toast linked Noyes and Field for accomplishing unprecedented acts that ruptured the status quo.

Uniquely accomplishing the impossible sits at the heart of both the Oneidan religious undertaking and the way they imagined the world at the advent of the Atlantic Cable. Self-reflective consciousness of impossibility was a nodal site of Oneidan investment in their own identity as a religious group as they lived out the radical breach of impossibility enacted in the second coming of Christ. Naming both their religious project and their global imaginary as utopian draws attention to the critical role played by impossibility for them. The religious logic of overcoming impossibility tethered the particular Oneidan religious project to the prevalent global imaginary of a world united by communication technology. The claims of the *Circular* at the advent of the Atlantic

/137609826/13D848AB7FC629B00D5/6?accountid=14244; “Ice-Treatment,” March 6, 1865, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137659221/13D848B0F2F3FCC6BFF/13?accountid=14244>; Z., “Broad Piety,” December 4, 1865, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137666359/13D848BD7669AEE69A/5?accountid=14244>; and “The Second Coming of Christ,” November 26, 1866, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137616217/13D848BFE653FFEEA5F/6?accountid=14244>.

⁸¹ “An Oneida Journal,” September 9, 1858.

Cable were hyperbolic and, even couched in the enthusiasm of the time, could not have been read without skepticism. At the very least the declaration that war had permanently ceased would have struck Americans as suspect at a time when violence with Native Americans swept through the West and violence over slavery escalated toward the Civil War.

The Oneidans were not unaware of such skepticism. Many of the descriptions of the Atlantic Telegraph made use of the very idea of impossibility as further securing the cable's similarity to the Oneida Community and as further evidence of God's actions in the world:

Every such onward movement as that of the Atlantic Telegraph, that raises the faith and courage of mankind toward things that seemed impossible, makes it more and more easy to reach forward towards victory over death; and we may expect that progressive people will henceforth be found looking in that direction, and will become familiar with the hope we have.⁸²

The Oneidans believed that Christ returned to earth within the apostolic age and “finished salvation.”⁸³ In light of their perfectionist stance, “victory over death” was, in part, already grasped by humanity. The “impossible,” toward which courage and faith was raised, had already been achieved. Their “hope” here must be read in the double sense of already and not-yet; it was a hope secured by history. While it was clear to the Oneidans that not all of humanity yet shared their view, the Atlantic Telegraph in its similar overcoming of impossibility predicted the moment for them when “progressive people” would share in their belief that the impossible was accessible. The affinity for impossibility also figured in in W.A. Hinds's toast at the Jubilee. He asked why the

⁸² “Hymn,” *Circular*, September 2, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137444333/13D8490218A1606FA74/16?accountid=14244>.

⁸³ Oneida Community, *Handbook*, 46.

Atlantic Cable should “excite our enthusiasms as Bible communists?” The primary reason was that “*it was accomplished in the face of unbelief...* There is something in the successful resistance of unbelief, which cannot fail to insure our sympathy.”⁸⁴ That something was the accessible impossibility that served as the premise of the Oneida Community.⁸⁵

The centrality of achieving the impossible is fundamental to the way in which the Oneidan global imaginary illustrates a necessary refiguration of our understanding of utopia in American modernity. The Oneidans opened a theological avenue that could eclipse the permanent deferral of utopia. Because Oneidan theology posited a temporal gap between the past second coming of Christ and his future third arrival, the end of history extended into a span of time, and utopia had room to arrive continuously.

Impossibility acted as the very tie that bound the reality of the Oneidans’ lived

⁸⁴ “An Oneida Journal,” September 9, 1858.

⁸⁵ For additional examples of the telegraph paralleled to the Oneidan’s confrontation with impossibility, see “The Resurrection Change,” July 15, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137616358/13D8496E8ED48625F0D/16?accountid=14244>; D., “Communism Illustrated in Nature,” July 22, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137614180/13D8497796B62668EF1/16?accountid=14244>; A. W. C., “Preparation for the Kingdom of God,” April 26, 1855, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137664443/13D849745934221E104/5?accountid=14244>; “A Long Look Ahead,” July 10, 1856, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137671246/13D849727706096D312/22?accountid=14244>; C. S. J., “Give Communism a Chance,” January 9, 1865, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137452985/13D84984DCF27F67EE2/3?accountid=14244>; G., “Malthus on Equality,” August 6, 1866, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137439484/13D8497B38F3CE3A0EC/5?accountid=14244>; L., “‘Twin Relics’ Again,” October 28, 1867, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137677575/13D84987A21BDA41B/22?accountid=14244>; G., “Signs of the Times,” March 15, 1869, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137458314/13D849804D78D26F93/7?accountid=14244>; and H. J. S. “Providential Stirpiculture,” April 25, 1870, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137690260/13D84989E65B6D2786/4?accountid=14244>.

experiment to the fantasy of the world united by the cable—what they imagined the cable to have already accomplished—through a Christian logic of the possibility of radical rupture.

The Birth of Unity through Communication Technology

The Oneida Community serves as a compelling case study of one prevalent aspect of the impossible at the heart of modern global imaginaries: universalism. In both their religious project and what they imagined to be the effects of the transatlantic telegraph, the Oneida Community envisioned that global unity would emerge naturally from communication technology. Although their vision of global unity was particular to their religious commitments, the belief that communication would necessarily create unity was widespread in nineteenth-century America.

The kind of global unity the Oneida Community proposed directly contradicted the obvious geographical limitations demanded by their community structure. The Oneida Community, as a “family” governed by the law of complex marriage in which children were the shared responsibility of all of the adults, was geographically bound by its social and religious structure. While Noyes imagined a world governed by a singular church-state, neither he nor the Oneidans wrote about the logistics of implementing the keystones of their religious life worldwide.⁸⁶ Risking significant understatement, it could be said that expanding their system of Bible Communism, plural marriage, and stirpiculture to a global scale would have been difficult. All of these systems depended on

⁸⁶ Noyes, *Berean*, 444.

geographical and social consolidation, voluntary participation by members, and collective adherence to a centralized system of community governance.

Rather than outline a plan for expansion, as can be found in the writings of Fourier, the Oneidans wrote about the universalization of their spiritual project in general terms of realizing divine unity without limit.⁸⁷ In Oneidan theology, selfishness was conflated with individualism and its modern counterparts in property ownership and domestic life organized around heterosexual marriage. The divine promise was understood to directly oppose this system so that the end of selfishness was also understood as the end of the individual in favor of an infinite unity of human beings with each other and with God. Thus the totality the Oneida Community declared was not one of an implemented system of worldwide Bible Communism but rather a globe that would echo the unity they saw themselves forging in upstate New York. The logic of metonymy governed this move—the part stood in for the whole as if the whole were fully represented in the part without loss.

The theme of unity dominated the Oneidan global imaginary. This unity was adamantly presented not as a loose amalgamation of diverse organizations and religious sects but as the realization of a teleology of absolute homogeneity in which Christ, by abolishing sin, abolishes any form of division. According to Oneidan theology, sin was itself the expression of division. The article, “The Age of Unity,” which was reprinted three times over ten years, explained it this way: “The ages of the reign of sin have been

⁸⁷ Fourier, *Design for Utopia*. For an example of the way the Oneida Community universalized their project, see A. W. C., “Preparation for the Kingdom of God.” The only exception to this are some references to the telegraph enabling the kind of communication necessary for global democracy, as in “Democratic Theocracy,” *Circular*, January 5, 1860, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137431120/13D84A0D6D85EC9B844/3?accountid=14244>.

ages of *Division*. Sin itself is centrifugal, driving away from God and unity.” This division was expressed in six forms: “(1) death is an ordinance of division, (2) diversity of language, (3) dispersion of the race by distance, (4) the separation of Jews and Gentiles, (5) family exclusiveness, (6) property exclusiveness.” The meaning of the coming of Christ and, specifically, the abolition of sin was equated with the abolition of division; the Kingdom of God, the ultimate expression of the ideal world, was framed as the absolute unity of the world and the unity of that world to God and Christ: “Christ came to displace sin, and bring about *unity*.” According to the article, evidence for the eradication of division could be found in the primitive church and was further supported by the spread of communism (which was eliminating family and property exclusiveness), spirit manifestations, (which were eradicating division by death), and tools of communication such as the telegraph (which established a common language and abolished distance).⁸⁸ Here the telegraph was as important as the very structure of daily life for realizing the divine destiny of the world for these Bible Communists.

Unity sat at the heart of Noyes’s theology governing both the form of salvation and the organization of the community. According to Noyes, salvation would unify humanity and join humanity to God. He wrote in *The Berean*:

Through Christ, under the Gospel, God and man are identified. The two parties of the former covenant flow together and become one *in the mediator*; so that he is no longer properly a mediator. God, and Christ, and man, are not three, but one; for the divine nature dwells in all, and “God is one.” In fact, there is but one party to the new covenant; so that it might properly be called an unconditional

⁸⁸ “The Age of Unity,” *Circular*, July 11, 1852. “The Age of Unity” was printed in the *Circular* originally on July 11, 1852 and then reprinted on May 15, 1856, August 19, 1858 (the day the newspaper reported on the success of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable), and November 27, 1862.

promise.⁸⁹

Salvation took the form of absolute identity in which divine and human subjectivity were understood to be one and the same. This promise of unity was made possible by the second coming of Christ and was visible in the primitive church, but its complete realization was reserved for the final coming of the kingdom of God. For Noyes, the Old Testament saints loved God but were not yet the “sons of God” that they became at Christ's incarnation. The difference here was one of salvation expressed in terms of connection. As Noyes wrote, “Did not the Old Testament saints *love* God? Answer. Yes; and so, many servants love and honor their masters, while yet there is no *vital union*, no *blood-relationships* between them. So there was no *vital union* between God and man, till Christ came in the flesh.”⁹⁰ This emphasis on unity framed the very meaning of Christianity for Noyes, “To *believe* in the gospel, is to credit and heartily embrace the truth that God is reconciled to man, and that Christ is in all flesh.”⁹¹ According to Noyes, the salvific effects of the first comings of Christ were “fulfilled by believers by the energy of the *blood of Christ*, the spirit of the living God.”⁹² In other words, the work of Christ in humanity was realized through the kind of unification made possible by communion. The regeneration of humankind was, according to Noyes, a change in the spiritual condition of a person such that they find a “junction with the Spirit of God.”⁹³

⁸⁹ Noyes, *Berean*, 143.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 157.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, vii.

Noyes lamented the fracture of a united humanity into multiple nations and the division of the state from the church. He was adamant that such division, while perhaps necessary to the fallen state of humanity, reflected nothing of God nor the ultimate telos of the kingdom of God. Rather, the ultimate kingdom would be marked by the unity of the whole of humankind whether in glory or damnation: “When that kingdom comes, a principle of unity will appear which will draw them [the nations and organizations] all into one organization, or sweep them away with the besom of destruction.”⁹⁴ The arrival of the kingdom of God would eradicate the two “disunities” that concerned Noyes: the disunity of the nations from each other and the disunity of the state from the church. He rarely offered concrete systems for the government of this unified world. Rather, Noyes wrote that the unity heralded by the coming of God would not join independent entities into alliance but, rather, make them one.⁹⁵ The singularity of the kingdom was evidence for Noyes that separation itself would be overcome. Moreover, it was only through the divine kingdom that such a unity could be forged; for Noyes, “all confederacies but one are destined to extinction.”⁹⁶

Unity, as the telos for humankind, also served as the foundation for living life in expectation of that end: “the central doctrines of Perfectionism, one and all, draw with their whole face toward unity.”⁹⁷ In fact, the very faith they practiced was understood to be an act of union:

⁹⁴ Ibid.,443.

⁹⁵ Ibid.,444.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 446.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

Faith, which is the root of holiness, is an act of union. It joins the life of the believer to the life of Christ. It draws a man out of his individuality, and merges self in fellowship with another. It is directly opposed to isolation. And that which draws a man out of self into partnership with God, necessarily establishes in his spirit a social principle which draws him toward unity with his brother.⁹⁸

The holiness produced by faith was a form of unity, “We aver that every branch of the doctrine of holiness tends to unity.” Holiness was itself “essentially a uniting principle.”⁹⁹

Because holiness was not merely the absence of sin but the positive energy of love, holiness was a principle of attraction that bound humans to each other and to God: “Its tendency is to make all who possess it, one in heart; and unity of heart is the earnest unity of mind and action.” For Noyes, it was through this principle that holy people the world over shared “one heart, one mind and one voice.”¹⁰⁰ The whole world was, in its best form, a global unity.

The telegraph served as a powerful portent of the arrival of such unity. The Oneida Community understood the telegraph to eradicate distance, as it announced in the article celebrating the success of the 1858 Atlantic Cable, which echoed the eradication of distance attributed to the telegraph in “The Age of Unity.”¹⁰¹ Their writing on the telegraph invested it with a unifying power that far exceeded that of rapid and long-distance communication. Discourse on the telegraph for Oneidans and other Americans did not attend to the communication and commerce that would pass over the cables.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 461.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 462.

¹⁰¹ “An Oneida Journal,” August 12, 1858; “The Age of Unity.”

¹⁰² The Oneida Community, ultimately successful in their own commercial endeavors, did not see commerce as opposed to the kind of communism they lived and

Rather, the material link of the cable was the salient element of the telegraph's connective power. According to one Oneidan, "Telegraphs will wind their electric ways over all lands and under all oceans to the myriad homes of Communism. Then will come the fulfillment of the promise: 'The earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.'"¹⁰³ This same spirit of unity that was said to emerge from the work of the telegraph bound all nations together through communication and commerce such that "what takes place in one country must be of vital importance to all" with the ultimate end of "complete amalgamation."¹⁰⁴

The connection between communication and unity was not a strategy by which speech would produce agreement but rather a framing of communication technology in terms of union. Communication in this modern global imaginary was a specific way in which to enact unity because the modern global imaginary invented at the advent of the Atlantic Cable was premised on an idea of unmediated communication as perfect identity. In the absence of mediation, communication would be absolute homogeneity. In this way, the ideal communication would take place without mediation, without even the

advocated. Rather, they asserted: "It is an undoubted fact that the commercial intercourse of nations and individuals, is bringing men into new and closer relations of dependence and harmony; that it is bringing the wide world under the influence of civilization; that it is a mighty agency in the providence of God in preparing the way for the reign of human brotherhood and unity." T. L. P., "The Future of Commerce," *Circular*, January 13, 1859, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137428759/13D84ACDE831B6B8C26/9?accountid=14244>. Commerce was useful precisely by promoting another means for global unity. This early form of globalization, while particular to the Oneida Community, reflects a powerful and persistent enthusiasm for global commercial systems as a practice of global community implying unity where indeed there may be none.

¹⁰³ T. L. P., "The Future of Commerce."

¹⁰⁴ "The Good Time."

mediation of speech. In light of the imaginary of the Oneida Community, which framed the possibility of the kingdom of God in terms of a global and divine unity expressed through the idea of identity, communication approximated perfect union.

For Noyes and the Oneida Community, communication, even in its imperfect and mediated forms, could create the unity that marked the arriving perfect world. The perfect world took shape with the promise of a universal language that would signal unity in its very establishment. This universal language was thus understood not as an instrument to agreement but as unity in and of itself. One article expressed this in its closing lines: “In forty years more the earth may be belted round with cables and wires, differences of time may be abolished, and diversities of speech all sunk in, or at any rate subordinated to, one universal language—that spoken by the quivering needles of the telegraph.”¹⁰⁵ Dreams of a universal language were understood to be secured by the telegraph.¹⁰⁶

In a poem by E. L. Blanchard, reprinted in the *Circular* from the English *Reynolds' Weekly Newspaper*, the unifying power of technology was made clear: “O! Would that some kindred communion/To man we could hope to impart,/That a bond of such magical union/Might link every heart unto heart!”¹⁰⁷ The power of unity secured by the telegraph was understood through the idea of unmediated communication as the identity of subjects with one another to produce a single subject: the teleological unity of humanity, God, and Christ as one. In part this function of the telegraph was attributed to

¹⁰⁵ “Andrew Crosse, Electrician.”

¹⁰⁶ See G. W. N., “Future Telegraph Lines,” *Circular*, July 29, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137438302/13D87F1E51A4783EBEB/8?accountid=14244> and “A Universal Language.”

¹⁰⁷ Blanchard, “Song of the Electric Telegraph.”

the powerful trope of the cable itself. In an article on faith, the cable was valued both for its strength and the connection it enabled and bore both tropological weights in its apparent unification of the world. The cable was compared to faith as a medium of connection and understood to create unity through its mediation: “We should twist the little fibers of our own faith into one cord, and the cords of all into one invincible cable. This condensation of faith will conquer the world” and, ultimately, “bring heaven and earth together.”¹⁰⁸ Here the power of the cable as a metaphor of strong connection secured a meaning for telegraphy that far exceeded its actual technical power. This excessive meaning for the cable was echoed in a hymn sung at the Walpole, New Hampshire celebration of the Atlantic Cable that was then printed in the *Circular*, “By thy divine Messiah—/That true celestial wire—/ To Heaven we’re bound!...With thy word-woven cord/ Bind all men to the Lord,/ And Man to Man!”¹⁰⁹ Through the meaning that adhered to the cable, telegraphy became a mode of connection beyond communication inasmuch as it unified humanity regardless of the speech that would pass through it. Moreover, telegraphy’s power also exceeded even the fact of a physical link since it here would join heaven and earth.

Noyes made this framing of communication clear in his writing on what he saw as four kinds of belief: imaginative belief (i.e. without correspondence to the world of the senses), belief of testimony (belief confirmed by the reports of others), belief of reason (belief arrived at through rationality), and belief of the senses (belief arrived at through

¹⁰⁸ “Generalizing Faith,” *Circular*, September 2, 1854, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137602661/13D87F224AC6AEA6DB4/19?accountid=14244>.

¹⁰⁹ “Hymn.”

observation). Against these, Noyes posed a fifth kind of belief that he called “spiritual belief:” “One spirit can present itself to the perception of another and communicate thoughts and persuasions, without the intervention of any verbal testimony, any process of reasoning, or any impression of the senses.” Noyes went on to state that this form of belief “is proved by the phenomena of Mesmerism,” a method in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries of interacting through touch, electrical conduction, and eye contact with a magnetic fluid believed to be part of all animate beings.¹¹⁰

This framing of communication was in part what made the telegraph so compelling for the Oneida Community. Just as the community members built their lives as a collective, they imagined the telegraph to usher in an era in which such collectivity would be written on a global scale:

It will be observed that the meaning of this latest time-wonder is UNITY. The merchant may see one use for it, the news-writer another, the statesman a third; the true heart of *man* recognizes in it the token and medium of a broader and better *unity* than has heretofore prevailed. Every flash that passes over those deep oceanic wires, will carry a shock into the bowels of old-time isolation and prejudice.¹¹¹

The enemies of isolation and prejudice were here outdated by the transformation launched by the telegraph. The capacity for unity, however, pre-existed the telegraph in the internalized “true heart” belonging to the universal “man” that would override the

¹¹⁰ Noyes, *Berean*, 27.

¹¹¹ G.W.N., “The World’s Holiday,” *Circular*, August 12, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137440187/13D87F602851A838B53/12?accountid=14244>. This sentiment was affirmed by Edward Inslee, an Oneida Community member, who expressed his support for the meaning of the cable as unity in a letter then printed in the paper, E. R. Inslee, “Correspondence,” *Circular*, August 26, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137443363/13D87F5FB1375A50C0/17?accountid=14244>.

diversity of perspectives determined by different professions. The telegraph allowed that pre-existent capacity for unity to be manifest.

The telegraph thus held two possibilities. The first was a shared language. The second was a kind of communication closer to communion, a joining of subjects such that communication through speech would no longer be necessary. In his toast at the Jubilee, G.W. Noyes offered these words of linguistic unity:

The restoration of unity of language is one of the great things that may be foreseen among the effects of the International Telegraph. It will tend to bring the nations into a familiar group where they will talk directly together, and will gradually assume one form of language. Thus we shall retrace our steps and recover the ground that was lost by the dispersion of tongues. I would offer as my sentiment: The Electric Telegraph—may it send the Electricity of Heaven into the hearts of men, and so make the nations truly one.¹¹²

More than facilitate speech, the telegraph would secure the “mingling of the minds and hearts of the people” of the world.¹¹³ The Oneidians imagined that this mode of electric communication would forge a collapsed subjectivity that would serve to unite and utterly homogenize the world at once, a striking reflection of the structure of their communal life at home.

The absolute unity enabled by the telegraph, comparable to the holiness of the dispersed followers of Christ, disregarded physical distance. This idea of united hearts and minds was echoed in descriptions of the telegraph cable as a physical tie that linked two continents and promised a world that would be likewise bound. One report in the *Circular* described the way the two ships laying the cable would remain in contact with

¹¹² “An Oneida Journal,” September 9, 1858.

¹¹³ J.L.S., “Article 1—No Title,” *Circular*, September 3, 1857, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137437124/13D880063F63D54256C/6?accountid=14244>.

each other: "The wires will enable them during the entire process to telegraph each to the other at will, so that their combined movements will be as it were at the direction of one mind."¹¹⁴ The telegraph may be most productively read not as a medium per se but as a mode of communication that would overcome the mediation of space and time. In an article about meetings of the community, the editors of the *Circular* directed the readers to also attend to the possibility of communication beyond physical proximity. Here, they understood the telegraph and the railroad to both be bound to the physical world, in contrast to Christ who acted as a medium for union via communication independent of space: "If you know where to find [Christ's] spirit, you have access to all that is *in* his spirit; i.e. you touch a conductor that communicates with all believers, in heaven, in this world, and in Hades."¹¹⁵ Of note is that even in this attempt to envision communication beyond the telegraph, the dominant metaphor was electrical communication and the result was unity beyond distance. The telegraph, in its unbroken delivery of electricity, seemed to provide an unmediated mode of communication, appearing to cross space and time as if they did not exist.

The telegraph, then, disregarded distance by crossing it. In an early report of the plans to string a telegraph cable across the ocean, an article in the *Circular* stated that, "The line is intended to be used exclusively for the direct transmission of *foreign intelligence*, and when completed, the only unbroken link in telegraphic communication

¹¹⁴ "The Ocean Telegraph," *Circular*, September 25, 1856, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137612747/13D880190AE15D1537A/21?accountid=14244>.

¹¹⁵ "About the Convention."

for many thousand miles, will be the Atlantic Ocean.”¹¹⁶ The world buckled under the descriptive demands; the Atlantic Ocean was made the site of absolute communicative proximity by virtue of its vast expanse. Space and its meaning were reformulated so that the totality itself became the condition for intimacy; the globe became the condition for the kind of connection Oneida imagined itself to model for the world.

It is important to note that Noyes did not always value communication positively. Although writing eleven years before the first successful transatlantic cable, during which time the community’s tone on the matter became increasingly positive, Noyes referred to the dangers of communication for unity in *The Berean*. While discussing the ascendancy of the devil in the approach of the Millenium, Noyes wrote:

The channels of communication between Europe and the East—which during the dark ages were closed—have been opened by the improvements of navigation, and the revival of commercial enterprise; and in all communications between good and evil, where fallen human nature alone is concerned, evil has the advantage. Instead of imagining that England by her eastern enterprises has civilized Asia, we apprehend that Asia has well nigh *paganized* the spirit of England.¹¹⁷

It was not simply speaking together that promised unity, and a theory of democratic agreement should not be read onto Oneidan theology. Noyes was clear that nations alone could not unify the globe nor could conversation among practitioners of diverse religions. This unity would not be created with human tools but through divine power and would take shape as a divinely granted shared subjectivity. As such, this unity was not earned or achieved but arriving.

¹¹⁶ “Ocean Telegraph.”

¹¹⁷ Noyes, *Berean*, 341.

The Future in the Present

To understand the particular temporality of this kind of modern global imaginary requires a refusal of the mutual exclusivity of future and present. Scholarly literature locates imaginaries between description and creation. Alongside theories that consider this double labor of imaginaries in terms of fact and fiction or the natural world and the social worlds created through them, we must understand this essential ambiguity of modern imaginaries as temporal as well. Modern global imaginaries describe what is and what is to come without distinguishing between the two. It is this temporal ambiguity that enabled modern global imaginaries to declare the universality that also served as their central desire. A new utopian temporality is most useful to this study: the world imagined by the Oneida Community and others was not a future impossibility but an arriving reality. This formulation lacks closure, but it also lacks distance. It was a proximate and unfolding event taking place in the present as the arriving unifying kingdom of God. In this case, the future took place in the present continuous. The Oneidans understood their present to extend into a future that stretched before them as that future came rushing toward them swallowing oceans of distance in its approach.

The Oneidan utopian future took on the already-not-yet of Christian salvation and amplified it to the already-becoming of Perfectionism. In their writing on the Atlantic Telegraph, the ambiguousness of a present-future was apparent in the gap between the second and third coming of Christ. In a dialogue recorded just after the Atlantic Telegraph was successfully laid, a community member identified only as “G.” offered a temporal formula for the Oneidan imagination of the world that complicated the distance

of the future. G. attested to a feeling that the proximity of God was affirmed by “signs of it in the success of the Atlantic Telegraph. These are footsteps of his advancing presence.”¹¹⁸ Here the promise of presence has already marked the earth leaving a trace of its own future arrival. G. went on to say:

It was necessary that communication should first be established between heaven and this world—that there should be a line of connection for the transmission of the spirit of the Primitive Church into this world, in order that such a means of communication as the Atlantic Telegraph should be put to its proper use. A line connecting this world and heaven has been established, we are perfectly sure, and see in it a fitness and preparation for the event that we are all so much interested in.¹¹⁹

In this construction, a previous spiritual telegraph prepared the way for the Atlantic Telegraph. The Atlantic Telegraph fulfilled the unity of heaven to earth by providing the necessary means for an earth united to itself. The future that would be marked by the end of distance and the end of war was arriving. In the words, of G., “God is approaching the world.”¹²⁰

Conclusion

The modern global imaginary at the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph made use of a religious logic of overcoming impossibility to declare the arriving presence of an inaccessible future. The Oneida Community and the way they imagined and inhabited the

¹¹⁸ “An Oneida Journal,” August 16, 1858.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ C.W.U., “An Oneida Journal,” *Circular*, August 19, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137441994/13D880D822812865F57/17?accountid=14244>.

world in 1858 offered a refiguration of modern utopia that foregrounded the achievement of impossibility through religious logic, the imagination of a unified totality through communication technology, and the role of declaration in the institution of society. The Oneidan utopia's disfiguration of time and space in which the ocean became the most intimate site of connection because it was vast and in which the present was already at the end of history made the modern Christian move of rendering the impossible accessible. Modern American utopias should not be characterized solely by spatial and temporal dislocation nor should they be remembered only as islands or futures. The Oneidan imagination of the Atlantic Telegraph illustrates that some modern utopias were able to overcome the structural limitations of their own form. This is also true for other American modern global imaginaries authored around the Atlantic Telegraph that claimed the arriving perfection of the world well outside a theology of perfectionism. For example, an article in the *New York Herald* titled "The Atlantic Cable—The World Revolution Begun" in August of 1858 states:

The magnetic telegraph ceases to be a local, and becomes an instrument of universal power. It grasps the thought of man, and carries it instantaneously to the utmost confines of civilization. Henceforth the whole world is to be moved simultaneously by the same thought, and action will be immeasurably quickened... In science, art, literature, and every branch of knowledge, every event that will quicken the human intellect, every discovery that will open new paths of usefulness, every achievement that will confer new power on man, will be at once communicated to every wing of the great army of progress, and the march of the world will be incredibly hastened.¹²¹

¹²¹ "The Atlantic Cable- The World Revolution Begun," *New York Herald*, August 6, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11E7535B33246840&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

Even without a grounding theology in perfection, public discourse about the cable in America echoed what resounded in the Oneida Community: the Atlantic Cable heralded a new and better age.

A central element of this utopia—one that will be reflected in the case studies to come and other modern global imaginaries produced around shifts in technology—is the imaginary of the world as a unity produced through communication technology. For the Oneida Community, the unifying action and physical connection attributed to communication technology far exceeded its technical capacity and thus produced for them the promise of absolute identity of humanity with God. While other contemporary and later global imaginaries do not share the Oneidan theology of unity as salvation, the idea of the world as a coherent totality is a critical and persistent element of global imaginaries then and now. Global unity and the closure of a global totality are precisely what these global imaginaries declare even as such a unified totality stands clearly out of reach.

The Oneida Community did not ultimately presage the eradication of distance and war. The Community itself disbanded just twelve years after their declaration of a new age of peace and proximity. Rather than understand both the Oneida Community and the global imaginary they authored at the advent of ocean telegraphy as missteps of history, we should read these fictions as productive and enabling practices that never premised themselves on an adherence to factuality. Reading this imaginary as utopian encourages us to see that the ideals they presented may offer little recourse to reality—in fact, are likely envisioned as practices of breaching impossibility itself—but, all the same, provided powerful visions of the world that translated to lived practice. I am not arguing

that the communism to which the Oneidans aspired nor the global imaginary they declared really existed in the world. Rather, I am pointing to a site of human intellectual and material activity that not only disregarded association with what we might think of as reality but made use of the distance from reality in a particular religious logic that instituted their imaginary.

Religion in Oneidan imaginary of the world provided a specific construction of a particular Christian homogeneity. It also provided a unique logic that uses the departure from reality as the link between their beliefs and the world they configured around the Atlantic Cable. The Oneidans understood the cable to relate to their own endeavors precisely because stringing a telegraph cable across the ocean appeared to be an impossible feat. Such was the primary organizing term of their faith and their vision of a world united by global communication technology. The measure of factuality does little to help us understand the mechanisms of modern global imaginaries in general. These utopian global imaginaries produce a world that is inhabited differently because of the impossible totality they declare.

This chapter has offered a closer look at the function of declaration for modern global imaginaries that here served as the announcement of a proximate utopia in the present continuous. Declaration always works in tandem with deferral and commitment. The Oneida Community declared the arriving presence of the world they desired and, as such, declared the arriving presence of the world that their desire always ushered further ahead of them. The following chapter will explore the function of deferral through the missionary globe imagined by the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions.

CHAPTER 3

DEFERRAL: AN AMERICAN MISSIONARY IMAGINARY

Any device that enlarges one's environment and makes the rest of the world one's neighbors is an efficient mechanical missionary of civilization and helps to save the world from insularity where barbarism hides.

—Amos Dolbear, inventor of the telephone, “Electricity and Civilization.”

American missionaries understood that in order to lure young evangelists to foreign shores, convince people to convert to Christianity, and raise the massive funds needed to support these endeavors, a little magic might be in order. In August of 1847, a missionary named Cyrus Hamlin held such magic in his hands. He was one of three Americans invited to the summer palace of the Ottoman sultan Abdul Mejid. On the shores of the Bosphorus Straits, the three guests carefully unwrapped a valuable object that would make a name for Turkey as a country uniquely open to the influence of the West. Hamlin, a Protestant missionary sponsored by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, was accompanied by Dr. John Lawrence Smith, a geologist for the Turkish government, and John Porter Brown, Dragoman of the United States Legation.¹²² Cyrus Hamlin, in an effort to convert both Turkish Muslims and Orthodox Christians to the Protestantism he brought from the United States, did not

¹²² A dragoman was an official translator or interpreter between European countries or, in this case, the United States of America and countries or empires where Arabic, Turkish, or Persian was spoken.

unveil a Bible. Rather, these three men slowly removed the covering from an instrument that would become something of an emblem of American innovation in the decade to come: Morse's electromagnetic telegraph. In the setting of foreign exhibitions, this "wonder" of "American genius," as historian Yakup Bektas puts it, was a crucial strategy for the emphatic spread of American religion and culture.¹²³

It was through Hamlin that Morse's telegraph had come to the Ottoman Empire, and it was first revealed at the seminary Hamlin founded in Istanbul. It took eight years and Hamlin's mechanical ingenuity, not to mention a handful of lives when a group transporting the repaired telegraph machine from Vienna capsized on the Danube, to get from America to Turkey.¹²⁴ Upon its final successful arrival, Hamlin, Smith, and Brown took the telegraph to the sultan. There, in the midst of their electric magic show, something strange happened. Hamlin, Smith, and Brown set up the telegraph with one

¹²³ Yakup Bektas, "Displaying the American Genius: The Electromagnetic Telegraph in the Wider World," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 34, no. 2 (June 2001): 200, http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0007087401004320. Hamlin's own account of these events can be found in Cyrus Hamlin, *Among the Turks* (New York: Robert Carter and Brothers, 1878), 185-194.

¹²⁴ The telegraph's arrival was significantly delayed. The first time the telegraph entered the country, it was in the hands of R. Chamberlain who had partnered with Morse to work for Morse's patents in Europe and Asia. Morse was making a strong push for international recognition of his electromagnetic telegraph in competition with other similar inventions by Europeans. Chamberlain took up the task and brought the machine to Constantinople. Hearing that Hamlin had a galvanic battery in his seminary, Chamberlain brought a telegraph machine there. While the machine worked, it produced a number of errors and was unreliable. The two decided that Chamberlain would return to Vienna to have a new and improved machine constructed there before presenting Morse's telegraph for a patent in the Ottoman Empire. However, this attempt to introduce the telegraph to the Ottoman Empire was delayed by the unfortunate end met by Chamberlain when his boat capsized on the Danube. The telegraph was not presented for another eight years until Smith ordered the telegraph from America. It arrived with parts missing and thus Cyrus Hamlin was involved again. Hamlin supplied the missing parts, fixed the machine, and set it up in the seminary to practice in preparation for presenting it to the sultan. Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, 185-194.

station in the throne room and the other in a corner room of the palace. They wound the wire through the palace to connect one station to the other making sure that the message could not be transmitted visually. The sultan was asked to come up with a message they would then send through the rooms. There, in the confines of the palace walls, the sultan imagined the machine linking not room to room, but nation to nation. His message was, “Has the French steamer arrived? And what is the news from Europe?”¹²⁵ The telegraph was already understood to be part of a communication network that would extend far beyond palace walls and even national borders. The telegraph, before it had come to link even one Ottoman city to another, was imagined in global terms.

The sultan was impressed with the demonstration of Morse’s telegraph machine and invited Cyrus Hamlin, John Lawrence Smith, and John Porter Brown back to repeat their demonstration before a gathering of high-ranking government officials. The officials shared the sultan’s excitement, and it was decided that a telegraph line would be established to Adrianople, approximately 150 miles to the west. Although there were significant delays (which Hamlin attributed to the political machinations of the pashas, high-ranking members of the Ottoman political system), the line was finally built when wartime created a new and vital use for high-speed communication. In Hamlin’s words: “The Crimean War made it a necessity; and the lines have become numerous, uniting Constantinople with all the world. From the distant parts of the empire, from India, from America, from all parts of Europe, the telegrams pour into the capital, and are published morning and evening.”¹²⁶ In the thrall of the spreading vision of a rapidly uniting world,

¹²⁵ Ibid., 190.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 194.

the telegraph appeared to link the Ottoman Empire to a world that suddenly appeared as a totality: the distant shores of vast countries were forged into the single and complete “all the world.”

The telegraph did not merely bring the Ottoman Empire into communication with Europe, America, and India. This instrument was a key element in the powerful imaginary of a united and homogenous globe that became popular in America in the nineteenth century and fueled American commitments to missionary work in a broad cultural and religious sense. The idea of producing a whole world that would find unity through shared religion and culture was a central component of the way Americans talked about the mission work they performed at home and abroad. The proposal of expansive missionary success was encouraged by the potent idea of a whole world turned to Christ that took on the unique form of a bounded entity all corners of which the missionaries could access and convert. In the words of one Protestant publicist when California came under American control, “Home and foreign missions have struck hands on the Pacific. Bible and tract operations have girdled the globe.”¹²⁷ The world, when conceived of as a totality without remainder, could be bound completely by missionary efforts into the grand project of universal conversion. The early steps toward the first global electric communication network served as the foundation for this powerful and popular imaginary. New forms of communication technology were drawn into this imaginary through the meaning-making work of religion and the shared social investments religion secured.

¹²⁷ One of the Secretaries of the American Tract Society, *Home Evangelization: A View of the Wants and Prospects of our Country, Based on the Facts and Relations of Colportage* (New York: American Tract Society, 1849), 142-143.

This chapter focuses on the logic of deferral at work in this modern global imaginary. When the Ottoman sultan sent the telegraph message through his palace to ask about the news from Europe, he was speaking to a world of connection that had not yet come into being. In addition to the declarations that such a world had arrived, examined in the previous chapter, participants in this modern global imaginary produced a discourse of deferral that held this united world just out of arm's reach. In the mid-nineteenth century, Americans were caught productively in the tension between the world they desired and the world they encountered. This tension was made more acute by the American habit of announcing the arrival or the impending arrival of the desired world; this tension was sustained by the deferral that held the desired arriving world at a constantly receding horizon. Arjun Appadurai's maxim, "modernity belongs to that small family of theories that both declares and desires universal applicability for itself," frames the argument of this chapter: between declaration and desire sits deferral and its demands.¹²⁸ Deferral is a constitutive element of modern global imaginaries.

Deferral initially appears straightforward; it is creating an object (in this case, the whole unified world) and setting it in the future. However, there must be a motive for the deferral itself. That is, there must be something that explains why the object should but cannot arrive now. Deferral is not merely "later" but, rather, "not yet." It is a specific type of urgent delay that relies on the tension between the pull into the present and the push into the future. The pull into the present requires an occasion for this new world: a new context with new possibilities. To call on the language of the previous chapter, this is the radical rupture that enables utopia. Such rupture is utopian because it might take us into

¹²⁸ Appadurai, *Modernity at Large*, 1.

an unknowable future far from the failings of the present.¹²⁹ But deferral does not offer the open indeterminacy of an unknown future. Rather, deferral entails both the production of the imminent occasion of a new world and a precise description of what that new world will be. The second element of deferral, the push into the future, is the delay of a predetermined end. Deferral entails a final object that closes the indeterminacy of rupture into a conclusion. Americans engaged in missionary endeavors understood their present moment to offer radically new opportunities for relating to the rest of the world, and they understood those opportunities to lead directly to a world unified through communication into a whole and bounded Christian community. The whole unified world awaited only their missionary labor.

Many Americans implicitly understood the possibility of global unity to be founded on a demand for their action to create universal assimilation through various forms of cultural expansion, including Protestant mission. The focus here is not that Protestantism, American culture, capitalism, and technology composed the foundational elements that were adamantly disseminated by American colonialism. Scholars of religious studies have explored the spread of modern empire in depth.¹³⁰ Rather, the contention here is that certain ways of understanding what the world was and what it

¹²⁹ See the discussion of utopia in the previous chapter and Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia.”

¹³⁰ See Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003); David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1996); Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Postcolonial Theory, India, and “The Mythic East”* (New York: Routledge, 2007); Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions; or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979); Styers, *Making Magic*; and Tyrrell, *Reforming the World*.

could be emerged because of the idea of a connected globe and the particular way it brought such agents of colonialism as Christian mission and technological change into relationship. These relationships and the particular ways they were secured continues to require a robust account. Empowered by the articulation of cultural expansionism—including mission, new advances in technologies of travel and speech, and the spreading commitment to the promise of a unified world—communication technology appeared to be an agent of unity when little evidence implied that more communication would breed peace and understanding.¹³¹ American Protestantism provided the logics and imagery that secured such a meaning for communication technology. Technology and religion acted together as agents of a whole new world.

This chapter will illustrate the work of deferral in modern global imaginaries by examining American missionary discourse and practice in the nineteenth century. The imaginary produced by the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions (ABCFM) echoes the unity and perfection found in other renditions of this modern global imaginary, such as that of the Oneida Community. American Protestant missionaries offer a particularly important lens into the production of this imaginary because they were directly engaged in the work of producing their desired universal culture. As the principal organization of American Protestant mission in the nineteenth century and as a community that spanned Protestant sects, American states, and numerous foreign mission sites, the ABCFM offered a dominant voice of American religion at the time. The

¹³¹ For helpful discussions of the empirical violence enacted through translation in the study of religion, see Arvind Mandair, *Religion and the Specter of the West: Sikhism, India, Postcoloniality, and the Politics of Translation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) and Ananda Abeysekara, “The Un-Translatability of Religion, the Un-translatability of Life: Thinking Talal Asad’s Thought Unthought in the Study of Religion,” *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion* 23 (2011): 257-283.

missionaries also served as vehicles for the commitment of other Americans who participated in this venture from home by providing financial and social support to the ABCFM.

This chapter draws on archival research on the modern global imaginary produced and participated in by the ABCFM and critical theory on modern global imaginaries, religious studies, and technological change. Woven through this study of the ABCFM, its missionaries, and its leaders is the thread of Cyrus Hamlin and his time in the Ottoman Empire. His work and thought is chronicled in two monographs he published about his life, *Among the Turks* (1878) and *My Life and Times in Turkey* (1893). Hamlin and other missionaries also left a significant archive of letters and reports that were preserved by the ABCFM. Much of the archival data here comes from the *Missionary Herald*, the newspaper of the ABCFM, established in 1821. It contains reports from missionaries, notes from the annual meetings of the ABCFM, sermons, and essays. Because many of the articles in the *Missionary Herald* are unattributed, the authors of articles are listed when they are identified. The ABCFM is listed as author for unattributed reports of the organization's annual meetings. Secondary histories of Hamlin and the ABCFM also provided data.

This chapter highlights the two elements that produce deferral: the establishment of a new context, which occasions radically new possibilities for the world, and the creation of a fixed end for these possibilities, which insists on a future world unified by communication technology into a cohesive Christian community. The production of a new context occurs through concerted cultural attention to technological change. The meaning of these technological changes was amplified by new potent metaphors for

social life. From the conception of the neural network as a biological system of electric communication in animals to the telegraph cables binding the globe, this era was dominated by the idea that distance was no longer an obstacle in pathways of information. Proximity despite—or, rather, in defiance of—geographical distance became a reigning trope in descriptions of social forms from the nation to the world. This chapter addresses three specific metaphors at play in these ideas of proximity and union: the whole world as the field of mission, the whole world as consisting of neighbors, and the whole world connected by a communication network.

A brief discussion of deferral will foreground the critical vectors of desire, promise, and urgent delay that run through modern global imaginaries. The following section turns to the fixed end Americans involved in Protestant mission produced: a whole Christian world unified by communication. This vision of an end point closed the indeterminacy of radical rupture through two logics. The first is a concept borrowed from rhetoric: synecdoche, in which a whole is represented by a part and that part can stand in for the whole. While the neighbor and the network provided images of a world produced through the equal participation of all of its members, these metaphors were underwritten by a logic of expansion in which the whole world was aggressively made in the image of an imagined idealized Anglo part. This turn to synecdoche helps to highlight the power and near-sightedness that shaped this imaginary of the united world. The second logic is progress, which served as a frame that joined technological change to Protestant conversion for the sake of a future that was already mapped out and deemed, at least by the missionaries, as good. The chapter closes with a final discussion of deferral and its importance for modern global imaginaries.

Deferral, Desire, and Promise

Common sense might lead us to think that Americans who participated in this imaginary *first* desired a unified communicating Christian world but *then* encountered a world of fracture, power plays, war, and endless miscommunication. This disparity *then* inserted deferral into the imagined ideal world and pushed it out of reach. Such an ordering creates a series of causal relationships moving from desire to encounter to a retroactive deferral. It is more productive to invert or collapse such causal linearity. Deferral was not tertiary to modern imaginaries of the world but, rather, foundational. Only deferral can open the opportunity for creative labor in the production of this world. If the world arrived now, the window for action would be closed. The cultural work made possible by deferral—indeed the cultural work on which imagination is founded—takes two forms. The first is a concrete labor to produce a world according to an imaginary: in this case, American mission endeavored to create the cohesive Christian world that this imaginary promised. The second form of work is more abstract but no less important. It is the work of imagination itself: the production of an ideal image of the world to which enabled cultural producers would aspire.

The first kind of action, the concrete cultural work that produced this imaginary, took shape, in part, as American mission. Deferral built a need for cultural expansionist labor into the imaginary of the world as a unified totality. Here the modern pairing of declaration and deferral activates the logic of promise in which an object is presented as a secure future (a whole unified world) but then held in reserve until a series of attendant demands are met (create universal culture). American missionaries were sent across the globe in an effort to spread Protestantism to Europe, Asia, the Middle East, and Africa.

The missionaries worked to convert Catholics, Jews, Eastern Orthodox, and Muslims to what they hoped would be a universal Christianity and also sought to spread American education, technology, industry, and culture (often coded as “civilization”). Many Americans had enthusiastically declared a new global unity. Only by activating the logics of promise, which presented that new reality as deferred and conditional (i.e., this new world will come into being if and only if those equipped with the correct technology, language, culture, and religion make it so), could they forge a space that required their particular aggressive religio-cultural contribution.

The second form of work was the production of an ideal image of the world through the work of imagination. A helpful way to think about this work is to set this world before its reflection. French psychoanalytic theorist Jacques Lacan, in his landmark essay on the mirror stage, describes a process by which one becomes a subject by identifying with a mirror image that presents the self as stable with fixed boundaries.¹³² This image feels impossibly coherent for one who senses oneself to be a chaotic mess of turbulent movements. The being identifies with its image in the mirror while also experiencing a terrible sense of alienation from that very image. There is at the heart of this identification the simultaneous loss of self that such production of self requires. It is presence and absence simultaneously, and the presence and absence require each other to produce this event of self-creation. Similar to the image in the mirror, a global imaginary presents a world that is far more coherent and stable than the world we experience. We identify with it, but only through an experience of alienation: an image of the world is

¹³² Jacques Lacan, “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience,” in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 75-81.

produced, but it is not the world we know. At the advent of the Atlantic Cable, the desired coherent world, the world of nineteenth-century fracture, and the gap of alienation between them were the locus of imagination.

For modern global imaginaries, three elements are at work in this gap: desire for the coherent image to be a proper representation, deferral as a way to account for the unmistakable gap between the coherent image and the fractured experience, and the logic of promise that holds the desired image as a fixed end to its deferral. This whole world *will* be the world after a time. In this understanding, desire, deferral, and promise are mutually productive, and each fuels the other. Desire always calls us to want something new, something more, or as Jacques Lacan would have it, to want again, another, still, or as he puts it, “*encore*.”¹³³ As much as desire reaches toward satisfaction, desire expects dissatisfaction. No matter what partial unity might be won through international mission or a communication network, it would never be enough, never make “all the world” completely part of this unity. Desire thus produces deferral by always extending itself and refusing satisfaction upon the acquisition of the desired object.

In addition, desire locks us into an economy of promise that offers a fixed end that is both guaranteed and conditional. We work toward that desired end but, because what we achieve never fully satisfies us, we are sustained inside the loop of promise. That fixed end always sits in the future and is dependent on our continued labor. This modern global imaginary promised world peace and global unity but was conditional on the spread of Christianity to all corners of the earth. Implicit in this promise was another

¹³³ Jacques Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality, the Limits of Love and Knowledge; Encore (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book XX)*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 1998).

promise: that Christianity could offer such ambitious ends and that Christians themselves were unified.

Similarly, deferral creates the ground of desire by both identifying what we want and then setting it just ahead of where we are. Deferral produces promise by setting a fixed end at a future point and thereby calling forth a set of demands. Promise activates desire and deferral by offering an object in completion but then withdrawing it to a future time. Promise, as more thoroughly discussed below, plays with conditionality. It offers certainty (a promise as an oath) but also entails a certain set of demands that must be met. As Sara Ahmed sets out in *The Promise of Happiness*, promises discipline by creating some possible futures while foreclosing others and by requiring certain subjects who approach a given future in certain ways.¹³⁴ The logic of promise always entails demands and thereby conditionally offers a fixed future.

The New World

The production of radical rupture set the stage for a new unified world to come into being. This section begins with a discussion of the particular shape this imaginary took in the writing of American missionaries and those who supported them. By making the whole world the mission field, Americans involved in mission produced an ideal image of the whole world and deferred it to a future that was conditional on missionary labor. Americans created a new context for that new world from the appearance of new technology. This section examines the role of new technology in producing a new context

¹³⁴ Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*.

and the manner in which such technology was given religious meaning in missionary discourse and practice. New technology became an important tool for American mission by serving as an aid to missionaries and as a spectacle to attract potential converts.

Technology also empowered two metaphors that invigorated the idea of global unity as a novel possibility: the neighbor and the network. This section will address each in turn.

“The Colossal Scheme of the World’s Evangelization” : The Whole World as the Mission Field

The ABCFM began as a small sectarian organization in the early 1800s and grew to become the primary engine of American international mission in the nineteenth century. Originally made up of Massachusetts Congregationalists, the organization accepted support from the Presbyterians and elected commissioners from New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania by 1812 and thereby established itself as a national and multi-denominational venture.¹³⁵ It quickly adopted the ambitious goal of evangelizing the entire world. As the Reverend Arthur T. Pierson of Detroit, Michigan wrote in the *Missionary Herald*, the newspaper of the ABCFM, in 1881, “The time has fully come for concluding the colossal scheme of the world’s evangelization as an enterprise of the united Christian Church...by a division of the field which is the world.”¹³⁶ ABCFM

¹³⁵ Clifton Phillips, *Protestant America and the Pagan World: The First Half Century of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, 1810-1860* (Cambridge: East Asian Research Center at Harvard University, 1969), 32.

¹³⁶ Arthur T. Pierson, “Miscellany: The World Evangelized in Twenty Years,” *Missionary Herald* 77, no. 7 (July 1881): 277, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137185383/13DAD7BA8F467F4AA03/16?accountid=14244>.

historian Clifton Phillips claims that “The directors of foreign missions had no grand strategy for the Christian conquest of the heathen world.”¹³⁷ That did not seem to stop the Board from trying. The ABCFM stated regularly that its primary goal was to evangelize the whole world through decades of its history, including in the annual reports of 1836, 1859, 1878, and 1895.¹³⁸

Missionary work in specific sites was framed within this expansive goal. In a paper read at the 1881 Annual Meeting of the Board, the Reverend Judson Smith, Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Oberlin Theological Seminary, began with this declaration: “The conversion of China must prove one of the most significant and decisive steps toward the evangelization of the whole world.”¹³⁹ He closed his remarks with a prayer in a similar vein, “And God grant to the young men... with a noble ambition to press forward to this work in such numbers and with such importunity that the majestic movements of God’s providence and Spirit may only surpass the resistless march of the

¹³⁷ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 266.

¹³⁸ American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Annual Meeting of the Board,” *Missionary Herald* 32, no. 11 (November 1836): 439, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137163138/13DAD7CE52C36591CDC/16?accountid=14244>; American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Annual Meeting,” *Missionary Herald* 55, no. 11 (November 1859): 32, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136982217/13DAD80DE087204CBB9/1?accountid=14244>; American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Annual Meeting of the Board, Part 1,” *Missionary Herald* 74, no. 11 (November 1878): 353, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136996663/13DAD810D8F316863E4/1?accountid=14244>; and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Reports of Committees at the Annual Meeting,” *Missionary Herald* 91, no. 12 (December 1895): 537, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137197211/13DAD815B3D35913E7F/20?accountid=14244>.

¹³⁹ Judson Smith, “China and Christian Missions,” *Missionary Herald* 77, no. 12 (December 1881): 486, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137174283/13DAD8325B14A30B9F2/7?accountid=14244>.

Christian host that arm themselves for the world's conquest to Christ."¹⁴⁰ The evangelization of the world was the primary call of the ABCFM and became an assumed mark of commitment to Christian mission in general. In the words of the Reverend Hitchcock of Chicago, "Now beyond a doubt, this spirit of our body is vitally related to the evangelization of the world." Hitchcock was not satisfied that it be merely the central commitment of missionaries and demanded that it be the central commitment of the church as a whole, from the individual pastor to every corporate entity:

When pastors are installed let us ask this question, "Brethren, do you believe that the evangelization of the whole world is the final end of your ministry?" And when churches are recognized let us ask the same questions. Let us put it into our articles of faith, into our covenants, and into all the constitutions of our associations. Here is described the normal sphere and the appointed function of the entire church in all its membership, and all its machinery, and all its associate life.¹⁴¹

Hitchcock's words illuminate the enthusiasm with which the whole world became a new and demanding missionary object. At this moment in the nineteenth century, when advances in travel and communication were part of a new dominance of the global over the local, the whole world was novel and its conversion urgent.

This was not only true for American missionaries; the powerful idea of the whole world at the brink of universal evangelization was significant for British missionaries as well. In his remarks to celebrate the fifty-year anniversary of the ABCFM, Mark Hopkins quoted the founding constitution of the London Missionary Society that described the new missionary enterprise as the "greatest of all schemes—the evangelizing of the

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ A. N. Hitchcock, "Congregationalism in Foreign Missions," *Missionary Herald* 93, no. 1 (January 1897): 13, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137007697/13DADA12E7C1DDCA890/17?accountid=14244>.

world.”¹⁴² This shared goal provided an important common ground between the British and American missionary societies. When reporting on the forty-second anniversary of the British Church Missionary Society, the *Missionary Herald* assured its readership that the English missionaries and their patrons all bear “hearts...enlisted in the great work of converting the world to Christ.”¹⁴³

Naming the whole world as the site of mission produced a global imaginary as a totality. The whole world called into being here was comprehensive and complete; there was no remainder. This absence of remainder was both internal to the world—there was no part of the world left out of this conception—and external to the world—nothing exceeded the world itself. This is not to say that transcendence was not active or powerful in this imaginary. Much of the expansive Protestant theology of the time reflected a transcendent god. However, the mission field was the world and the world alone, and this world-as-mission-field was absolutely coincidental with the geographic globe. In his “Semi-Centennial Address” at the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the ABCFM, Dr. Hopkins stated, “Now [the ABCFM’s] mission stations belt the globe, so that the sun does not set upon them, and the whole world is open.”¹⁴⁴ He continued, “The circuit of that globe, with every continent, and island, and ocean that it rolls up to the sunlight or

¹⁴² The founding documents of the London Missionary Society (1795) quoted in Mark Hopkins, “Semi-Centennial Discourse,” in *Memorial Volume of the First Fifty Years of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions*, ed. Rufus Anderson, 5th ed. (Boston: The Board, 1862), 23.

¹⁴³ “Proceedings of Other Societies,” *Missionary Herald* 38, no. 8 (August 1842): 343, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137172409/13DADA2D16D3B89672F/15?accountid=14244>.

¹⁴⁴ Hopkins, “Semi-Centennial Address,” 16.

buries in its shadow is now known; and this it is that we are to conquer for Christ.”¹⁴⁵ In each of these cases, the world was imagined as an encapsulated totality with no outside. It was the site of potential uniformity and offered the possibility of a bounded whole. The world in this ideal form would be both complete and completely converted.

Dr. Hopkins remarked on the novelty of this experience of the world: “For the first time since the dispersion of men, is the world waking up to the consciousness of itself as one whole.”¹⁴⁶ Many of the descriptions of this world were preoccupied with the novelty of the idea of the whole world and the singularity of their historical moment as offering radically new ideas about the whole world as the site of mission. Christian ideas of the whole world date back to biblical literature, and biblical uses of the idea of the whole world are regularly quoted by the ABCFM.¹⁴⁷ The questions that emerge are: Why

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ For example, see “Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15) quoted in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Annual Meeting of the Board,” *Missionary Herald* 55, no. 11 (November 1859): 321 and A. N. Hitchcock, “Congregationalism in Foreign Missions,” *Missionary Herald* 93, no. 1 (January 1897): 13; “The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea” (Habakkuk 2:14), quoted in Condit, “The Monthly Concert,” *Missionary Herald* 65, no. 11 (November 1868): 373, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136981524/13DADBB6D2619309D9B/9?accountid=14244>; “the world shall know that Thou has sent me” (John 17:23), quoted in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Annual Meeting of the Board, Part 1,” *Missionary Herald* 73, no. 11 (November 1877), 337, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136983170/13DADBBC7FF5AD24BA3/1?accountid=14244>; “unto the uttermost parts of the earth” (Acts 1:8) quoted in American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Annual Meeting of the Board,” *Missionary Herald* 74, no. 11 (November 1878): 353; and “God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16), quoted in E. K. Alden, “Foreign Missions the Test of Christian Character,” *Missionary Herald* 80, no. 11 (November 1884): 80, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137191046/13DADBC4A7F2B6D8195/5?accountid=14244>.

did this idea of the whole world feel new in the nineteenth century? What elements of this imaginary provided a sense of novelty? Why did the wholeness of the world call forth such investment by American Protestants at that time?

New Technology

New technology served as an important touchstone for Americans as they produced a new context for a new world. As new technologies of communication exploded on the American scene, Americans who participated in this imaginary invested them with powerful cultural and religious meanings. In her thorough cultural study of new technologies, *When Old Technologies Were New: Thinking About Electric Communication in the Late Nineteenth Century*, communication studies scholar Carolyn Marvin outlines the regularity with which new technologies of the nineteenth century were paired with dreams of new social unity. “The more any medium triumphed over distance, time, and embodied presence, the more exciting it was, and the more it seemed to tread the path of the future. Such achievements were often imagined in great detail. And always, new media were thought to hail the dawning of complete cross-cultural understanding, since contact with other cultures would reveal people like those at home.”¹⁴⁸ These new technologies of steam, railroad, telegraph, and print appeared to offer new ways for expansive Protestantism to insinuate itself around the world. For American missionaries in the nineteenth century, technology was a useful tool for engaging potential converts because it enabled faster and broader missionary

¹⁴⁸ Marvin, *Old Technologies*, 194.

communication and served as a spectacle with which to enchant would-be Christians. However, technology was also deeply entwined with mission as part of a group of articulated ideas that formed the fabric of American cultural expansionism. Linked through the central node of progress, Protestantism, communication technology, and the Anglo culture of which they were a part were integrated elements of mission work. Technology should not be understood only as a tool or technique used by missionaries. Rather, technology and mission together participated in the creation of a global imaginary that promised an imminent unity that would emerge from connections forged through technologies of travel, communication, and religion.

Understanding missionary focus on the telegraph requires some discussion of the use of mechanical and electrical technologies in mission work itself. Of interest to this study are three principal means by which technology was used to create a context of radical rupture that enabled a new world to come into being. Technology was a tool of mission used by missionaries to reach more people more quickly, to create a spectacle that would lure in prospective converts, and to win them over to the cause of spreading American culture. Technologies of communication also provided a new way to realize the old Christian trope of regarding everyone as a neighbor and, thus, to participate in producing the idea of the world as made up of universal neighbors. Lastly, technology was a key factor in a new form that emerged in the nineteenth century to describe both electrical and social connection: the network. In these ways, technologies participated in reshaping ideas about Christianity and, ultimately, the world.

A key example of how new technology participated in creating new understandings of Christianity and the world can be found in the descriptions of

Christianity as a widely transportable object, a new idea at that time. Missionary consideration of communication technology reveals a very interesting development in the function and understanding of religion in international evangelization. Certainly discourses of American Protestant Christianity as an experience of faith, the public declaration of adherence to doctrine, and lived practice according to Christian principles continued to circulate. However, a discourse on Christianity as a translatable and transportable object gained traction as American missionaries began to adopt the goal of spreading into bigger, more distant, and less accessible territories. Rather than aiming toward producing religious commitment dependent on internal change and public commitment, Christianity in this evangelical discourse was shaped around discussions of delivering the religious object to more people in less time and over greater distances. “The missionary in the printing-office can do more to make Christ known among the people than ten men could do faithfully preaching daily in the streets and bazaars of the city.”¹⁴⁹ Framed in this pragmatic sense of spreading mission to more places and more people, technologies came to be understood in terms of delivery.

The delivery of Christianity to areas that were heretofore unreachable for geographical and political reasons participated in an articulation of technologies of travel and technologies of information. Communications theorist James Carey identifies this as the transmission model of communication. In the nineteenth century, both travel and speech were understood as “communication,” and both were governed by the idea of moving people, goods, or information from one site to another. The postal system and

¹⁴⁹ Mr. Hume quoted in William E. Strong, *The Story of the American Board* (New York: Arno Press, 1910), 166.

railways were excellent examples of this.¹⁵⁰ As advances in communication (both travel and speech) made the movement of missionaries and missionary products such as leaflets faster and more wide-ranging, missionary ideas about Christianity became biased toward concepts of transmission. One goal of mission became transmitting Christianity to more people in more places at higher speeds, which also shaped the way the world was produced in missionary discourse. The world became the site of mission as the recipient of so much newly empowered transmission. This is why “the Colossal Scheme of the World’s Evangelization” seemed possible in new ways with new technologies of communication in the nineteenth century. Thus, the whole world could become the mission field.

The notion that missionary work was a project of spreading more information to more people in less time was, of course, contested. As ABCFM historian William Strong frankly points out, “a list of publications, with the number of copies circulated, did not furnish a kindling report of a year’s work to most of those who supplied the funds for it.”¹⁵¹ Funders and others engaged in the missionary endeavor held a persistent investment in the image of a personal “delivery” of the gospel. In 1856, after a visit to the missions in India and Ceylon led by ABCFM Secretary Rufus Anderson, the Board instituted a series of changes in missionary policy, including reductions in educational activity, decreased emphasis on printing in favor of increased emphasis on direct

¹⁵⁰ James W. Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication,” in *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 15.

¹⁵¹ Strong, *American Board*, 166.

evangelism through preaching, and a turn to vernacular instruction.¹⁵² These changes, however, followed the ABCFM's significant investment in other forms of mission in which technology was integral.

Technology as Tool and Spectacle

Cyrus Hamlin brought Morse's telegraph machine to the sultan as part of his missionary work because Hamlin saw little distinction between saving souls through the gospel and saving souls through industry. Hamlin spent years working toward the presentation of the telegraph to the sultan and devoted a whole chapter to the story in his monograph on his years in the Ottoman Empire, *Among the Turks*.¹⁵³ In his account of the event, the telegraph provided a perfect opportunity to illustrate the deep links between theology and mechanics. The sultan, Hamlin reported, took great interest in the machine and how it worked and was especially intrigued by the apparent fact that iron semicircles only magnetized when in contact with an electric current:

[The sultan] took the iron semicircles, laid them on the coil, laid the coil on them, and placed them in every possible position, with no result; but when he passed the ends within the coil, they instantly cohered with a *click* that surprised him. At length, throwing them down, he turned to me, and said, "Why is this so?" I replied, "Your majesty, science makes known to us facts, but God only knows the reasons of those facts." He immediately bowed his head reverentially, and said no more.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵² American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Report of the Deputation to the India Missions Made to the American Board of Commissioners of Foreign Missions at a Special Meeting, Held in Albany, N.Y., March 4, 1856* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1856), 53 and Phillips, *Protestant America*, 53.

¹⁵³ Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, 185-194.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 188.

Hamlin put God in the machine by turning to the plot device of *Deus ex machina*: God appeared out of nowhere to solve the problem of incomplete scientific knowledge.

The strategy of using technology as a mission aid was not uncommon for Hamlin. Hamlin spent thirty-five years in the Ottoman Empire. He was originally appointed by the ABCFM in February 1837 to head a high school in Constantinople. Hamlin arrived in Istanbul in 1838 and, in the midst of political upheaval that directed attention away from the unwelcome incursion of Protestantism, he opened the Seminary of the American Board in Bebek in 1840.¹⁵⁵ He made little distinction between his work to spread American engineering, including the telegraph, and his work to spread the gospel. Each became an opportunity for the other. Hamlin used experiments in physics, a particular interest of his since his early education, as a means to attract “gentlemen of high standing” to the seminary.¹⁵⁶ Hamlin’s interest in mechanical engineering was well-known and earned him an ironic nickname: “The Turks ascribe mechanical invention to Satan, the ‘stoned devil’ against whom they pray five times a day. I have myself, for some supposed mechanical ability, been seriously introduced by one Ottoman to another as ‘the most Satanic man in the empire!’” Hamlin regularly repeated this story in his monographs, which implies a wry pride at the moniker, but he also lamented that it was

¹⁵⁵ Bektas, “American Genius,” 200. This seminary was one among many Christian missions in the Ottoman Empire. The Jesuits made a concerted effort to establish Catholicism in Turkey. Hamlin often referred to Jesuit presence as a benefit to both Christian groups. He made clear, though, that his acceptance of the Jesuits was an act of benevolence and confidence in Protestantism. He was not sparing with his critique of their piety. For example, he wrote of what he sees as the relative lack of progress of Catholic missions, “Had their early missions been conducted in a more Christian spirit it can not be doubted that they would have met with far greater success.” Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, 72.

¹⁵⁶ Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, 77.

“not favorable to mechanical progress.”¹⁵⁷

Hamlin often involved mechanical proficiency in his evangelical endeavors, from a seminary bakery to a laundry service for British soldiers during the Crimean War. He understood technology to be a critical step on the path to conversion: “The general progress of civilization, the railroad, the steamboat, the telegraph, the expansion of commerce, the increase of travel, have all united in softening the prejudices of the Moslem mind.”¹⁵⁸ Hamlin was interested in carefully defining the often porous boundary between missionary work and other kinds of aid and saw industry as a means of providing indirect aid to Turkish converts. He encouraged missionaries to be cognizant of the local laws and customs and to utilize this knowledge to advocate on behalf of converts. However, he specifically cautioned against lending money directly. He based this latter argument on the principle that the “object of the missionary must always be to help the needy to help themselves.”¹⁵⁹ This missionary goal provided the justification for Hamlin to advocate for the involvement of religion in the growth of an industrial economy: “Now, whatever the missionary can do to promote industry, and to guide to the right objects of industry, is in the line of his calling, and places him in the apostolic succession, although he may not be a tent-maker.”¹⁶⁰

Cyrus Hamlin was not alone in understanding technologies of communication and Christian mission to be paired endeavors of Anglo culture. The missionaries of the

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 58.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., 354.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 198.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 199.

ABCFM used recent discoveries in science and technology as a strategy for capturing the attention and commitment of potential converts. As Phillips's history of the Board chronicles, "The men of the Board, however, were quite willing to employ the gadgets of Western science to impress the heathen mind."¹⁶¹ In one example, missionaries in Persia exhibited a Leidan jar¹⁶² sent from America to a wedding party, "until the whole party seemed to be wrapped in amazement, declaring that the mysterious engine possessed *unlimited*, as well as *unseen* power. A more favorable opportunity for such an exhibition could not possibly have been presented; and we trust that some desire for knowledge and improvement may have been enkindled in the minds of these scores of the Persian nobles, and the multitudes of people who thronged the court to witness it."¹⁶³ Indeed, such wonders attracted politically important allies for the hopes of Protestant success. In 1837, two Persian princes went to Constantinople to see the "fire-wonders" of electrical experiments presented by Americans there.¹⁶⁴

The use of technology as a spectacle was a common strategy according to Carolyn Marvin. To enhance public support and appreciation for new technologies, experts "convinced of the power of new technologies to repackage human experience and to

¹⁶¹ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 303-304.

¹⁶² A Leidan jar was a glass jar with two electrodes inside that could store an electric charge. The invention dates to the late eighteenth century and was used for experiments in electricity.

¹⁶³ Justin Perkins, *A Residence of Eight Years in Persia, among the Nestorian Christians; with Notices of the Mohammedans* (Andover: Allen, Morrill and Wardwell, 1843), 295-296.

¹⁶⁴ "Constantinople: Extracts from the Journal of the Mission," *Missionary Herald* 33, no. 11 (November 1837), 447, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137156458/13DADC4DF046E96350F/4?accountid=14244>.

multiply it for many presentations labored to enhance the largest, most dramatically public of messages, and the smallest, most intimately personal ones.”¹⁶⁵ The production of media as spectacle invested social energy into these new technologies and the possibilities they seemed to bear. For missionaries, these spectacles held the particular importance of convincing religious others of the cultural superiority of America as a bridge to their conversion, a conversion that was understood to be both religious and cultural. The promotion of American superiority through science and technology regenerated a European inheritance and thus situated America in a legacy of cultural expansionism. As Styers notes in *Making Magic*: “Among the intellectually and socially elite classes of Europe, Western science came to stand as a prime marker of Europe’s cultural superiority, and this confidence in Europe’s preeminence served as a valuable resource in the spread of European economic and industrial power throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.”¹⁶⁶

Technology, particularly the communication technology of print, and industry were notably important to the way the ABCFM understood their domestic and international ventures; at one point the Board divided their mission work into five fields in which mission stations were to specialize: evangelistic, educational, medical, industrial, and publishing.¹⁶⁷ The industrial work included training programs in trade crafts, including mining and sapping to produce raw materials, in order to pave the way for evangelism. This division of labor reflected an early theory embraced by the ABCFM

¹⁶⁵ Marvin, *Old Technologies*, 152.

¹⁶⁶ Styers, *Making Magic*, 59.

¹⁶⁷ Strong, *American Board*, 326.

that “some measure of civilizing influence must precede any effective attempt to Christianize.”¹⁶⁸ Many members of the ABCFM considered preaching to be less successful in certain contexts than approaches that integrated direct evangelization with other kinds of cultural interactions and services. For example, by the early 1830s, the Board’s official policy for missions in the Mediterranean was to use education and conversational approaches over formal preaching.¹⁶⁹ While the ABCFM later vacillated on whether industrial education helped Christian mission or not, Hamlin earned commendation for modeling successful use of industry in mission: “the best work yet done by any native pastors or preachers has been done by men who were trained to industrial habits and pursuits at the Bebek Seminary by Dr. Hamlin.”¹⁷⁰

One early model for missions was to create small self-sufficient outposts of Christian life that included chapels, schools, and farms and employed ordained preachers as well as physicians, farmers, blacksmiths, and others. This model was used in early missions to the Choctaw and Cherokee, based on a Moravian station in the Cherokee Nation.¹⁷¹ While it was ultimately rejected for international mission because of expense and a lack of willing volunteer physicians and blacksmiths, this model certainly reflects the depth to which industry and technology were understood to be intertwined in the work of mission.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 327.

¹⁶⁹ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 43.

¹⁷⁰ Unattributed quotation in Strong, *American Board*, 328.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 63.

Universal Neighbors

The idea of a unified world was underwritten by the Christian imagery of the neighbor that equipped missionaries with a rhetoric of proximity that could span the world and overcome nation-state and sectarian difference. The neighbor was a term explicitly used by American missionaries and was empowered by the Christian weight it held. The books of Matthew, Mark, and Luke not only repeat the divine commandment from Leviticus to “love your neighbor as yourself,” but depict Jesus naming this commandment and the commandment to love God as the greatest commandments.¹⁷² In the account in Luke, when asked “who is my neighbor?” Jesus tells the parable of the good Samaritan, identifying the neighbor as a stranger who shows mercy to another.¹⁷³

¹⁷² Lev. 19:18 (New Revised Standard Version). The account in Matthew depicts Jesus’ elevation of this commandment thus: “When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. ‘Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?’ He said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Matt. 22:34-40 (NRSV). Similar passages are found in Mark 12:28-43 (NRSV) and Luke 10:25-28 (NRSV).

¹⁷³ Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. “Teacher,” he said, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” He said to him, “What is written in the law? What do you read there?” He answered, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” And he said to him, “You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live.” But wanting to justify himself, he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?” Jesus replied, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take

The Christian trope of the neighbor posits strangers as a reflection of the familiar.

The wave of revivals known as the Second Great Awakening fueled the expansive Protestantism that emerged in the nineteenth century, particularly the American turn to missionary movements. The neighbor was a common trope in the sermons and writing of revivalist leaders. For example, itinerant preacher Lorenzo Dow's autobiography contains a long discourse on the requirement to prove one's love for God through love of neighbor. According to Dow, a neighbor is "thy friend, enemy, acquaintance and stranger, and whosoever is in distress, no matter who."¹⁷⁴ Charles Grandison Finney, one of the most innovative preachers of the nineteenth century, expanded the definition of the neighbor in his 1836 lecture on the Christian duty of reproof. While offering his thoughts on the mandate to rebuke one's neighbor for sin, Finney extended the idea of the neighbor to accommodate new technological capacities: "Neighbor, here, means any body that sins within the reach of your influence; not only in your presence, but in your neighborhood, if your influence can reach him, or in your nation, or in the world."¹⁷⁵ New modes of contact expanded who the neighbor could be.

A primary focus for American missionaries was to recognize that the whole world

care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.' Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" He said, "The one who showed him mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." Luke 10:25-37 (NRSV).

¹⁷⁴ Lorenzo Dow, *History of Cosmopolite; or Journal of Lorenzo Dow, Containing His Experience and Travels from Childhood to 1814, Being Upwards of Thirty-Six Years* (Pittsburgh: Israel Rees, 1849), 463.

¹⁷⁵ Charles Grandison Finney, "Reproof a Christian Duty" in *Lectures to Professing Christians: Delivered in the City of New York in the Years 1836 and 1837* (New York: John S. Taylor, 1837), 45. The text on which the sermon was based was "you shall reprove your neighbor, or you will incur guilt yourself." Lev. 19:17 (NRSV).

was made up of neighbors. In their descriptions, the neighbor evokes an emotional and ethical commitment among strangers and serves as a prime example of understanding the whole world through ideas of proximity and unity. As James Taylor preached to the Hampshire Missionary Society: “I am bound to call every human being, my neighbor, my friend, my brother; my Saviour has taught me to do so. Whether he be the person, that is within the reach of my arm; or the man that treads the antipodes of the earth—he is my neighbor.”¹⁷⁶ The epigraph of this chapter points to the prevalence of this imagery in the discourse that surrounded new communication technologies from the telegraph to the telephone in America.

The Christian trope of the neighbor in missionary writing was governed by a pairing of proximity and familiarity—the idea that we know what is close to us. The kinds of connection attributed to communication technology appeared to offer a new opportunity for proximity and familiarity across vast physical distances and cultural differences. Advances in communication technology seemed to realize proximity on a global scale. Missionary discourse, following this logic, credited the spread of technologies of travel, print, and electricity for the new possibility of universal familiarity (literally making everyone family). In an article on the spread of Protestant Christianity in India in 1846, the *Missionary Herald* reported that “the incredible rapidity of communication by steam [is] uniting the whole world, as it were, into one vast family.”¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁶ James Taylor, *A Sermon Preached at Northampton before the Hampshire Missionary Society: At Their Annual Meeting, August 20, 1818* (Thomas W. Shepard, 1818), 12.

¹⁷⁷ “Progress of Christianity in India,” *Missionary Herald* 42, no. 2 (February 1846): 65, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137172799/13DADC65B771130D195/19?accountid=14244>.

In a plea for aid for efforts to address famine in Western Turkey, a local missionary, Mr. Farnsworth, wrote, “Tens of thousands of old men and old women, of young men and maidens, and little children, are today suffering this very torture. By means of steam communication and the telegraph they are *your neighbors*.”¹⁷⁸ Technologies of communication connected the world and, according to this connection, provided a new form of proximity that enabled a global familiarity. The idea of the neighbor as part of a unifying series of technological connections brings us to the next element in this modern global imaginary: the network.

Network

The sense of the world as a whole relied heavily on the trope of connection as a continuous chain of links that took shape in the metaphor of the “network,” which had recently become the dominant metaphor for neurological systems, electricity, rail, and the telegraph. The idea of association across distance through a physical pathway became a particularly meaningful way of understanding the world in the nineteenth century as scientists and engineers studied the related systems of electricity and animal nerves, and as advances in transportation linked routes to each other. As Laura Otis carefully traces in *Networking: Communicating with Bodies and Machines in the Nineteenth Century*, this era of discovery bore witness to a mutually informing conversation between

¹⁷⁸ A Letter from Mr. Farnsworth quoted in “Western Turkey Mission: The Distressing Famine,” *Missionary Herald* 71, no. 3 (March 1875): 79, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136979682/13DADC71D0427FCEB43/12?accountid=14244>.

neuroscientists, engineers, and authors that birthed the network as a common trope.¹⁷⁹ For animal nerves, electricity, social systems in George Eliot's *Middlemarch*, and lines of communication technology, the network served as a dominant metaphor that shaped not only the way such systems were understood but how they were studied and built as well. In two of its most important roles, the network served as the foundational image for the movement of electricity in neurological systems of animal bodies and the emerging possibilities for communication by electric telegraph.

The network also played a particularly important role in mission work. The notion that individual nodes could be bound together through physical connection reshaped ideas about proximity and unity for a vast globe comprised of heretofore often unreachable places. There were two central ways in which the idea of the network informed missionary ideas about the world in this modern global imaginary. First, the network appeared to be a mode of connection born from travel and communication technologies that led directly to unity. Second, the network offered American missionaries unprecedented access to the entire world, and such access was understood as a mandate for the spread of American culture. Together, these elements created a global imaginary of the world as a bounded whole without remainder.

The primary understanding of the network was as a series of links that connected the world and paved the way for the global proximity and unity that this modern global imaginary demanded. At the Annual Meeting of 1890, the ABCFM's Foreign Secretary, the Reverend Judson Smith, presented a paper on "The Missionary Outlook" in which he stated:

¹⁷⁹ Otis, *Networking*.

With the introduction of steamships and railways, and the constant improvements in machinery, with the network of telegraph lines covering the great continents, and sunk beneath the seas, and binding all parts of the world into the circuits of swift intelligence, space and time are almost annihilated, the continents are near neighbors, and even the islands of the sea have lost their isolation and form a part of the closely linked system of the world.¹⁸⁰

Isolation was overcome by the curious ability of these rapidly connecting lines of electric speech to cover the land and swim through the sea to overcome land and sea in a vast web of connection. As the Reverend A.N. Andrus wrote in the *Missionary Herald* in 1877: “When Dr. Newman, of Washington, journeyed from India through the Persian Gulf, up the Euphrates and Tigris on his way across the Turkish Empire to the Mediterranean, he was surprised to find no traces of missionary labor until he reached the gates of Mosul! Indeed, the chain of missions which connects the whole world with the Christian Church has a break here; a link is missing.”¹⁸¹ This imagery of the network, at work from electricity then to the internet today, offered an interesting role to geography. Connection was imagined in geographical terms but was understood to supersede geography. Consequently, an oceanic telegraph wire could promise “the end of distance,” as it did for the Oneida Community and nearly annihilate space and time as it did for the Reverend Smith. Likewise, a chain of missions could “connect the whole world” as it did for the Reverend Andrus.

The ABCFM was particularly interested in the ways the world was rendered accessible by new political relations, the spread of a global communication network, and

¹⁸⁰ Judson Smith, “The Missionary Outlook,” *Missionary Herald* 86 (November 1890): 465.

¹⁸¹ A.N. Andrus, “The Missing Link,” *Missionary Herald* 73 (March 1877): 72, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136975266/13DADC8E9A83AA7ADE2/6?accountid=14244>.

the changes in technologies of travel. The idea of the world being opened to missionary venture by new networks of travel and communication gained traction in the ABCFM's early decades. The Reverend Leonard Baker remarked at the 1836 Annual Meeting that, "God seems to be opening the whole world to missionary effort and enterprise. The walls which formerly separated us from the heathen empires have fallen down."¹⁸² The private use of ships made travel to Asia increasingly possible for the ABCFM, and in 1856 the ABCFM purchased its own vessel, *The Morning Star*, for this purpose.¹⁸³ In his celebration of the advances of missionary work since the early years of American mission, the Reverend J.D. Davis wrote from Japan:

China and Japan were almost unknown. It took six months to reach them, and when reached they were not accessible. But to-day the whole world is open. Steam and electricity have annihilated distance, and the 700,000,000 of the heathen world are now our near neighbors. We can hear their cries, we can feel their heart-throbs, the scattered family of Adam are reunited, we are brothers.¹⁸⁴

Changes in technology had rendered the world accessible according to the missionary imagination. In accordance with this vision of the world, a newly rendered accessibility created a global intimacy in which an American Christian could feel the heart-throb of a distant heathen linked by a primary familial relation reactivated by steam and electricity.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸² American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, "Annual Meeting of the Board," *Missionary Herald* 32, no. 11 (November 1836): 439.

¹⁸³ Strong, *American Board*, 236.

¹⁸⁴ J. D. Davis, "Our Present Responsibility," *Missionary Herald* 70 (April 1874): 106, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137174442/13DADC9F33E7699AD10/5?accountid=14244>.

¹⁸⁵ Similar descriptions of the world as newly opened can be found throughout the *Missionary Herald*, including "Annual Survey of the Missions of the Board," *Missionary Herald* 46, no. 1 (January 1850): 1, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu>

The world had been opened by God, boats, and the telegraph, and global accessibility became a salient element in ideas about missionary possibility. Christian missionaries considered that openness to constitute permission if not demand for missionary incursion. In the words of the “Annual Survey of the Missions of the Board” in 1851, “Not in vain has [God] opened so large a portion of the whole world for the labors of Christian missionaries.”¹⁸⁶

Communication technologies played a particularly vital in this endeavor. The telegraph, in these instances of missionary writing, opened the world to missionary access rendering the whole world available in just the ways this imaginary of unity and totality demanded. In an extract of a speech printed in the *Missionary Herald*, the author directly attributed the world’s newfound accessibility to increased possibilities for communication and travel: “The intercourse between different parts of the globe is becoming daily more frequent and easy, contracting the dimensions of the world, and bringing the most distant parts into near neighborhoods...By the rapidity and ubiquity of commercial intercourse, the whole world is more accessible to missionary enterprise now, than the Roman empire was in the days of Paul.”¹⁸⁷ Now the missionaries could

/docview/137166904/13DADCACBCB46C49CF9/1?accountid=14244; “Consecrated Money-makers,” *Missionary Herald* 93, no. 3 (March 1897): 93, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137008627/13DADCBA36826DA671/11?accountid=14244>; and S. H. Howe, “Two Missionary Precedents,” *Missionary Herald* 96, no. 1 (January 1900): 13, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137163577/13DADCE4352632AA877/19?accountid=14244>.

¹⁸⁶ “Annual Survey of the Missions of the Board,” *Missionary Herald* (January 1851): 1, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136975914/13DADCFEEC1899BA65/3?accountid=14244>.

¹⁸⁷ “Extracts from Late Speeches,” *Missionary Herald* 22, no. 8 (August 1826): 249, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137142808/13DADCFECC664E97ADF/12?accountid=14244>. A similar attribution of openness to

reach parts of the world through electric speech. The theme of a telegraphically created proximity was important to this imaginary of access. In a description of the then recent changes in India, one missionary wrote that “Railways, the telegraph, and the public mails had grown from isolated lines into systems and networks, knitting the whole country together.”¹⁸⁸

The telegraph permitted access by diminishing separation. However, something more was implicated when the telegraph wires were evoked not as a means for speech but as the very thing that was circuiting the globe. The telegraph as circuit fueled the imagery of the earth’s boundedness and the concomitant possibility of the globe as a whole without remainder. By binding the contours of the earth, the telegraph provided the opportunity for complete conversion. The emphasis is on universality, a modern imaginary of global conquest in which partial success had little place. In the face of the suddenly possible *all, some* barely counted. As a charted whole, the earth offered the possibility of absolute contact and universal conversion.

The End of the World as We Know It

American missionaries produced a new context that would enable a new world. Such radical novelty is the work of utopia described by Fredric Jameson and others in

new capacities for intercourse and, “in consequence, the spreading of intelligence and light” is found in “Annual Survey of the Missions of the Board,” *Missionary Herald* 46, no. 1 (January 1850): 1.

¹⁸⁸ George T. Washburn, “The Pasumalai Institutions, Southern India,” *Missionary Herald* 80 (June 1884): 215, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137153767/13DADD1B279738559C9/4?accountid=14244>.

which a radical rupture opens the possibility of a new way of life freed from the problems that plague the present. Novelty entails indeterminacy. The modern global imaginary under study here, however, had a fixed end and a firm timeline. This was how deferral worked for these dreams of an impossible reality: it provided a new context that occasioned a new world, described that new world in detail, and then pushed it to a future moment. The previous section outlined the major characteristics of this new context (new technology) and the new world it was understood to produce (a unified world as the site of mission in which the network made us all neighbors). These elements of this modern global imaginary seemed to promise a radically new way of life in which the world's people would join as equals in one global family as if they all entered into connection on a flat plane.

This section will highlight the logics that underwrote such dreams of equality and novelty. This imaginary engaged deferral to institute a fixed end for the new context that took shape as a predetermined expansion of an idealized vision of Anglo culture.

Synecdoche, the rhetorical term that describes a figure of speech in which a part serves to represent a whole without remainder, better explains the cultural imperialism that framed the flat-plane dreams of the network and neighbor. A discussion of the idea of progress and the ways deferral offered a pre-determined end to the new possibilities erupted by this new context will follow.

Synecdoche: America for the World

In Carolyn Marvin's study of new technologies, she addresses the affiliation

forged between new technologies and dreams of cross-cultural community. She cautions, however, that “the vastly extended eyes- and ears-to-be of new machines of communication anticipated few cultural puzzles to unravel, and showed their inventors only the most reassuringly echoic and potent images of themselves.”¹⁸⁹ This modern global imaginary took up tropes that appeared to represent the world as connection on a flat plane, that is, connection among equals. However, while the tropes of the neighbor and the network fueled ideas about a world unified through communication, both were underwritten by a particular logic of connection that belied the equality the neighbor and network seemed to offer. American missionaries produced a global imaginary that relied on a logic of synecdoche such that the whole world was imagined through an idealized Anglo part, and that the Anglo part was understood to represent what the whole world could—in fact, would—be.

Synecdoche describes a figure of speech in which a part can stand in for the whole and the whole is imagined through the representative part. For example, “all hands on deck” does not mean that ship laborers must place their hands on the deck but, rather, that those ship laborers (those who use their hands to do their job) should come to the deck. Modern Americans did not use the term synecdoche to describe the work they did to create the idea of a unified world; the term names a logic that enabled ideas of the network and the neighbor by obscuring the insistent underlying determination to make a foreign global whole become like a familiar local part. Unlike the traditional rhetorical use of the term, synecdoche here does not describe a mode of speech. Rather, synecdoche illustrates the logic that enabled an aggressive cultural demand enacted through global

¹⁸⁹ Marvin, *Old Technologies*, 193.

mission. This modern global imaginary made significant use of the idea that the Anglo world could successfully represent the whole world and that the world could be shaped to be encapsulated in Anglo culture, religion, and language.

American missionaries took up this modern global imaginary as a willful synecdochal project. The part—the Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, and often American part—was understood to be the appropriate model for the whole (world) and should, through aggressive action, be made to represent and reshape the whole. In their thirty-seventh annual report, the ABCFM announced, “It would almost seem as if a single missionary in a city, or a dozen in a kingdom, might speedily transform an ignorant, sensual, idolatrous, and selfish community into a nation of intelligent, moral, Christian freemen; or as if a hundred or two such laborers might, in a few years, put a British or American face on the whole Chinese empire.”¹⁹⁰ This language empowered ideas of extension as a primary model for the work of mission.¹⁹¹ In this imaginary, the world was not made up of beings who will meet in new ways on a flat plane. Rather synecdoche enabled the ideas of the network and the neighbor to signal a world in which the whole would be remade in the image of the part.

This logic put a tremendous amount of pressure on the part. The nineteenth

¹⁹⁰ American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, *Report of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Presented at the Thirty-Seventh Annual Meeting Held in New Haven, Connecticut, Sept. 8-11, 1846* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1846), 221.

¹⁹¹ For example, see the letter of Mr. Trowbridge, reporting on mission work in Turkey, in which he describes the deep interest of one Albert Barnes in “the extension of Christ’s kingdom through the whole world.” Mr. Trowbridge quoted in “Albert Barnes and the Native Ministry,” *Missionary Herald* 67, no. 6 (June 1871): 168, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/136965551/13DADD37A2E63BD7504/5?accountid=14244>.

century was marked by adamant calls for the improvement of a domestic national religious public as a necessary step toward global Christian conversion. Many Americans focused on unity within Anglo culture as a model for unity across the globe. In his history of the ABCFM, Phillips identifies the focus on Anglo Protestant domestic unity as the strategy to global success; “domestic purification only prepared this country for its special mission to the world.”¹⁹² Once the part was perfect, the whole would follow.

The British and Americans used the idea of a shared language, culture, and religion, whether or not that actually existed, as the idealized part that stood in for the united global whole. Even ABCFM secretary Rufus Anderson, who would later instruct missionaries to educate and preach in the local vernacular, wrote in 1850, “We can suppose the Anglo-Saxon race to fill the myriads of sunny islands on the bosom of the board Pacific; and the genius of American and English enterprise to preside in great commercial cities, (other New Yorks, or even Londons,) reared on the Sandwich Islands, New Zealand, and Australia.”¹⁹³ The alliance of British and American mission here became particularly salient, and the spread of English culture stood in for the spread of Christianity. For example, in a report from the ABCFM Prudential Committee in 1854, the committee on the Home Department resolved to accept a recent offer of aid from British missionaries with the hope that “England, Scotland, Ireland, America and all of every tongue who love our Lord Jesus Christ, shall constitute one ‘allied army’ for the

¹⁹² Phillips, *Protestant America*, 258.

¹⁹³ Rufus Anderson to John Van Nest Talmage, 7 March 1850, American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions Archives, 8.1, vol. 2, p. 273, Houghton Library, Harvard University, quoted in Phillips, *Protestant America*, 261.

subjugation of the whole world to God.”¹⁹⁴ English speakers were understood as the core of the effort to convert the world and formed the heart of the culture that they would spread throughout the world.

An initial problem arose, however, as this synecdochal thinking took hold. The “part” was itself divided. Many British and American missionaries understood their mission goal to be the spread of Anglo culture, which included expansive Protestantism. However, tensions still echoed—and none too faintly—between the two nations. The War of 1812 and the founding of the ABCFM as a national venture occurred in the same year. In their early years, British and American missions, fueled by nationalist commitments, were emphatically considered separate ventures. Religious ties were forged through shared history and the spread of transatlantic revivalism in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as social movements such as temperance. Yet England and America existed in tense political relationship through the first half of the nineteenth century.¹⁹⁵ The ABCFM sent missionaries to British India within two years of its founding but was sorely lacking in funds and knowledge, and starkly aware of both needs. In an effort to gain British financial support and advice, the ABCFM sent Adoniram Judson to London in 1811. The British society refused the ABCFM and offered instead to employ the American missionaries themselves. The ABCFM refused

¹⁹⁴ “Report of the Prudential Committee,” *Missionary Herald* (December 31 1854): 12, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137171657/13DADD5E9C71555D5EF/7?accountid=14244>.

¹⁹⁵ For an excellent study of this, see Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster, 2006).

the British offer.¹⁹⁶ This first possibility for a formal British-American missionary alliance withered under national sentiment. Anglo culture could not then promise unity since Anglo culture was itself fractured.

American-British missionary ventures improved in time. Cyrus Hamlin himself made significant contributions to American-British relations. When Hamlin saw that British soldiers were living and often dying in vermin-infested clothes and blankets during the Crimean war, he organized a laundry service for them. He also used the Bebek Seminary bakery to supply their hospitals and military stations with bread.¹⁹⁷ According to Phillips, Hamlin's actions were the primary catalyst for the formation of the Turkish Mission Aid Society in London in 1854 to provide British aid to the efforts of the ABCFM in the Ottoman Empire. After the initial refusal by the British to support American missionary efforts, they contributed £2,000-2,500 annually for churches and schools in Turkey.¹⁹⁸

In perhaps the most critical instance of synecdochal logic in this global imaginary, American missionaries talked and wrote about their pan-Protestant unity and their ultimate alliance with British missionaries as a representation of the unity their efforts would create the world over. Missionaries thought a great deal about the significance of their pan-Protestant venture and the kinds of international ties it would engender. As Hopkins wrote in his "Semi-Centennial Address," the association of numerous Protestant

¹⁹⁶ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 32-33.

¹⁹⁷ Hamlin. *Among the Turks*, 228-239. Hamlin even invented a makeshift washing machine to retain the washerwomen who initially fled when asked to touch the vermin-infested blankets.

¹⁹⁸ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 163.

sects in missionary ventures sparked a “Blessed upheaval of great truths, where, as upon a high table land, Christians could walk and work together, and look down upon their differences, and claim the same promises, and with the eye of faith sweep the horizon of the whole world as their common field, and feel how much more there is that united than there is that divides them.”¹⁹⁹ Indeed, Hopkins cited the founding documents of the London Missionary Society from 1795 throughout his address to argue that it is the unity of the Christian missionaries from Britain and the United States that enabled their “greatest of all schemes” to evangelize the world.²⁰⁰ This particular ideal image of the part could then be enforced as a global norm.

A valorization of unity fueled many of these ways of thinking about and living in the world. Just as for the Oneida Community, discussed in the previous chapter, the most important element of this world was its universal accord. Hopkins described sectarianism as an affront to the basic unity of Christianity as expressed in the primitive church:

Were there divisions among [the apostles and primitive Christians]? Inspiration condemned them. Did any say, “I am of Paul?” The apostle asked at once, “Who is Paul?” They were sent, and they sought simply to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might—what? Belong to a sect? No; but “receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in Him.”²⁰¹

Here the plan for universal conversion was written back onto the history of the missionary societies and presented as a universalizing impulse that sprang nearly directly from the early church and inspired the missionary project itself. Many of these

¹⁹⁹ Hopkins, “Semi-Centennial Address,” 23.

²⁰⁰ Founding documents of the London Missionary Society (1795) quoted by Hopkins, “Semi-Centennial Address,” 23.

²⁰¹ Hopkins, “Semi-Centennial Address,” 22.

missionary societies were the first joint venture of denominations that emerged out of over two hundred years of religious innovation and sectarian division. In his “Semi-Centennial Address,” Hopkins cited the founding documents of the London Missionary Society to say, “It is declared to be a fundamental principle of the Missionary Society that our design is not to send Presbyterianism, Independency, Episcopacy, or any other form of church order and government, (about which there may be a difference of opinion among serious people,) but ‘the glorious Gospel of the blessed God’ to the heathen.”²⁰²

Noted American religious historian Perry Miller attributes the era’s pan-Protestant unity to the telegraph itself and cites the spread of communication technologies as the binding agent among disparate Protestants:

The unanimity, which might at first sight seem wholly supernatural, was wrought by the telegraph and the press. These conveyed and published “the thrill of Christian sympathy, with the tidings of abounding grace, from multitudes in every city simultaneously assembled, in effect almost bringing a nation together in one praying intercourse.” Nor could it be only fortuitous that the movement should coincide with the Atlantic Cable, for both were harbingers of that unity which is the forerunner of ultimate spiritual victory... The awakening of 1858 first made vital for the American imagination a realizable program of a Christianized technology.²⁰³

Rather than give technology the primary causal role here, it would be more helpful to understand that religious logics, technology, and pan-Protestant affiliations in the form of revivals and social movements participated collectively in creating a new understanding of Christianity in America and the world.

²⁰² Founding documents of the London Missionary Society, quoted in Hopkins, “Semi-Centennial Address,” 22-23.

²⁰³ Perry Miller, *The Life of the Mind in America: From the Revolution to the Civil War, Books One Through Three* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1965), 91. In this work, published posthumously, Perry does not provide citations for the quoted passages. Notably, communications theorist James Carey quotes this passage at length in his landmark essay, Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication,” 17.

Much of the investment in pan-Protestant unity as a representation of what Protestantism could offer a divided world came directly from a new religious context in which multiple sects shared religious experiences and commitments. The transatlantic spread of revivals contributed to the growing spirit of sectarian unity that shaped the practice of Christianity in America and Christian mission around the world. The period of the ABCFM's rise was marked by numerous events and institutions that united Protestants beyond denominational boundaries, including tract, home missionary, temperance, and Bible societies. These social movements and religious practices, which relied on unity across denominational divides, motivated many of the missionaries in the field and the investors who funded them.

Much of the Christian unity that the telegraph-loving Cyrus Hamlin celebrated in his writing can be traced to the revival culture that surrounded him at Bowdoin College. While at Bowdoin, Hamlin described occasions when the unity of various Christians in revivals and societies impacted his own religious formation and contributed to his path toward international mission.²⁰⁴ In his description of the Praying Circle, one of the two religious societies at Bowdoin, he made a point to note the ecumenicalism: "The Praying Circle brought together the religious element of the college without any distinctions. In that there were neither Congregationalists, Baptists, Methodists, nor Presbyterians. Its influence in college was unobtrusive, but was very great. There was a corps of earnest Christian students in college, whose influence was excellent and whose work in life has been blessed."²⁰⁵ Similarly, he described the ecumenical revival that took hold of prayer

²⁰⁴ Hamlin, *My Life and Times*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society, 1893), 97-116.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 97.

meetings in his junior year at Bowdoin and which he attributed in part to the influence of revivals that students had encountered when home.²⁰⁶

Revival enthusiasm swept through American colleges and divinity schools in the first half of the nineteenth century and motivated many to commit their lives to missionary work. A secret fraternity called the Brethren developed at Andover from which over two hundred candidates applied to the ABCFM.²⁰⁷ The ecumenical temperance movement, in which Hamlin played an enthusiastic role, also provides evidence for a theme of pan-Christian unity that he located on the righteous side of religious development. The transatlantic nature of these revivals helped to forge an improbable alliance between England and America. The revivals, which had roots in England, fueled missionary interest in the U.S. and a shared international evangelical project between the two nations.²⁰⁸

That is not to say that there was no awareness of differences of denomination among the missionaries. Writing about unity in some ways demands that there be separate entities to be unified. The history of the ABCFM reflects this awareness and

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 103-116.

²⁰⁷ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 23. Among the Brethren's members was John Humphrey Noyes. He withdrew from the Andover Brethren in 1834 claiming that he had "embraced such doctrines as he thinks the Board would not wish to diffuse among the heathen." "Record Book of the Andover Brethren," 72, quoted in Phillips, *Protestant America*, 25. Noyes went to Yale where he unsuccessfully attempted to start another chapter of the Brethren. Phillips, *Protestant America*, 25. The mark of Noyes's membership in the Brethren can be seen in elements he borrowed from their practice and instituted as part of the Oneida Community, such as the practice of "mutual criticism." Ibid., 28. For further discussion of the origins of mutual criticism, see John Humphrey Noyes, "Mutual Criticism," *The Congregational Quarterly* 17, no. 2 (April 1875), 272-281, <http://archive.org/stream/congregationalq01uniogoog#page/n5/mode/2up>.

²⁰⁸ Phillips, *Protestant America*, 4-20.

includes chronicling the denominations involved in particular missionary locations. For example, Strong notes in his history that “The Japan Mission during its early years included members of six different denominations, Presbyterians, Cumberland Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, Baptists, and Methodists, as well as Congregationalists.”²⁰⁹

Moreover, as much as missionary discourse was dominated by the language of and excitement for broad Christian unity, forms of the nation-state and the kinds of difference they represented also shaped ideas about missionary religion and work. As missions expanded, nation-states were formed and carved into mission territories. The nation-state itself was understood as a mark of successful mission. Strong chronicles the mission work by the ABCFM in Micronesia as such: “The transformation of the Sandwich Islands from a land of savages to an ordered nation was now accomplished.”²¹⁰ This transformation would soon be superseded by the machinations of the United States to facilitate a coup and annex the islands to its own territory as Hawaii. The sense of the nation-state was reinforced by the practice of distinguishing between foreign and native mission workers. Missionaries kept records that made and maintained this distinction, and the role, power, and value of native mission workers was a source of conflict among the members of the Board. The native workers’ responsibilities were determined formally by the foreign missionaries.²¹¹

In this kind of synecdochal thinking, we can see the construction of this world

²⁰⁹ Strong, *American Board*, 309.

²¹⁰ Anderson to Talmage, quoted in Phillips, *Protestant America*, 261.

²¹¹ Strong, *American Board*, 208.

according to its most basic ideas: the whole could be understood, made proximate, and imagined as a site of unity because it would be built as an extension of the known, although idealized, world of expansive Anglo Protestantism. Unlike the network or neighbor, which to this day promises a kind of global relationship that assumes equality among its members and universal accessibility, a world created through synecdoche is a world that is formed according to the predetermined dominance of the part. Synecdoche offers a fixed end to the creative work of imagination, supplementing the indeterminacy of a new world with a specific teleology: the new world will be *this*. This is not to say that there was no creativity at work. This world was indeed unfolding in a process of creation; however, that creativity must be understood within the frame of a fixed, if fictional, end.

This fixed end contradicted the novelty of this world. While this world was understood to be new and was understood to offer heretofore unknown possibilities, the modern global imaginary of unity through communication worked through an understanding that this world was already known and that it would offer new possibilities only to multiply the familiar across a new expanse. It was not expected to be the site of an unimagined future. Rather, the enthusiasm for the novelty of this world, particularly the cutting edge of religious possibility and technological change, was grounded in the widely held belief that it would offer one fixed future. It would offer progress toward a pre-determined end, and that end would be enabled by technological change. This next section turns to the ways that missionaries used and talked about technology and the ways that technological change and religion were both articulated to this teleological narrative of the world's future.

Progress

Hamlin's fascination with mechanical engineering formed part of a critical pairing of technology and religious mission in the nineteenth century. This pairing reveals a set of linked ideas that affiliated all sorts of modern elements through the central node of progress. Changes in technology served as a sure sign that the world was moving toward a determined future of global unity, specifically a global unity built through an extension of Anglo culture. More than the global spread of religion and technology, though, progress served as a narrative of the world that linked a whole series of elements and held their relationship to each other to be given and unbreakable. Hamlin produced a network of ideas that joined industry, technologies of communication, literacy, Christianity, Anglo culture, and that broad colonial catch-all, "civilization." For example, Hamlin became an avid advocate for mission education in English as opposed to the push by ABCFM secretary Rufus Anderson to conduct mission education in regional vernacular. Hamlin's argument was built on the logic of affiliation in which each component idea was understood to bear a necessary connection to every other idea; once one pulled the string of English, the fabric of commerce, science, philosophy, and Christianity would unravel:

As so large a proportion of foreign missionaries and educators are Anglo-Saxons, the English has been naturally chosen. Its wide diffusion by commerce and colonization favor it. Its rich stores of Christian thought, science, and philosophy make it the most useful for this purpose, and it seems destined to form a band of sympathy and intercourse among the nations, beyond any other language.²¹²

Already caught up in linguistic momentum, English would bind the nations in a tie of "sympathy" that would inevitably, it would appear, create global community around the

²¹² Hamlin, *Among the Turks*, 282.

strength of modern British and American knowledge, commerce, and Christianity.

Hamlin thus secured a relationship for Protestant conversion and mechanical industry that extended far beyond the simple use of mechanics to lure in prospective Christians. Here, mechanical industry and Christian conversion became weft and warp in the fabric of modern cultural expansionism. This can be seen in Hamlin's location of progress in a movement away from Islam and toward Protestant Christianity in the Ottoman Empire: "No one who has long resided in Turkey can deny a general advance in civilization. Islam has a capacity of progress up to a certain point, and there it stops. It has no high ideal to work by, or to draw inspiration from."²¹³ For Hamlin, Christianity provided the needed source of inspiration that would "civilize" the Turks.

The role of printed texts was, for Hamlin, a critical marker of this progress. He celebrated the introduction of printed school books into the Turkish classroom, printing presses "as an active living power" allowing people to print pamphlets and books, the spread of newspapers, the translation, printing, and circulation of Christian scriptures, and the development of "a literature, Christian, educational and general."²¹⁴ After an occasion in which a convert from Islam to Protestantism was treated cordially by Ottoman officials, Hamlin wrote:

However interpreted, it was a proof of progress. The ignorant multitude are still fanatical and bigoted, but the governing class has wonderfully changed. Such a scene would have been impossible a dozen years before. The Scriptures, newspapers, books, education, and the course of things are working slowly down into the mass, and religious freedom is coming in slowly, and in the only way possible, by enlightenment.²¹⁵

²¹³ Ibid., 130.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 360-363.

²¹⁵ Ibid., 90.

The vital role of communication technology took on surprising weight and power that would accomplish everything from religious freedom to Western global dominance. According to Hamlin, the coincidence of the fall of Constantinople and the invention of printing produced a significant change in the organization of global power and paved the way for what we would today call globalization:

While the East held the sword, and cultivated the arts of war, the West gave itself to intellectual and industrial pursuits. Printing, Navigation, Commerce, Architecture, Painting, and finally, the Reformation, lifted the West out of its barbarism and ignorance; and its progress in arts and arms has left the East centuries in the rear. Four centuries ago it led the world in arts and arms. Now it gets its cannon from Krupp in Germany, its Martini-Henry rifles from Providence, Rhode Island, and its ammunition from New Haven, Connecticut! The press has proved itself mightier than cannon, and the arts of peace mightier than the arts of war.²¹⁶

The technologies of communication developed in Europe refigured global commerce, inter-empire war, and world powers, and thereby spread Western culture.

This notion of progress was emphatically teleological; it moved determinately toward the universalism of American culture. Progress and destiny marched hand in hand in much of these missionary writings and particularly so in Hamlin's. For example, a future of Christian dominance was "irresistible" even in this largely Muslim empire: "It has also attracted the government attention, that their 'rayahs' or Christian and Jewish subjects, the Armenians, Greeks, Bulgarians, and Jews, have nearly doubled within this half century, while the Moslem population is stationary. Irresistible forces would change eventually the balance of power without foreign interference."²¹⁷ The future he saw was given.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 26-27.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 22.

Hamlin had a curious habit of critiquing what he called the “fatalism” of the Turks while applying his own sense of destiny to the unfolding of their history. In the distinction he drew between his own fight for progress and the Turks supposed apathy to an unknown future, we can see his allegiance to his ideas of progress as the right pre-determined end for the world. Hamlin critiqued Turkish fatalism as a source of national apathy, which, he insisted, rendered Turks unable to fight in war or fight off disease.²¹⁸ He understood their relationship to their sense of divine providence as willing resignation. He frequently described death due to diseases he considered preventable as suicide. He lamented that those with Cholera would accept what they understood as their fate and wait for death rather than take his recipe of laudanum, spirit of camphor, and tincture of rhubarb on a lump of sugar.²¹⁹ Yet, in nearly the same breath, he celebrated the inevitable arrival of a new and better future that he saw unfolding in the increase in Protestant converts, technological progress, and the constitutional governments of the emerging nation-states. In his discussion of the Ottoman Empire and its battles with the Byzantine Greek Empire and the Seljukian Turkish Empire, Hamlin could only imagine one modern future and it was the necessary end of what he saw as a “demoralized” and “paganized” empire:

The Christianity of the empire was lost in driveling superstitions. Magic and charms and relics and miraculous pictures, and holy fountains and places, were all that remained of the Gospel among the common people. The court was buried in

²¹⁸ Ibid., 22-23.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 308. Hamlin provides a lengthy description of his recommended treatment for Cholera. Ibid., 305-312. In a typical pronouncement, Hamlin explicitly names fatalism as the primary obstacle for Muslims to seek treatment: “As in the plague, so in the cholera the Moslems and Jews were the greatest sufferers; the latter for their filth, the former for their fatalism. Filth and fatalism are the grand aids-de-camp of the enemy.” Ibid., 313.

luxury, the people in poverty. The central government had no power over the provinces, and in its internal dissensions often called upon the Turks for aid. Whoever will look over Labeau's, or any other history of the Byzantine empire, will only wonder that it endured so long. If its government was demoralized, its religion was paganized. *The time was approaching when it must pass away.*²²⁰

A generous reading of Hamlin would suggest that the difference between his entropic teleology and the fatalism of which he accused the Turks was that he understood the Turks to accept any future whatsoever while he foresaw the advance of progress.

This key difference—something like an adamant modern Western optimism—is perhaps best explained by Sara Ahmed's insightful work on happiness. For Ahmed happiness is attributed to certain objects such as a happy future. Happiness in this role is pedagogic, she argues, making hefty demands on subjects that orient them to these designated happy objects. Because the object is already determined as happy, one must mold him or herself into a subject who will enjoy such an object.²²¹ In this case, Americans produced themselves as subjects who would enjoy a future suffused with American ideas of progress and its attendant expansive Protestantism, industry, constitutional government, and communication technology. Hamlin, invested as he was in the belief in American progress as a happy future, did not participate in a resigned acceptance of whatever the future would bring. Rather, he happily saw Turkey on the path to the only possible happy future for modern nation-states.

²²⁰ Ibid., 19 (emphasis added).

²²¹ Ahmed, *The Promise of Happiness*.

Conclusion: Deferral, Desire, and Demanding Promise

At the core of this modern global imaginary, we find the mutually constituting movement of deferral, desire, and promise. At work together, these three elements participate in an imaginary of the world as a united global whole that sits just on the cusp of arrival. The previous chapter addresses the mode of arrival that this imaginary engages. This chapter analyzes the mode of deferral simultaneously at work. This imaginary was built on a foundation of urgency enabled by the novelty of changes in communication technology. This imaginary was given a fixed end and that end was set in the future. Rupture, end, and delay constituted deferral such that a new world came into being between a radically new context and a given end. Temporal delay plays a crucial role in the location of modern global imaginaries between rupture and telos. More important, deferral makes imaginaries meaningful. The work on desire by Jacques Lacan and the work on presence and absence by Jacques Derrida help elucidate these roles.

The whole connected world present in American missionary writing in the nineteenth century was a totality, a complete entity without remainder. However, this totality retained one key form of *incompletion*. Missionary writing reveals a sense of two worlds at work in the whole world: the Christian world and the world to be made Christian. In 1812, an address to the “Christian Public” at the third annual meeting of the Board declared, “All the power and influence of the whole Christian world must be put in requisition, during the course of those beneficent labors which will precede the millennium. . . . The utmost exertion of every Christian now living, so far as his other duties

will permit, is required in this glorious service.”²²² Such rallying cries, which promised that missionary labor would bring a united Christian world soon, located deferral at the heart of the ABCFM’s modern global imaginary. Their discourse established a world and then placed it at a remove. Because their global imaginaries left no room for another geographic space, this remove was temporal. Their writings gave us this world and the whole unified world that would come.

Deferral, desire, and promise were active forces in American religious thought in the nineteenth century. The waves of perfectionist revivals that swept through America and Britain grounded their community practices and beliefs in the delicate play of these three elements. For religious groups that emerged from these revivals, such as the Millerites and the Oneida Community, a certain kind of moral perfection was made possible by the arrival of a previously deferred event. In the case of the Millerites, a small community founded in upstate New York, the founder, William Miller, predicted the exact date of the second coming of Christ to be 1843.²²³ The Oneida Community believed that the world had already experienced the second coming of Christ but deferred the final judgment of humanity to the rapidly approaching third coming of Christ. By identifying an anticipated event as proximate and simultaneously deferring it, these communities sustained desire as a mode of religiosity.

²²² American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Address to the Christian Public,” in *Minutes of the Third Annual Meeting (1812)*, in *First Ten Annual Reports of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, with Other Documents of the Board*. (Boston: Crocker and Brewster, 1834), 48.

²²³ Catherine Albanese, *America: Religions and Religion*, 5th ed. (Boston: Cengage Learning, 2013), 170.

American missionaries did something very similar. In the case of the ABCFM and other missionary movements, global conversion and the spread of their invented Anglo culture was the anticipated event. Similar to that of the Oneidans and the Millerites, American missionaries deferred this event, but only by a short time. Numerous articles cited the “immediate” or “speedy” conversion of the whole world to Christianity.²²⁴ The Thirty-fifth Annual Report closed with a report by Secretary Rufus Anderson in which he announced that all Christians were called to send and sustain missionaries. Christians should ask themselves what ability they expected of these missionaries. “To this inquiry the following answer, it is believed, should be given: ‘THEY CAN EVANGELIZE THE WHOLE WORLD IN LESS THAN HALF A CENTURY.’ In other words, the laborers who may go forth from Christian lands, can with the aid which they may hope to receive from native helpers, carry the gospel to every part of the earth, in less than fifty years.”²²⁵ Forty-two years later, ABCFM members were still predicting that the completion of the project to Christianize the world would arrive within the present generation.²²⁶ This was a venture that they thought they would see to completion. Such determined points of closure were

²²⁴ For example, see B.B. Wisner, “Proposed Enlargement of the Missions of the Board During the Present Year,” *Missionary Herald* 29, no. 3 (March 1833): 108, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137184108/13DADEB4753AB9BB5C/13?accountid=14244>; “Northern Baptist Education Society,” *Missionary Herald* 29, no. 7 (July 1833): 255, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137146476/13DADED280E1170F24A/21?accountid=14244>; and American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Forty-fourth Annual Meeting, Part 1,” *Missionary Herald* 49, no. 11 (November 1853): 321, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/137171157/13DADEE0B591FEFEAD7/1?accountid=14244>.

²²⁵ American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, “Thirty-fifth Annual Meeting, Part 1,” *Missionary Herald* 40, no. 10 (October 1844): 325.

²²⁶ Kincaid William, “National Beneficence the Safeguard of National Life,” *Missionary Herald* 82, no. 12 (December 1886): 490.

made possible by the boundedness of the totality they imagined. In a world without remainder, they could clearly see the end point of their project of universal conversion. This was a highly teleological project grounded in the Christian imaginary of a new world.

This kind of deferral is constitutive of desire according to Jacques Lacan for whom desire is an activity of lack in which what one desires is always out of reach. The desired object is always, in part, defined by its absence. Desire appears to want satisfaction but, in fact, desire dies upon satisfaction.²²⁷ Once you have what you want, you can no longer desire it. As Lacan notes, however, we enjoy desire.²²⁸ We enjoy the reach toward a receding object to such an extent that, often, when we get the object we want we realize that we want more of that object or that we actually wanted another object all along. To enjoy desire, one invests in deferring the final encounter. This means that there is an effort in the work of desire to push the object away. To desire is to constantly engage in the double movement of approach and deferral, which appears similar to the slapstick classic of the man who goes to pick up his hat and each time he takes the last step to it, he kicks it up the road.

This play of presence and absence serves to extend desire and is also a necessary

²²⁷ This theme runs through Lacan's work. It is prominent in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious or Reason Since Freud," *Écrits*, translated by Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 493-441, particularly in his use of metonymy to describe desire (428), and *On Feminine Sexuality*, particularly "A Love Letter (*Une Lettre d'Âmour*)," 78-89.

²²⁸ Enjoyment here does not mean that desire is pleasurable. It certainly can be, but it can also be a practice of frustration and sometimes pain. Enjoyment in the Lacanian sense is a process that produces one as a subject and articulates the investments and habits that orient one to one's world. Christian O. Lundberg, "Enjoying God's Death: *The Passion of the Christ* and the Practices of an Evangelical Public," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 95:4 (November 2009): 387 – 411.

part of making such imaginaries meaningful. The relationship of presence and absence in making meaning has been perhaps most eloquently described by Jacques Derrida in his neologism, *différance*. *Différance* combines the French words for difference and deferral. Derrida uses this concept to explain the way a name gives us the present absence of what it names and thereby offers us access to that thing while displacing it at the same time. In the legacy of the language theorist Ferdinand de Saussure, Derrida points out that any name only becomes meaningful when it is set against all the other names it is not (e.g. we know what “cat” is because we can distinguish cat from hat, bat, dog, and so on). We make words meaningful by situating them against what they are not (difference) and, thus, must refer out to a vast system of words before a single word can make sense (deferral). Words do not give us their meaning directly or immediately; rather, they refer back to the whole system of language—a minute deferral that withholds meaning from the word and locates it in webs of other words from which it is distinguished. Without difference and deferral, words would not make sense.²²⁹

Understanding the role of deferral is important because social imaginaries trade in meaning. Social imaginaries are constituted by conferring particular meaning on certain objects, beings, and the modes of relationship among them. Through this process we can create meaningful descriptions of similar social forms and are able to distinguish, for example, between a crowd and a mob, or, as we see in nineteenth-century American missionary discourse, between the “Christian world” and the “whole world.” The kinds of meaning that adhered to the idea of the globe in the nineteenth century had little to do

²²⁹ Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Writing and Difference*, 1-27, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978). See also “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourses of the Human Sciences,” in *Writing and Difference*, 278-293.

with the world participants in this imaginary experienced. The globe became the site of assimilationist unity or the field of mission only through the conferral of meaning. That is, the imaginary of a whole world unified by communication came into being when communication, the network, the neighbor, and the idea of global Christian community became meaningful, related, and important.

The meaning invested in new technology created a context for a new world with new possibilities. The fixed happy end of that new world, deferred into the near future, specified what that novelty would be. Through declaration and deferral a new way to imagine and inhabit the world was born: an early form of globalization in which a communication network would unify a world community in which everyone was a neighbor bound into a global family under the banner of Protestantism and Anglo culture. This world demanded a labor of cultural expansion, of which mission was a significant element, to make a whole world that was represented by the idealized Anglo part. It promised that with such labor this new world would come into being in the present generation.

However, in a global imaginary, which is shared and participated in across multiple sites of difference, we have moved far beyond names, language, and text. Modern social imaginaries are lived processes of habitual behaviors, the activation of particular beliefs, and the circulation of certain texts, images, and metaphors. They are filled with unexpected encounters and actions. An imaginary is a lived process that requires participation from diverse people and objects and shared investment across inevitable perspectival differences. An imaginary requires resonant images and vocabularies that produce shared—although not absolutely identical—meaning.

Moreover, an imaginary must produce a shared motivation for the people who participate in it to invest the labor required to do all of this meaning-making work and to sustain this new vision. The next chapter will examine the constructive work that declaration and deferral frame.

CHAPTER 4

THE GREAT FIZZLE: THE ROLE OF FAILURE AND INVESTMENT IN SUSTAINING IMPOSSIBLE IMAGINARIES

Ships that pass in the night, and speak each other in passing,
Only a signal shown and a distant voice in the darkness;
So on the ocean of life we pass and speak one another,
Only a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *Tales of a Wayside Inn*

In 1865, the *New York Times* reported on a remarkable event that had occurred seven years earlier, an event the author of the article calls the “Great Fizzle.” The context for the “Great Fizzle” was the first successful attempt to cross the Atlantic Ocean with a medium for electric speech: the Atlantic Telegraph Cable of 1858. The context was also the cable’s failure a mere twenty-three days later. But the “Great Fizzle” itself, the topic that took up these impassioned paragraphs of print was not the cable, nor the sudden ability to speak with Europe in a matter of hours rather than a matter of weeks, nor the cable’s failure, but what the author calls “popular enthusiasm,” which at this first possibility for relatively rapid communication with Europe was raised to a “fever heat.” In the words of the reporter, “Then succeeded THE GREAT FIZZLE of the nineteenth century, a fizzle which developed the Americans as the most enthusiastic believers in fables, the most implicit dupes of ‘statements,’ the most credulous in all that pertains to glorious achievement...in the world.”²³⁰ The reporter described the situation rather

accurately: many Americans ranging from small communities of utopian communists to President Buchanan had celebrated the improbable promise that the telegraph would unify the world into a grand global society of Christianity, prosperity, and peace.

Reflecting on this past event, the reporter continued: “The TIMES teemed with dispatches from all parts of the country, descriptive of the universal joy which the tidings inspired...Such a week of excitement, such days of wondering, such hours of prayerful thanksgiving, such never-ending transports as our people indulged in, we hope to never see again.”²³¹ Sadly for this scornful journalist, we have seen such fizzles again. New technologies seem to attract fever-hot enthusiasm in America. We are experiencing our own fizzle now in the ardent belief that the internet is an inherently inclusive global forum for free speech, that Facebook and Twitter will fuel democratic revolutions around the world, and that giving every child a laptop will connect and reform a global community.²³² The Great Fizzle, it seems, never fizzled out.

While the Great Fizzle never fizzled out, the 1858 cable certainly did. This first successful means of transatlantic electric communication irreparably burned out within a month. The high voltage batteries used to impart electrical impulses at this unprecedented

²³⁰ “The Atlantic Telegraph: Probable Failure of the Enterprise,” *New York Times*, August 10, 1865, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/91907071?accountid=14244>.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

²³² For example, see descriptions of the 2010-2011 labor strikes and acts of civil disobedience in Egypt in the effort to unseat President Hosni Mubarak as the “Facebook revolution” such as that in Wael Ghonim, *Revolution 2.0: The Power of the People is Greater Than the People in Power: A Memoir* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, Harcourt, 2012). See also the mission statement of One Laptop per Child: “We aim to provide each child with a rugged, low-cost, low-power, connected laptop... With access to this type of tool, children are engaged in their own education, and learn, share, and create together. They become connected to each other, to the world and to a brighter future.” “Mission of One Laptop per Child,” accessed March 5, 2013, <http://one.laptop.org/about/mission>.

distance melted the insulation of the cable. Not only was the cable ruined, but very little of the cable could be recovered. The first technology for crossing the Atlantic with electric speech was left to disintegrate slowly on the ocean floor. The Atlantic Cable was anticipated with promises of permanent global unity and yet failed; America erupted into civil war, and the world was rocked by colonial and anti-colonial violence. The imaginary of a united world, though, remained a vital element of American life despite its contradiction of reality.

This chapter addresses how imaginaries of a united world could be constructed and upheld in the face of overwhelming evidence to the contrary, particularly the miscommunication that the cable fostered and the ultimate failure of the cable itself. Under the mutual influence of religion and technology in nineteenth-century practices of globalization, Americans found themselves suspended between their declarations of a world united by communication and their deferral of this impossible ideal into the near future. This was a time marked by the fervent optimism of manifest destiny, the gold rush in the Sierra Nevada, and rapid innovation in technological and scientific knowledge, including Charles Darwin's publication of *The Origin of the Species* in 1859. Yet it was also a time marked by violence over slavery in Bleeding Kansas and other signs of the civil conflict about to unfold, the first global economic crisis in the Panic of 1857 (a clear sign of the dangers of world-wide interconnection), and revolts against colonial rule, such as the Indian Rebellion of 1857. In the tension between dreams of an imminent perfect world and the shocking reality of chaos in social life, finance, and politics, Americans engaged in the serious labor of imagining the world otherwise. This chapter will demonstrate how declaration and deferral produced a modern global imaginary in the live

temporal tension between *already* and *not yet*.

The tension between declaration and deferral in modern global imaginaries creates a productive space of action. In the small margin between the now and the soon of modern global imaginaries, the work of construction occurs. This is a finicky space. It is set between an experienced reality and a fixed ideal and, yet, in that given frame offers room for creativity. This creativity is limited by the present resources and fixed future that frame any modern global imaginary. Worlds are not born out of nothing, nor are they created out of infinite possibility. Worlds cannot be made into anything; rather, imagining a world is a creative act that takes up and makes use of very real limits. We are, as Frederic Jameson notes, tethered to our present. Even our wildest utopian fantasies are born out of this location in time and space, and our dreams of perfection are destined to respond to the failures of the life we know.²³³

For an imaginary to emerge and engender sustaining action on the part of its participants, there must be room for creative imagining and the variable practices that make such imagination into habits, forms, and ways of life. Without declaration, there is no constitution of a new world. Without deferral, there is simply an immovable conflict between the world we know and the world we want. Deferral creates a space in which we can create the world we declare. Imaginaries do not become the powerful “symbolic matri[ces] within which a people imagine and act as the world-making collective agents” Dilip Gaonkar describes unless people, as Gaonkar notes, *act*.²³⁴ Therefore, imaginaries

²³³ As discussed in chapter two, Fredric Jameson makes the compelling argument that utopian thought can only ever be a response to the failures of the status quo and is formed as a bricolage of resources taken from the present. Jameson, “The Politics of Utopia,” 40.

²³⁴ Gaonkar, “Toward New Imaginaries,” 1.

are contingent on the sustaining action of their participants. Imaginaries can gain momentum such that participants are taken up into an imaginary and act for it almost unintentionally, but the imaginary always depends on that action.

Imaginaries are not rigid systems of meaning but decidedly unsystematic ways of living. Because imaginaries are lived, they are material practices with material effects and are built of ideas, images, and symbols as well as practices, habits, and things.

Imaginaries contend with the possibilities and limits of the material, historical, and social context in which they are lived. In antebellum America, an imaginary arose that wove a world out of wires and dreams.

The main body of research in this chapter comes from public texts on the imaginary of a whole world united by communication at the advent of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable, including newspapers, speeches, and the telegrams sent on the cable. Such public texts are a critical resource for a number of reasons. First, they reflect the widespread excitement about the telegraph and the many ways such excitement refigured American lives. Second, such public texts from sources that were not explicitly religious reveal the important role religious thinking, logics, and imagery played in sites where religion was not overtly demanded by context. When the success of the 1858 cable was confirmed, landmarks in Brooklyn, NY, from the Post Office building to the Shakespeare Hotel were illuminated in celebration, fireworks went off, City Hall Square filled with the sounds of “Yankee Doodle” and “God Save the Queen,” and the Mechanics Bank posted a transparency of the dispatch Captain Hudson of the *Niagara* sent to his family in Brooklyn, “God has been with us. The Telegraph Cable is laid

without accident, and to Him be all the glory.”²³⁵ Religious language conventionally appeared in public texts, such as newspapers, political speeches, and displays. Yet that does not mean that the religious content, thinking, and practices in such public speech did not have specific effects. The religious language, imagery, and logic conveyed by these conventions of public speech played significant roles in the constitution of this modern global imaginary.²³⁶

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the Great Fizzle as a resource for understanding how this imaginary accommodated and made use of the failures that hounded it. While unity through a connected network remained a critical element of this modern global imaginary, disconnection and failures abounded from the material failures of the cable and the conflicts that rocked the world at the time to the impossibility of this—or any—global social totality. These failures were often accommodated by Americans as missteps on a path to inevitable success. This chapter argues that failure was generative for and constitutive of this imaginary by opening a space for creative, imaginative action and affective investment.

The Great Fizzle

The Great Fizzle provides a valuable lens into the particular activity that sustained

²³⁵ “Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/hnpnewyorktimes/docview/91416251/fulltextPDF/13C7C8B236C74515588/2?accountid=14244>.

²³⁶ There is ample evidence that religious discourse and logics helped constitute these very publics in America. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* and Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption*.

the imaginary of a world united by communication technology. Unlike the reporter for the *New York Times*, let us not see the Americans as “dupes.” Gullibility is a poor frame in which to understand the Great Fizzle. In a progressive teleology, one might argue that gullibility is a poor frame because it is a dismissal enabled by a hindsight of past failures without foresight to the success that would ultimately result in broad networks of electric communication from the telegraph to the internet. Yet gullibility is a poor frame because gullibility is an accusation of failing to carefully weigh evidence. Americans did not fall for a con. The evidence that communication would not spontaneously unite the world was clear—the cable itself was riddled with failures, encounter at distant shores was fraught with conflict, and America was rocked by violence over slavery and numerous conflicts between the U.S. government and Native Americans. Americans recognized that their dream of what society could be was impossible; the investment of social energy into this dream was never simply a matter of rational choice. Enthusiasm, which might compensate for rational inadequacy, also falls short as a frame for the Great Fizzle not because of its absence but because enthusiasm alone cannot account for the work the Great Fizzle accomplished. The Great Fizzle was not merely a surge in national feeling; it produced a powerful new meaning for communication technology as a unifier of global community.

The Great Fizzle is best understood as a particular formation of affective investment. Affect is the social energy through which subjects, meaning, and cultures are produced and organized.²³⁷ While this social energy can flow and shift in nimble ways, it

²³⁷ This definition of affect draws on the following sources: Ahmed, *Promise of Happiness*; Teresa Brennan, *The Transmission of Affect* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004); Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out*; and Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in*

can also create habituated formations that adhere to social practices. Two important roles for affect come to the fore in the constitution of modern global imaginaries: affect as the force that secures particular meanings to things and affect as the energy that structures what we care about, how we live according to those cares, and, indeed, who we are when we care in those ways.²³⁸ Affect is a critical creative mechanism through which the world takes shape. This study highlights the repetitive relationship between modern global imaginaries and technological change. New communication technologies do not have natural meanings; they come to bear meaning for modern Americans through affective investment. In this modern global imaginary, an affective formation developed a durability that habitually adhered to technological change and the promise of global unity.

Religion, as a privileged site of social investment in the nineteenth century, consolidated energy and meaning around new electric technologies in forceful ways that sustained an impossible imaginary of a united world. Religion trades in emotional investment, social meaning, and the habits of everyday life. Religion also forges durable connections between practices. For example, kneeling is affiliated with praying for some Christians. One can certainly kneel without praying, but kneeling's affiliation with prayer inflects its meaning in other contexts. Religion is not the only social practice that forges affiliations, institutes habits, and so on, but it is particularly effective at doing so. In nineteenth-century America, expansive Protestantism served as a dexterous vehicle for

Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012). Affect is addressed more directly later in this chapter.

²³⁸ These two roles for affect draw heavily on Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out*; and Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*.

these practices. Particularly after the revivalism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, expansive Protestantism became marked by attention to emotional energy and belief in its importance for Christian life. Speech that referred to God and divinely-ordained destiny, logics of attaining the impossible through a transcendent power, and affective investment all marked the manner in which Americans performed imaginative action around new communication technology in the nineteenth century.

“Fizzles” is an ambiguous term, meaning both effervescence and failure. The reporter from the *New York Times*, writing seven years later about the optimism that greeted the 1858 cable, played on both meanings to convey the enthusiasm surrounding an ultimately doomed venture. Indeed, enthusiasm and fiasco went hand-in-hand in this modern global imaginary. This chapter will explore the vital relationship between failure and investment at the heart of the imaginative work in which nineteenth-century Americans engaged. When read in the context of technological change, failure is often considered a misstep on the path of progress. Success, then, is framed as an end *despite* failures “along the way.” However, the institution of this modern global imaginary occurred not despite failures but because of them. Failure provides a unique site of affective investment, and this investment is habituated into a durable formation that regularly adheres to modern global imaginaries. The constitution of modern global imaginaries, in the case of the 1858 cable and others, entails failure and the affective investment that orbits it. The Great Fizzle—that is, investment and failure together—was a critical element in the establishment of an imaginary of the world as a united whole.

Failure played a particularly important role in this imaginary. Both declaration (the announcement of an impossible utopian present) and deferral (the relegation of an

imaginary to the constantly receding horizon of the future) trade in failure. Declaration names a present that does not exist. Deferral refuses us access to that impossible present. Between the failures of declaration and deferral, creative investments of social energy produce new ways of living in the world. Consequently, the production of modern global imaginaries occurs in the creative space between the failure of the status quo as a site for life and the inability to fully predict, let alone achieve, an ideal future. Imagination is movement initiated by the two failures of a present that cannot sustain us and a future we cannot reach.

We need a better account of disconnection and disaffiliation in our understanding of social imaginaries and religious life in America, one that understands disconnection as generative of social life. Just as fragmentation (e.g., enmity, gossip, missed connections) structures social groups, so disaffiliation provides sites of social commitment that organize religious cultures in America. The failures of the Atlantic Telegraph Cable were similarly generative and in this case occurred by producing a particular affective formation. The habitual affective formation that formed around failure generated the meanings that structured this imaginary and organized the social investments that sustained it in the face of its own impossibility. Religion played the crucial role of securing and organizing such social investment.

The Priority of Connection

The location of the cable between the now and the soon and between the material and the abstract had a surprising effect. It rendered the cable material enough to become a

locus of affective investment as a thing of importance and yet, at the same time, allowed the cable to accomplish more than a simple copper wire ever could. A striking instance of this was the unity of the world that the cable was said to cause. Notably, the cable was not understood to produce unity because it would enable mutually transformative conversation. Rather, the unity the cable was said to cause was attributed to the simple fact of the cable's physical connection of two points and the cable's participation in a network of connection that stretched to numerous sites around the world. The unity discourse of the telegraph ascribed more capacity to the material reality of the cable and the venture that produced it than to any sense that communication would bring people together.

The notion that conversation might provide the means to mutual understanding was rarely raised. On the contrary, as with the Oneida Community and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, American public speech portrayed global unity as the result of the material connection of the cable and the new technological possibility of global simultaneity. For example, the *New York Times* reprinted a notice from the *Boston Atlas* on a "most interesting fact" demonstrated in the celebrations: "By preconceived arrangement, Mr. J.B. Stearns, Superintendent of the Boston Fire Alarm Telegraph, rung all the bells of Boston connected with the fire-alarm from the office of the American Telegraph Company in *Portland!* This extraordinary feat indicates the practicability of a simultaneous ringing of bells throughout the world."²³⁹ Here it is clear that the whole world imagined at the advent of the Atlantic Cable was not understood in processual terms. Simultaneity stood in for unity. Connection itself was understood as the

²³⁹ *Boston Atlas* reprinted in "Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise," *New York Times*, August 9, 1858.

motivating force that would produce this global totality. Later developments in democratic and communication theory that promote discussion as a means to agreement and unity did not yet reign.²⁴⁰ This distinction is crucial because it places the priority on the means of connection rather than on the forms of speech that might take place through that connection. The distinction also indicates that connection here is not premised on these technologies as modes of mutually transforming discourse. Rather, connection itself is understood as the sole condition for unity regardless of what speech might transpire across these lines.²⁴¹

This sense of immediate connection was echoed by the histories of transatlantic telegraphy that emphasized expansive collective action as the primary cause of this innovation. In these histories of the telegraph, a whole world was invoked as the simultaneous cause and the effect of this new technology. They attributed the telegraph to the collaboration of a broad swath of the world's population. A *New York Times* article on August 7, 1858 traced a history that began with the discovery of electro-magnetism by Danish physician Hans Christian Ørsted in 1819 and moved over eleven columns of text through a series of major discoveries from various telegraph machines to the repeated

²⁴⁰ Communication studies scholar William Keith locates the rise of discussion as the model for deliberation in the early twentieth century. This movement entailed three significant changes: a shift away from casual conversation, a shift toward populist participation, and the development of a site in which such formal, populist discussion could take place. William M. Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (New York: Lexington Books, 2007), 7.

²⁴¹ Annelise Riles makes a similar point in her study of the network: “The effectiveness of the Network is generated by the Network’s self-description. As we have seen, the naming of a Network is the existence of a Network, and the existence of a Network is synonymous with Action on its behalf. . . in other words, one need not show a link once one pronounces the existence of a network.” Annelise Riles, *The Network Inside Out* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2001), 172.

Atlantic Ocean soundings.²⁴² Similarly, the Honorable William D. Kelley offered an expansive alternative lineage in his oration at the Philadelphia Jubilee celebration of the Atlantic Cable.²⁴³ He began with a rather simple assertion: that “the occasion is not a local one.”²⁴⁴ He was referring, at first, to the many American cities celebrating the Atlantic Cable that night. However, he quickly elaborated the reach of the cable's impact to include “every member of the human family.” In the history of human scientific discovery that he traced, “no event has occurred which is to work so large an influence upon nations and people, upon the social, political, commercial and economical relations of mankind—no event, the influence of which is to be so far-reaching, or so all-pervading.”²⁴⁵

The universality of the cable did not lie merely in its impact. Kelley spent the next ten pages of his oration thanking every person he considered to have had some hand in the making of the Atlantic Telegraph, from the naval lieutenant who commanded the ship that made the soundings of the ocean floor to a lawyer who ten years earlier had put a memo before Congress urging them to note that there was a table of land beneath the ocean that stretched from Canada to the British Channel. The memo was sent to committee and floundered there, but Kelley honored the lawyer alongside the sailors, the inventors, the machinists, the congressmen, the funders, not to mention all of the famous

²⁴² “The Atlantic Telegraph: The Failure of the First Effort in Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Eight,” *New York Times*, August 7, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/docview/91410541?accountid=14244>.

²⁴³ Kelley, *Oration*, 2.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

scientists he could think of from Benjamin Franklin to Alessandro Volta. Kelley did so to insist that the Atlantic Cable was the work "not of members of a single community or state, not of a particular nation, not of any of one of earth's named localities" but of "various nations and races." The work all these people ultimately accomplished "was for the world and man; and it was fitting that the *human family* should have its hand in it."²⁴⁶ According to Kelley, a vast and diverse group of people worked over great stretches of time and space somehow in concert to create the Atlantic cable.

In his expansive list of participants, Kelley included a particularly unique actor. The "great Omnipotent One" created the earth, gave humanity dominion over it and then bestowed the telegraph as a last great blessing.²⁴⁷ Kelley stated, "When the Almighty permitted that cable to be laid, He made public announcement to man, that He had registered a decree for the early completion of the Pacific Railroad...God in His providence has ordered the work to be done."²⁴⁸ Kelley's mention of God was more than just the addition of another global participant. It was God that made this imagined global public cohere. Rather than a scattering of inventors, sailors, lawyers, and congressmen working independently, these agents were the "highest ministers [of God] on earth."²⁴⁹ This project, according to Kelley, was not merely the twisting of copper to survive submarine currents, but rather a collective project to realize a divinely ordained human destiny in the unification of the whole world.

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 2.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 6.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁴⁹ Ibid., 12.

Kelley's public Christianity serves as an important example of the role of religion in this imaginative work. A diffusely Protestant strain of public theology anchored the importance of this event and provided a logic for an impossibly cohesive global community. This diverse body of disparate people cooperated because God ordered it, and because God ordered it, the event of the Atlantic Cable must be a focus of American attention and care. The American-Christian logic at work here rendered the impossible particularly achievable and thus made a global community appear out of thin air.

Yet, similar to other renditions of this global imaginary, when we look more closely at the names Kelley cited, every single one is from Europe or America (except God, although that is perhaps debatable in this case), and Kelley paid particular homage to those from Philadelphia. This not-so-local event turned out to be rather local after all. Indeed, the God that drew these multitudes of laborers into a singular human family also seemed familiarly Protestant. Kelley's whole world functioned as one unit by virtue of its God-given vocation, and yet this particular God-giveness ensured that Kelley's whole world could only ever contain the Protestant members of the global population. As we saw with the Oneida Community and the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, this global community cohered through a particular American version of Protestant-inflected Christianity.

Kelley's speech conferred two related meanings on the telegraph, both of which enriched the submarine cable beyond its capacity. First, Kelley's insistence on God's role as the director of this invention and the unifier of this inventing community imbued the cable with religious significance and authority. The power of Kelley's discussion of God did not rely on proof of divine involvement. Rather, Kelley assumed public Protestant

faith that he then used to lend his account importance, grandeur, and emotional power. Religion served as a rich source of emotional attention and an effective vehicle by which such attention could be invested in the dream of a unified world. Second, Kelley premised unity on the physical fact of this electric communication technology rather than on a process of communication. The presence of a cable between two continents held no more guarantee of connection than the ocean it spanned. Assuming a physical link would forge a family out of the world's population and bring recently warring nations "face to face" enriched the meaning and power of that material technology beyond its capacity. Through these meanings, particularly as they were animated by the social energy religion wielded, a copper line sufficed to foster a sense of whole-world unity that was able to overcome the material gaps, failures, and ruptures that excluded much of the whole world.

As the network acquired its place as a dominant metaphor in the nineteenth century, nerves, social life, electricity, and communication were understood in terms of connection across linking structures. According to Laura Otis, the dominance of the network as a structure was not a result of the coincidental discoveries of electricity, telegraphy, neurology, etc. Rather, the power of the network fueled these discoveries. Electricity, for example, was understood as the agent for both neural systems and telegraphy. The telegraph was understood as analogous to or even simply as a nerve network, which influenced how it was constructed.²⁵⁰ Through the shared territory of metaphor, discourse, and practice, the network organized a vital convergence in social life so that excitement over scientific, social, and technological innovation was

²⁵⁰ Otis, *Networking*, see especially 124-133.

excitement for the network.²⁵¹ The preeminence of the network made it appear to be a natural phenomenon discovered in the nerves and applied to communication.

The network offered unity and totality to this imaginary. In a reflection on the mid-nineteenth century in the *Chicago Daily Press*, reprinted in the *Lake Superior Miner*, the author marveled at the recent progress in America: “Who knew that thousands of miles of railroads would now be spread like network over all these States; from the Atlantic to the Mississippi—that by the magic wand of the telegraph, the extremes of our country would be brought into instantaneous communication—that California and Australia were to increase so immensely and opportunely, the circulating medium of the world?”²⁵² The circulating medium of the world, the magic wand of the telegraph, and the network of railroads here paralleled each other as connectors marked by their incomprehensible power to unite the world.

The Failures of the Cable: Signs of Progress

In 1858 there were few reliable signs that communication across the ocean by telegraphy would succeed, let alone assurance that unity would prevail in a world rocked

²⁵¹ A joke published in *Harper's Weekly* after the 1866 Atlantic Cable succeeded played on the way ideas of linkage held meanings in social and technological life: “Shall we call Mr. Field [who masterminded the 1858 and 1866 Atlantic Cables] an aristocrat because he is so very proud of his ‘connections’?” “Humors of the Day,” *Harper's Weekly*, August 18, 1866, <http://app.harperweek.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/IssueImagesView.asp?titleId=HW&volumeId=1866&issueId=0818&page=519>.

²⁵² J.S.W., “A Quarter of the Century in Chicago,” *Chicago Daily Press*, reprinted in *Lake Superior Miner* (Ontonogan, MI), January 16, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11B32A5468BC2578&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

by conflict. In fact, most evidence pointed to the inevitable failure of transatlantic telegraphy. American newspapers readily reported on the failures of the cable and the likelihood of the failure of the entire endeavor up to the last moments in which its initial success was confirmed. Reports often encouraged readers to expect failure. In a report in late June, 1858, the *New York Times* reported that while the official statements by the engineer of the Atlantic Cable and reports in English newspapers spoke of one or two instances of the cable breaking mid-sea and attributed these ruptures to old cable and rough seas, reporters on board the *Niagara* witnessed many more instances of cable breaking in both old and new sections of the line at a time when the sea was calm. “We fear this second experiment will prove a failure,” an officer quoted in the article glumly concludes.²⁵³

Technical problems besieged the cable, including damage to the cable’s insulation, faulty connections between cables as they were spliced, and navigational troubles, in addition to the innumerable dangers in having two ships meet mid-way in the ocean, splice their two cables together, and wend their way back to ports of call while signaling across the line that stretched between them. Just getting the ships out to sea with functioning wire coiled aboard was nearly impossible. The *New York Herald* included two reports on the cable that illustrated this vividly. The report from Halifax on December 31 at 10:00 p.m. stated, “It is now blowing a southwesterly gale here, and it is still very wet, but there are prospects of its clearing up. The telegraph lines are working horribly. It is hardly probable that either the *Canada* from Boston or the *Niagara* from Liverpool will arrive before noon tomorrow.” A second, from St. John, New Brunswick

²⁵³ “The Atlantic Telegraph-Probability of Failure,” *New York Times*, June 24, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/91422654?accountid=14244>.

at 1:30 a.m. on January 1, 1858 stated, “The line has been interrupted between here and Sackville since about eleven o'clock. The trouble appears like a cross with some branch wire. We have been trying incessantly for nearly three hours to raise Sackville, and are now compelled to abandon the attempt as useless.”²⁵⁴ Because so many of the steps involved in this task were complicated, risky, and often unprecedented, the reports on the cable were riddled with accounts of failure.²⁵⁵ The likely outcome was that the *Niagara* and the *Agamemnon* would signal to each other and then succumb to “darkness again and a silence,” resembling Longfellow’s ships passing in the night.²⁵⁶

While the cable did ultimately succeed, its success was short-lived before it fell silent on the great ocean floor. The last complete message was transmitted by the Atlantic Cable on September 1, 1858. Despite desperate attempts that pushed a few fragmented

²⁵⁴ “The Latest News,” *New York Herald*, January 1, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11B9BB66031F02E0&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

²⁵⁵ An additional challenge was the political support the Atlantic Cable required from both sides of the ocean. At the end of 1857, the Atlantic Telegraph Company petitioned U.S. President James Buchanan and his cabinet to commission the U.S. warship *Niagara* to lay the east side of the cable. The *New York Herald* reported that several members of Congress used the opportunity to attempt to extort money from the Atlantic Telegraph Company under threats of their opposition. After Buchanan quickly agreed to the Atlantic Telegraph Company's request, these corrupt members of Congress, thwarted in their negotiations, took up the cause of drafting a resolution to repeal the law that authorized the use of U.S. warships in the laying of the cable. As the *New York Herald* reported, “One member of Congress, it is said, made the modest proposal that the company should lend him ten thousand dollars for four years, in consideration of withdrawing his opposition [to the Atlantic Telegraph Company's plans].” “Affairs in Washington,” *New York Herald*, January 11, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11B9BB674D669A60&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

²⁵⁶ Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, *The Poetical Works of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: Tales of Wayside Inn* (New York: Houghton, Mifflin, 1886), 6:224.

transmissions through, the cable's signals died out completely on October 28, 1858.²⁵⁷

Even when transmissions were successful, the cable that would bring the world into simultaneity transmitted at the rate of a few words per hour.²⁵⁸ The ninety-nine words of Queen Victoria's message to President James Buchanan took a relatively speedy twelve hours and nineteen minutes to transmit.²⁵⁹

In addition to being slow, the telegrams sent on the cable that would annihilate distance were largely the communication of miscommunications. The transcript of some of the telegrams on the seventh day of the cable's functional operation, August 16, 1858, read as follows:

Newfoundland to Valentia.

Sent 12.4 a.m.—“Send V's.”

Valentia to Newfoundland.

²⁵⁷ Bill Glover, “Cable Timeline: Atlantic Cables 1856-2012,” ed. Bill Burns, *History of the Atlantic Cable and Undersea Communications from the First Submarine Cable of 1850 to the Worldwide Fiber Optic Network*, Bill Burns's Private Collection, <http://atlantic-cable.com/Cables/CableTimeLine/atlantic.htm>.

²⁵⁸ Bill Burns, “Cable Signaling Speed and Traffic Capacity,” *History of the Atlantic Cable and Undersea Communications from the First Submarine Cable of 1850 to the Worldwide Fiber Optic Network*, Bill Burns's Private Collection, <http://atlantic-cable.com/Cables/speed.htm>.

²⁵⁹ “The Queen desires to congratulate the President upon the successful completion of this great international work, in which the Queen has taken the deepest interest. The Queen is convinced that the President will join with her in fervently hoping that the electric cable, which now connects Great Britain with the United States, will prove an additional link between the two places whose friendship is founded upon their common interests and reciprocal esteem. The Queen has much pleasure in thus directly communicating with the President, and in renewing to him her best wishes for the prosperity of the United States.” Victoria to James Buchanan, telegram, August 16, 1858-August 17, 1858, *Report of the Joint Committee Appointed by the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and the Atlantic Telegraph Company to Inquire into the Construction of Submarine Telegraph Cables; Together with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1861), 232.

Sent 12.20 a.m.—“Sent V’s.”

Newfoundland to Valentia.

Sent 12.34 [a.m.] —“Please send alphabet.”

Valentia to Newfoundland.

Sent 2.27 [a.m.]—“Sent alphabet.”

Newfoundland to Valentia.

Sent 2.57 [a.m.]—“All right but three letters. Please ask some question, but much faster.”

Valentia to Newfoundland.

Sent 3.35 a.m.—“Understand. Can [The rest of the message, which was unintelligible:—“You take a message?” These words came afterwards, forming the twentieth message.].

Newfoundland to Valentia.

Sent 3.36 a.m.—“Please after care. Yes, at same rate.”

Valentia to Newfoundland.

Sent 4.56 a.m.—“You must repeat each sentence in full.”

Newfoundland to Valentia.

Sent 5.15 a.m.—“Repeat word before ‘in.’”

Valentia to Newfoundland.

Sent 5.40 a.m.—“Sentence.”

Newfoundland to Valentia.

Sent 5.55 a.m.—“I said—‘send your message.’”

Sent 6.40 a.m.—“Received but not intelligible. Try again, commencing with four

V's.²⁶⁰

The technology that was to unite the world took six hours to transmit the above correspondence, of which the only successful transmissions were v's, an incomplete alphabet, and requests to send, before the operators were reduced to repeating their v's. More substantive messages fared no better; two short messages sent from England to Canada regarding troop movements took twelve hours to transmit and largely consisted of requests for the operator to resend the message.²⁶¹

The failures of the cable did little to dampen enthusiasm for it. Even reports that highlighted the difficulty and shortcomings of this venture couched their concerns in an optimistic sense of the world's speedy progress toward global connection. By 1858 the tension between failure and success had become a standard motif in news reports on the cable's progress. These descriptions of the telegraph were decidedly celebratory, particularly given the daunting nature of this endeavor, the absence of a historical precedence, and the history of failed past attempts. This affirmative tone did not deny past and potential failures but, rather, foregrounded them as reasons within a teleology of progress that guaranteed ultimate vindication. The promise of success despite failure became a standard element of reports on the cable's progress. These reports regarded disconnection and failure as minor setbacks on the grand path to inevitable success. These reports relied on teleologies of progress and the kinds of positive valuation that adhered to technological innovation in this time.

²⁶⁰ *Report of the Joint Committee Appointed by the Lords of the Committee of Privy Council for Trade and the Atlantic Telegraph Company to Inquire into the Construction of Submarine Telegraph Cables; Together with the Minutes of Evidence and Appendix* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1861), 231.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 286-287.

The Logic of Progress

Accounts of the increasing speed of information transmission and the rapid spread of cabled connections often rely on a progressive version of history in which each misstep is subsumed into a narrative of ultimate success. The Atlantic Telegraph Cable of 1858 was, from the American perspective, a critical step on the way to the world's first electric global communication network. Retrospectively, this failed attempt has been read within a triumphalist history that progressed from the telegraph to the internet in less than 200 years. In 1858, for the first time speech could travel across the Atlantic Ocean faster than a boat, which meant that transatlantic communication no longer relied on a human messenger. Americans have cheered that new technologies would make communication instantaneous, from when a few words slowly pulsed across the hefty 1858 cable each hour to the current record of 1.15 terabits of data sent by laser through a single fiber optic in one second.²⁶² In dominant discourses of communication technology, the world has become more connected as speed of transmission has increased.

Many of the news reports on the Atlantic Telegraph couched the failures of the present in a longer forward-looking story in which the promises of instant communication would surely be realized. Progress, particularly when presented as a given, external force that worked like a natural law, made success appear inevitable no matter what failures it

²⁶² NEC Corporation announced their claim on a new transatlantic speed record in January of 2012. They used an optical superchannel technology which would use laser to transmit data on existing fiber optic cables. Sebastian Anthony, "NEC Sets 4 Tbps Transatlantic Speed Record," *Extreme Tech*, January 11, 2012, <http://www.extremetech.com/computing/113137-nec-sets-4tbps-transatlantic-speed-record>. See also their press release, "NEC Demonstrates First Terabit/s Superchannel Transmission over 10,000km," January 10, 2012, <http://www.nec.co.jp/press/en/1201/1001.html>.

encountered along the way. What appeared impossible would be overcome through the innovation that was already in motion. Such inevitability subsumed the shortcomings that were part of this early telegraphic venture and recapitulated them as signs of success. Each attempt that ended in a no was understood as a step that defined the path to yes.

Therefore, doubts about the cable's capacity are expressed as evidence *for* the cable's inevitable effectiveness at linking North America and Europe. The *London Times* reported on the limits of transmission within a frame of certain triumph (reprinted in the *New York Herald*):

To many of our readers unacquainted with the practical working of submarine lines only eight words per minute may appear to be but poor result after all, though we can assure them that, if ever attained, it is such an improvement in the rate of transmission as not many ventured to anticipate who saw the cable worked for the first time last summer. At the same time such a result seems to show with most convincing clearness that, though 480 words per hour through this line, if it is successfully laid down, might doubtless amply remunerate the company, it would still be almost as far as ever from accommodating the business messages between Europe and the New World. If, therefore, this line is submerged this summer it will *follow as a matter of course* that three of four others *must* be laid as well, and there seems no reason why if one can be laid down there should not be as many telegraphs under the Atlantic as there are now under the Channel.²⁶³

This logic of subsuming failure within a narrative of success was a mainstay of reporting on the cable, particularly as failures besieged it. In one *New York Herald* report, faulty wire actually strengthened the cable: "When a defective part [of the cable] is detected the process of coiling is suspended until the imperfect portion of the wire is cut away, and the whole is replaced in a manner that not only *secures the perfect* insulation of the

²⁶³ "The Atlantic Telegraph," *London Times*, March 11, 1858, reprinted in *New York Herald*, March 29, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11B9BBEDE4AA3330&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

conductor, but actually *adds to the strength* of the cable.”²⁶⁴

At work in these reports is a logic of scientific innovation, in which the new is understood as inevitably better. Indeed 1858 marked a year in which Americans stood on the cusp of a capacity for communication that would far exceed what had been possible. Science comes to stand in as the embodiment of the momentum of progress such that science became an authority that no longer required substantiation. In one radical declaration that demonstrates this logic of subsuming failure under the given authority of science, the *San Antonio Ledger* reported, “The gentlemen having charge of the operations, have recently reported that no element of failure beyond the control of science

²⁶⁴ “The Atlantic Telegraph,” *New York Herald*, May 11, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11B2CDBC6CFEBC0&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF (emphasis added). A similar incorporation of failure into success can be seen elsewhere in this article's discussion of splicing: “There is in fact no department of the work in which there is more skill and ingenuity displayed than in that of splicing; and it is particularly deserving of remark here that only in one instance during the last expedition was the cable known to part at a splicing. This, however, requires an explanation, from which it will be seen that the case was an extraordinary one, and such as under the new arrangement will not be likely to occur again. The splice had been made at the junction of the shore end of the cable with the deep sea line, and was not as perfect as could be desired, on account of the difference in size between the two portions, so that when subject to a strain it parted while in the act of passing over the wheels or sheaves of the paying out machine. The second attempt to join the two parts was, however, most successful, and by the aid of a hawser to relieve the spliced portion from any undue strain, it was lowered safely into the water. The continuity was found to have been unimpaired by the fracture, and the cable worked as well as if it had never been parted.” “The Atlantic Telegraph,” *New York Herald*, May 11, 1858, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=F5DP5DAXMTM2NzgxMDY2Ny40MTA1MjY6MToxMzoxNTIuMi4xNzYuMjQy&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=11&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=11&p_docnum=3&p_docref=v2:11A050B7B120D3F8@EANX-11B2CDBBC896CE88@2399811-11B2CDBBDC588BC8@1-11B2CDBC6CFEBC0@Additional+from+Europe+Death+of+the+Captain+of+the+Macedonia+the+Result+of+the+Financial+Panic+in+Europe (emphasis added).

has been developed.”²⁶⁵ Here, unforeseeable setbacks are subsumed within a discourse in which science-as-progress always and inevitably wins.

Generative Failure

While discourses of progress promised success *despite* failure, the modern global imaginary built around the Atlantic Telegraph Cable was sustained *because of* failure. The function of failure within this imaginary of a world united by the yet-to-be-successful Atlantic Cable was not merely another misstep on the path to inevitable success. Failure as failure was generative. Failure produced the disconnections and impossibilities that constituted these material networks and the social forms that were built through them. Failure opened a critical space for the investment of affect that sustained this imaginary.

While many news reports subsumed failure within a logic of progress, some reports revealed failure’s utility in creating this modern global imaginary. For example, in a stirring passage in the *San Antonio Ledger* in April of 1858, the problems of communication were woven into the fabric of acclaim:

It will be an annihilation of time and space that will bring the eastern and western hemispheres within hailing distance of each other; it will infuse a new, and perhaps, in some respects, an embarrassing intelligence into the transactions of commerce; and news of all the current events of times—the wars and rumors of wars—the calamities that men inflict upon themselves and each other, or suffer in the natural course of things, with the thousand minor items of detail that swell the catalogue of human destiny—will flash with the speed of thought from one extremity of the globe to the other.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ “The Atlantic Telegraph,” *San Antonio Ledger*, April 3, 1858.

²⁶⁶ Unattributed quotation, “The Atlantic Telegraph,” *The San Antonio Ledger*, April 3, 1858.

The proximity and totality of the globe were produced through the very conflicts and “embarrassing intelligence” that made global unity impossible. Failure was a critical generative element for the production of the world as a united whole.

There are a few crucial failures at work in modern global imaginaries. First, declaration and deferral each entail failure. Declaration announces the arrival of a reality that does not exist. Deferral promises a future it cannot guarantee. The utopia created in declaration and deferral does not avoid failure; rather, as Jameson insists, utopia’s only possibility is “to succeed by failure.”²⁶⁷ Moreover, the failures of declaration and deferral eke out a space for the cultural processes of imagination that enact this world.

Imagination confronts a third failure: the impossibility of capturing any totality in a representation. Just as a map can never fully represent the territory it portrays, any vision of the globe is necessarily partial and misleading. Kevin Lynch, in *The Image of the City*, offers the term “cognitive mapping” to describe the process by which people makes sense of their surroundings by plotting themselves on a mental image of the city as a whole.²⁶⁸

Fredric Jameson takes up the term to note that any attempt to locate oneself inside a totality—whether a city, a nation, or a world—raises the specter of impossibility: “The social totality is always unrepresentable.”²⁶⁹ This unrepresentability does not hinder imaginary activity; rather, it is the unrepresentability of the globe that makes room for imagination’s constitutive creativity. Because representation necessarily fails, it entails

²⁶⁷ Jameson, “Progress versus Utopia,” 153.

²⁶⁸ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960).

²⁶⁹ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 14.

creative action to construct a viable image of the world.

A Failure to Communicate

Failure is also necessary to the central term of this imaginary: the endeavor of communication itself. Communication's very possibility requires failure. On a linguistic level, the signifier can never fully represent the signified in a one-to-one correspondence. In other words, there is no inherent relationship between a word and the concept or object that word is paired with. Moreover, any given word only functions through its relationships with other words. This is true in the sense that we can understand any given word only by distinguishing it from other words (e.g., cat from bat, hat, dog, etc.), a particular preoccupation of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure.²⁷⁰ It is also true in the sense that each word accrues meaning through its affiliation with other words (cat refers to an animal but also carries attendant ideas of cuteness, fickleness, Catwoman, hep cat, etc.). For thinkers such as Jacques Lacan and Jacques Derrida, language makes meaning not despite such referentiality and displacement but because of it.²⁷¹

²⁷⁰ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, trans. Wade Baskin (New York: Philosophical Society, 1959). See also Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, corr. ed., trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997).

²⁷¹ Lacan provides an apt example in "The Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious": "thirty sails" as a way to describe a fleet of ships. There is no direct equation between sails and ships; as Lacan points out it is impossible to know how many ships these thirty sails should represent since "for a ship to have but one sail is very rare indeed." Yet it is not difficult for the reader to understand, with or without the surrounding sentence, that it is not merely thirty detached pieces of canvas floating over the sea. Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter," 421. The referentiality of language is also a basis for the idea of *différance* discussed in the previous chapter. Derrida, "Différance." See also Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *Margins of*

Saussure proposes that language functions by arbitrarily connecting words (signifiers) to concepts and objects (signifieds). Lacan provides a different model of language that will be helpful here. Lacan rejects Saussure's idea that the signifier and signified are paired in closed one-to-one correspondence. For Lacan, signifiers can only produce meaning through reference to other signifiers.²⁷² The relationship between any word and concept is never fixed. Rather, it is temporary and conditional. Moreover, signifiers are meaningful even when their relationship to any signified is intentionally thwarted. As Lacan points out, one can still understand the question, "My dear, my dearest, how many pebbles is it since I have had the apprentice to sugar you?" because meaning is conveyed by the structure of the surrounding signifiers with little need for a correspondence between word and concept.²⁷³ Furthermore, there are specific instances in which meaning is made not despite such displacement but because of it, as in the case of sarcasm, puns, and metaphor. In these cases, the displacement of an expected word is the

Philosophy, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 207-271. Other proponents of the theory that there is no zero-degree discourse include Ernesto Laclau, *On Populist Reason* (New York: Verso, 2005); Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*; Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ (New York: Routledge Classics, 2003); and Hayden White, *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978).

²⁷² Lacan refers to the referentiality of words as the "signifying chain," in which each word links to another. Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter," 418. Only through the chain can any word make meaning: "it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning *insists*, but that none of the chain's elements *consists* in the signification it can provide at that very moment." *Ibid.*, 419.

²⁷³ The question comes from the Jean Tardieu play "Un Mot pour un autre" quoted in Jacques Lacan, *The Psychoses (The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book III)*, trans. Russell Grigg (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 226.

very thing that generates meaning.²⁷⁴ For example, in the epigraph to this chapter, Longfellow illustrates the fragility of connection in a discussion of ships. The ships stand in for (that is, displace) people and thus evoke a passing meeting as an experience of social disconnection rife with distance, loneliness, and the fragility of interpersonal bonds. The function of displacement is not only generative of meaning in poetry. For Lacan, there is no direct or permanent correlation between the word and the concept; thus all language functions by virtue of displacement. Derrida agrees: all language functions by virtue of the combination of difference and deferral he terms, “*différance*.”²⁷⁵ In other words, any meaning language makes happens through disconnection. Failure serves as language’s very condition of possibility.

Christian Lundberg, in his study of Lacan, rhetoric, and social theory, *Lacan in Public*, extends this linguistic theory into an account of the generative role of failure in social lives. Lundberg takes up Ernesto Laclau’s claim that Lacan highlights a “failed unicity” of discourse and ontology.²⁷⁶ To have unicity would be to have a “coherent totality underwriting the subject, sign, and the act of communication or of discourse that unites speaker, speech, and speech act in a coherent transhistorical whole.”²⁷⁷ Faced with the impossibility of such coherent wholeness, subjects act as if there were unicity in their identity, social forms, and discourse. To complement Laclau’s “failed unicity,” Lundberg claims that subjects “feign unicity”: “Feigned unicity between signs, representations, and

²⁷⁴Lacan discusses this at length in “The Instance of the Letter.”

²⁷⁵ Derrida, “*Différance*.”

²⁷⁶ Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, 224, cited in Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*, 2.

²⁷⁷ Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*, 2.

their referents purchases the subject an ability to act as if words and representations effortlessly stand in for their referents.”²⁷⁸ Because the fracture of our social lives and discourse prompts our creative action to produce a fictional coherence within which we can live, Lundberg understands failure itself to play a critical generative role. “Failures of unicity in speech, subject, and the sign are put to work as forces that call forth our investment in the supplements, fantasies, and imagined totalities that work to cover over failed unicity: instead of becoming fatal in the life of speech and the speaking subject, failures in unicity become the driving forces that animate human existence.”²⁷⁹ Failure motivates our creative forging of a coherent whole in which to live and our affective investment in that fictional totality.

The Logic of Perfection

Characterizations of the telegraphic venture as “perfect” provide a vital example of the work required to produce a coherent totality out of an experience of fracture and failure. Perfection—as a standard that denotes the absolute absence of defect—was as yet unachieved. Despite the fact that each inch of cable was tested and retested, these were new technologies that were endangered every time they were moved, adjusted, fixed, coiled, unwound, and fused. In one instance, it was reported that the entire cable ceased functioning because of a small hole in the insulation caused by a nail protruding from a

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 3.

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 2-3.

worker's shoe.²⁸⁰ Yet reports continued to claim perfection. For example, the *Columbus Tri-Weekly Enquirer* noted the vast length of the cable and proclaimed it perfect in the same sentence: "More than two thousand miles of the cable have been coiled on board the ships, and machinery is completed and pronounced perfect."²⁸¹

Perfection is a peculiar assurance against further failure, particularly with new technology. The only way to know if a technology is perfect is to see that it functions through all the unforeseen factors that inevitably besiege a new venture. When the technology is unprecedented, the problems are also unprecedented and, thus, unforeseeable. Perfection as an assurance against likely failure ultimately offers very little except a repetition of the very impossibility it is said to safeguard against. No technology, particularly no unprecedented technology, is perfect. Thus, to say that a venture riddled with impossibility is not impossible but perfect simply replaces a practical impossibility (the telegraph will not work) with an impossible standard (the telegraph is perfect). Perfection works like a shell game, hiding one impossibility under

²⁸⁰ "It was found by reference to the telegraph instrument that the current did not pass through the whole cable, and on stopping to discover the cause it was found that a nail in the shoe of one of the workmen had penetrated through the wire covering of the cable and the gutta percha [a form of latex produced in Asia] coating of the conductor. Through the small opening produced in this way the electrical fluid had been dissipated and thus failed to make the circuit of the whole wire." Notably, the article continued in the very next sentence to hail the perfection of the device that caught the error: "The unerring certainty with which the telegraph indicator works in such cases is one of the most remarkable and interesting features of the science of telegraphing." "The Great Ocean Telegraph," *New York Herald*, April 20, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.882004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=11B2CD95EE288F10&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

²⁸¹ "General News," *Columbus Tri-Weekly Enquirer*, May 15, 1858, http://docs.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/openurl?ctx_ver=z39.88-2004&rft_id=info:sid/iw.newsbank.com:EANX&rft_val_format=info:ofi/fmt:kev:mtx:ctx&rft_dat=1130385C072A4638&svc_dat=HistArchive:ahnpdoc&req_dat=0FF0DDC272369ADF.

the fast moving cups of another.

A new technology can only be declared perfect in retrospect, once it has successfully survived the conditions that befall it. Perfection for new technology works through its absolutism because it is, by definition, unable to provide sufficient explanation or substantial evidence. For instance, this article on the Atlantic Telegraph from the *London Times* and reprinted in the *New York Herald* stated:

It is no exaggeration to say that there is one portion of the apparatus upon the fitness and proper management of which the success or non-success of the whole plan must ultimately depend, and that is upon the paying out machinery. That this machinery was bad last year, and that it was made still worse by the most absurd management, no one now denies; but *we trust and believe* that there is no chance of a repetition this year of great blunders. How the new machinery is constructed *we cannot at present say*, further than that a new self-acting brake has been devised, which is *said to be perfect*.²⁸²

This report employed the double move of reliance on scientific discourse while at the same time failing to present any substantive explanatory mechanism or evidence. Scientific authority was evoked without any of the protocols of expert scientific discourse in play. Rather, scientific authority as a reliable, if unnamed, source served to legitimize these empty declarations of perfection.

The article took past failure and the scope of this herculean task in stride as it assured its readers of inevitable success: “The general programme of the second and, as we trust final attempt to submerge this gigantic line of electrical communication between the New and Old Worlds is, we believe, decided on, and all the preparations necessary to secure a successful plan of operations are rapidly advancing toward completion.” The article went on to announce that the additional length of cable manufactured to replace

²⁸² “The Atlantic Telegraph,” *London Times*, March 11, 1858, reprinted in *New York Herald*, March 29, 1858, emphasis added.

that which was lost undersea in the last attempt “is of precisely the same kind of cable as the rest [the cable made for the last, failed, attempt], which we have already described—flexible, strong, small and light; it has been tested and retested to insure its *perfect* insulation, and *its completeness being thus definitely ascertained.*”²⁸³ Failure is employed here to launch claims of perfection and definitive success. The perfection discourse surrounding the Atlantic Telegraph identified the cable as absolutely perfect in the context of a near guarantee of failure given the precedence set by past failed attempts.

A Disconnected Network

The focus on unity in the connected globe the telegraph was said to inaugurate bears the danger of masking the important role played by disunity in this modern global imaginary. The 1858 cable’s insulation burned out just twenty-three days after the first successful transatlantic transmission and rendered it a useless collection of wires discarded on the ocean floor. In a time in which the concept of networked connections was applied to everything from railroads to the nerves of the human body, the 1858 cable presented a grand moment of disconnection.²⁸⁴ Disconnection did not serve as a minor obstacle to be overcome but as a critical element in the flourishing of an impossible imaginary.

A long history of valuing connection as a crucial element of biological and social life, in which transatlantic telegraphy played a significant part, has obscured the

²⁸³ Ibid (emphasis added).

²⁸⁴ For more on the rise of the network as a prevalent metaphor for the nervous system, communication, and sociality, see Otis, *Networking*.

generative role of disconnection and rendered commonsensical the idea that disconnection is an obstacle to be overcome. The network dominated discourse about electricity, communication, neurology, and sociality in the nineteenth century and continues to serve as a primary explanatory mechanism for communication technology and sociality today.²⁸⁵ In both instances, the metaphor of the network proposes that social life is performed through durable connections across which information flows.

The central limit of network as a metaphor is that, while it can account for new social affiliations, it cannot account for disconnection or how disconnection can engender new knowledge and forms of social life. In *The Network Inside Out*, Annelise Riles raises three critiques of the network as a dominant metaphor for communication and social

²⁸⁵ For example, Bruno Latour's landmark text of network theory, *Reassembling the Social*, proposes Actor-Network Theory as a methodology in which scholars trace connections like ants by staying close to the particular connections they find without making any scalar leaps into metaphysical pronouncements on a governing structure. For Latour, the network at stake is not a set of interconnected points that exists in a stable form in the world, such as the links of so many railroad lines, but a constantly changing point-to-point connection that leaves a physical trace as long as there is movement along it. A theory premised on connection leaves little room for adept considerations of disconnection and disaffiliation. Latour is adamant that the network is not a social form. Claiming it to be social, he argues, could only come about by releasing oneself from the antlike adherence to the connection itself and attempting to see the network as a whole in a stable state. Stability, he argues, is the exception. However, Latour's network is ontological despite his claims to the contrary. While Latour's network is indeed unstable and in a constant state of shifting forms, it is a given form with given connections that the scholar "finds" in the world without "filtering" or "disciplining." Latour presents the network as an empirical reality rather than a discursively produced aesthetic of information and relationships. The unstable network is a thing in the world. Moreover, the network is indeed a social form, albeit an unstable one. The idea of the network here relies entirely on connections between humans, objects and quasi-objects. It is, therefore, a set of relationships. Cutting us off from thinking about the particular forms this network takes or what particular structures govern its possibilities instantiates the network as the *only* mode of connection. In this way, Latour seems to have unintentionally provided a significantly determining metaphysical frame. Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

organization.²⁸⁶ First, networks instantiate an aesthetics of information that presumes that everything one needs already exists in the world; one merely needs to access it. Second, the network is just *one* aesthetic of information among many.²⁸⁷ Understanding the network as a methodology, as Latour suggests, blinds scholars to other forms of exchange and articulation. Finally, the notion of the network focuses on the flow of information across connections and forecloses an account of the fragmented form of social relationships, which are riddled with enmity, gossip, jealousies and miscommunications.²⁸⁸ The network compels us to follow unbroken lines of connection without providing a means to account for the many ways that knowledge arises through broken lines and miscommunications. Disconnection—in language, subjectivity, communication technology, and the modern global imaginary of this study—opens a site for the investment of social energy and the creative structuring of social life.

The Affective Formation around Failure

Failure provided a space in which the creative work of this modern global imaginary could occur. The multiple ways in which the world failed to be the connected totality Americans had declared required the creative action of the participants in this imaginary to supplement the world they experienced with the world they enacted.

²⁸⁶ Riles, *Network Inside Out*.

²⁸⁷ Riles identifies the network as an aesthetic of information particular to modernity. *Ibid.*, 2.

²⁸⁸ Riles offers a helpful description of the kinds of ruptures that interrupt and constitutes networks. *Ibid.*, 175-178.

Failure—as the vital gap between a coherent whole world that would surely arrive and the world of fracture, conflict, miscommunication, and telegraphic silence that was firmly present in 1858—opened a site for the investment of affect. One report on the success of the 1858 cable put it succinctly: “A result so practical, and yet so inconceivable; so pregnant with consequences which prophecy alone can fathom and estimate; so full of hopeful prognostics for the future of mankind, must in all time designate this period in the annals of race as one of the loftiest moments; as one of the grand wavemarks in the onward and upward march of the human intellect.”²⁸⁹ The unknowable future and the teleology of progress joined uneasy hands in a contradictory declaration of contingency and inevitable success and made the moment a site to which passion could adhere.

When the Atlantic Cable worked for the first time, the eastern coast of the United States erupted in celebration. Bells were rung, guns were shot, and buildings were illuminated. Even these wholehearted celebrations, however, carried with them the ambiguity of this imaginary that was always rendered from the plural perspectives of a surprising present and a predicted, progressive successful future. It was a vertiginous place from which to locate the now, a place of wonder and terror, or in a word, awe: the windows of buildings on Fulton Street displayed transparencies that read “Two worlds united. Mark the event” and “Success to the Atlantic Telegraph. We are living, we are dwelling,/ In a grand and awful time—/ In an age of thrilling wonder—/To be living is sublime.”²⁹⁰ This dizzying moment produced a chaotic feeling—the Great Fizzle—and

²⁸⁹ “The Atlantic Telegraph: The Failure of the First Effort in Eighteen Hundred and Fifty-Eight,” *New York Times*, August 7, 1858.

²⁹⁰ “Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1858.

offered a glimpse at this world in its making.

What was this world making and how did it engage such effort if it was grounded in failure? In other words, what makes a fizzle that doesn't fizzle out? Affect is the social energy through which subjects, meaning, and cultures are produced and organized.²⁹¹ In this modern global imaginary, affect organized social investment around the telegraph cable and connected the cable to dreams for a unified global community. Affect plays two important roles in the constitution of modern global imaginaries. First, affect functions as the suturing force through which signifiers and signified are paired to produce and circulate meanings. Second, affect structures the manner in which meanings, identities, objects, and ideas matter in a specific social conjuncture. That is, affect organizes commitment such that certain meanings matter more than others. Affect acted as the critical element in sustaining this modern global imaginary. Drawing on recent work in affect theory, particularly Christian Lundberg's work on affect and rhetoric and Lawrence Grossberg's work on affect and American political culture, will allow us to explore these two roles for affect.

As discussed above, language functions through its displacements. Words make meaning by standing in for other words and, ultimately, for concepts or objects. Yet meaning also requires that these shifting displacements pause at certain points to join words to concepts in a durable way. To explain this, Lacan turns to the unlikely metaphor

²⁹¹ While often used interchangeably with emotion, affect as used here is different from emotion in three critical ways. First, unlike emotion, affect does not well up from within an individual. Affect is social and can pass through us, work on us, and move us. Second, unlike emotion, affect does not signify something beyond itself nor is it successfully represented in language, whereas sadness, anger, joy appear to name emotions relatively well. Third, unlike emotion, affect gives critical texture to our social lives in ways that determine who we are, how we live, and how we imagine the world we inhabit.

of upholstery. The plane of words and the plane of concepts can be seen as the cloth and batting of the upholstery on a sofa. They are arranged to touch in particular places, so that one point of the cloth comes into contact with one point of the batting. These relationships are not cemented for all time, but they can have some stability.²⁹²

There are particularly powerful pairings of a word and a concept that do more than simply make meaning for themselves. These powerful pairings organize the field of discourse around them.²⁹³ For example, in the nineteenth century Americans declared that a stretch of copper cable was the unifier of humanity. That declaration did not simply enable the telegraph to assume meaning, it affected the way Americans understood other concepts such as communication, electricity, and even "America" itself. Lacan called such powerful pairings "quilting points" (*points de caption*).²⁹⁴ As an upholstery button on the back of a couch fixes the fabric and batting at one particular point and strains and arranges the surrounding fabric, these pairings of sign and referent exert an organizing force on the surrounding field of meaning.

These pairs of signifiers and signifieds are joined, according to Lacan, by affect. It is through social investment that words or signs adhere to concepts. For example, a certain kind of ring worn on a specific finger can signal love and the social priority placed on heterosexual marriage, a strip of colored plastic worn around one's wrist can

²⁹² Lacan, *The Psychoses*, 258-270.

²⁹³ Lundberg describes Lacanian metaphor in this way: "metaphor is a particularly affectively saturated connection that organizes a field of metonymic connections around a central figure." Lundberg, *Lacan in Public*, 78.

²⁹⁴ Lacan, "The Instance of the Letter," 419. Bruce Fink translates *points de caption* as "button ties." This paper employs the more familiar term "quilting point" used by Russell Grigg in his translation of Lacan, *The Psychoses*.

indicate that one is a philanthropist or cancer survivor, and so on. The elements of our world take on meaning through their socially forged associations with other elements, and their durability depends on the continued investment of energy in that particular connection. Many people invest a great deal of energy in the value of a ring worn on the left ring finger; it is likely that wedding bands will persist as a sign of marriage for a long time. But unless people continue to produce, wear, and care about Live Strong bracelets, colored strips of plastic around our wrists are less likely to mean that we support cancer research in ten or twenty years. As beings who extensively interact in non-representational, corporeal, and emotive relations, we live our social lives by tying elements of this world together in meaningful, but contingent, constellations.

In 1858, the telegraph signaled a new and vital hope for a coherent global community. The telegraph no longer signals that. But this original social investment reverberates in the meaning now ascribed to the internet and social media. The meaning changed with the shifting focus of social investment. Some parts of the meaning fell away and re-adhered to a new object. The quilting point was re-sewn in a new place.

Religion's function, Lacan once declared, is to “unearth correlations between everything.”²⁹⁵ Taking this comment with a much-needed grain of salt, we might say that one of religion's functions is to create meaning in social life by working to forge complex webs of associations. Religion provides a storehouse of images, vocabularies, structures, and logics that are read onto objects and make them meaningful. Because these resources carry the hefty weight of the emotional, material, and intellectual investment in religion as a body of meaning, they not only provide a set of meanings and attendant associations

²⁹⁵ Jacques Lacan, “Press Conference at the French Cultural Center, Rome,” *Lettres de l'École freudienne* 16 (1975): 6-26.

but weight those meanings such that they become culturally significant. Religion forges powerful quilting points that can dominate the surrounding field of meaning. In the most obvious form, religion assimilates certain symbols so that their primary meaning is understood as religious (a cross, a six-pointed star, etc.) Yet religion is also hard at work in other less-expected areas of American life. In the case of the transatlantic telegraph, a diverse community—from Protestant missionaries to civic leaders—spoke of the newly united world that electric speech would create in explicitly Christian terms. President Buchanan called the telegraph “an instrument destined by Divine Providence to diffuse religion, civilization, liberty, and law throughout the world.”²⁹⁶ Missionary documents described the telegraph as the “opportunity” that would finally allow missions to establish “a living Christianity everywhere.”²⁹⁷ These statements are not merely religious ways of speaking about the telegraph; the affective weight born by this Christian vocabulary and imagery forged the affiliation of the telegraph with dreams of global community in particularly durable ways.

Affect also acts as energy that structures what we care about, how we live, and who we are. Affect produces meaning and also renders certain meanings more culturally important than others. Affect can help us understand why the Atlantic Cable as a unifier of the world surpassed other meanings of the cable. For example, the cable was uniformly described in America as a bridge between the U.S. and England. But the cable was actually strung between Ireland and Canada. The British envisioned the Atlantic Telegraph as an entirely British venture that linked the United Kingdom with their

²⁹⁶ Cited in Prescott, *History, Theory, and Practice*, 189.

²⁹⁷ Anderson, *Memorial Volume*.

colony, Canada. For example, in October 1858, the *New York Times* reprinted a report from the *London Times* that illustrated how President Buchanan's strong suggestion of the cable's neutrality in times of war was met: "perhaps Mr. Buchanan would like to secure the neutrality of the British *fleet* also, in case of war."²⁹⁸ The *New York Times* continued:

The Telegraph is regarded as thoroughly and exclusively a British institution, —just as completely British property as the Cunard steamers; *and so it will remain*. It is owned mainly by British capital: it is mainly in the hands of British directors:—its ends are upon British soil, —and its operators are British subjects. In the event of war it will be used, solely and exclusively for the promotion of British interests:—and that, too, in spite of all the promises, negotiations and pledges that may be entered into.²⁹⁹

The meaning of the telegraph as an exclusively British institution, however, carried no weight for people in the United States. It may have been true, but it did not matter.

The cable was understood by Americans, facts be damned, as their link with the world.

These weighted meanings for the telegraph indicate a role for affect that moves beyond securing meanings to signs. The meaning-making work of affect, particularly at quilting points in which the saturation of affect sends lines of force out into the surrounding *linguistic* field, also works in similar ways to structure and shape the

²⁹⁸ The full text of President Buchanan's telegram to Queen Victoria: The President cordially reciprocates the congratulations of her Majesty the Queen on the success of the great international enterprise, accomplished by the skill, science, and indomitable energy of the two countries. It is a triumph more glorious, because far more useful to mankind, than was ever won by conqueror on the field of battle. May the Atlantic Telegraph, under the blessing of Heaven, prove to be a bond of perpetual peace and friendship between the kindred nations, and an instrument destined by Divine Providence to diffuse religion, civilization, liberty, and law throughout the world. In this view will not all nations of Christendom spontaneously unite in the declaration that it shall be for ever neutral, and that its communications shall be held sacred in passing to the places of their destination, even in the midst of hostilities. Buchanan to Victoria, 16 August 1858.

²⁹⁹ "Our Foreign Correspondence," *New York Times*, October 1, 1858, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/91418437?accountid=14244>.

surrounding *cultural* field. Cultural studies scholar Lawrence Grossberg calls the organization of affect a “mattering map.” Such organization makes possible certain objects of investment (what we can care about) and certain modes of investment (how we can care about such things), and it determines the coherence between these elements and the subjects we become in the investments we make.³⁰⁰ According to Grossberg, mattering maps not only determine our investments, they also structure the very practices of investment: “mattering maps also involve the lines that connect the different sites of investment; they define the possibilities for moving from one investment to another, of linking the various fragments of identity together. They define not only what sites (practices, effects, structures) matter but how they matter. And they construct a lived coherence for those enclosed within their spaces.”³⁰¹ Affect produces the impossible social totality in which we feign our coherent existence. Thus, while affect is certainly expressed in both emotion and enthusiasm, affect offers a way to think about their historically situated structures. As nodal points of investment become saturated with affect—and religion provides a culturally rich vehicle for such saturation—these points attract more affect and shape more of the field around them.

When Americans began to talk about a world unified by the telegraph, the meaning of words such as communication, electricity, and America began to change. Moreover, the fact that the dream for global community *mattered*, that is, that affect was organized around it, also motivated Americans to live and act in certain ways. The investment in the telegraph as a divinely ordained unifier of the world motivated global

³⁰⁰ Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out*, 82-83.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

mission, shaped international relations, fueled religious practices, and determined financial investment. Furthermore, it affected who Americans understood themselves to be in a world suddenly made up of neighbors.

There was a surprising amount of explicit reflection on the affective investment in the cable in public texts. Much of affect theory relies on the idea that social energy functions through circulation that often does not reach a conscious register. In the case of the cable, however, American affective formations around the telegraph cable became news. At times regretful and at times celebratory, newspapers from New York to Georgia included reports on the growing affective investments of Americans in the possibilities of the cable. This news was particularly notable because these same articles also included discussion of the persistence of this collective energy—what one paper called the “public confidence”—in the face of repeated failures and frustrations.

The expectation of a particular kind of reaction in the news reports illustrates the ways in which this affective formation was shaped and disciplined. The majority of reports described joyful celebration at the news of the cable’s initial success. A report from Buffalo on August 7, 1858 stated, “Upon receipt of the news of the Cable's being successfully landed, a strong desire took possession of the people of Buffalo to celebrate the event in a manner becoming its importance.”³⁰² The celebration included illuminated buildings, bonfires, bells ringing, and guns firing. “Bands of music are also parading the streets, which are literally packed with an excited and joyous throng.” Similarly in Nashville reports proclaimed a “general joyful feeling throughout the city,” and accounts from Rutland, Vermont, stated, “There is great rejoicing here to-night, in appreciation of

³⁰² “Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1858.

the greatest event in the history of the world...the people are full of enthusiasm.” In Halifax, the “greatest enthusiasm has prevailed.” In cities from Cincinnati to Columbus, flags waved, bells rang, fireworks shot into the sky, lights illuminated decorated buildings, guns fired, and celebrants thronged the streets. Even these reports, according to the *New York Times*, did not come close to representing the energy of the populous, “The columns of the TIMES would be insufficient for the accommodation of a tenth part of the expressions of enthusiastic rejoicing over the success of the Cable, which reach us from all parts of the country.”³⁰³ The *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot* reported that “Every man is more or less absorbed in the subject.”³⁰⁴

The role of failure in generating the depth of this enthusiasm was evident in a report from New Hampshire: “This announcement [of the Atlantic Cable’s success], at a moment when hope had almost ceased to be felt for the successful termination of this magnificent enterprise, created the greatest surprise and excited joy all over the land, and has been followed, from one end of the land to the other, by demonstrations of the interest and enthusiasm it has occasioned, in the ringing of bells, illuminations, firing of canon, and other tokens of joy.”³⁰⁵ The possibility of failure made the joy of success

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ “Editorial Correspondence,” *Weekly Wisconsin Patriot*, August 14, 1858, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=H5EW5DAXMTM2Nzg3MDYzNC44NTk0NDE6MToxMzoxNTIuMi4xNzYuMjQy&p_action=doc&s_lastnonissuequeryname=11&d_viewref=search&p_queryname=11&p_docnum=2&p_docref=v2:108BD1FCD7E9FA90@EANX-10903218450343A0@2399903-1090321893CF74F8@1-10903219BA8A4078@The+Cabinet.+Wednesday+Morning%2C+August+11%2C+1858.

³⁰⁵ “The Atlantic Cable Successful Laid!!” *Cabinet* (Amherst, NH), August 11, 1858, http://infoweb.newsbank.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/iw-search/we/HistArchive/?p_product=EANX&p_theme=ahnp&p_nbid=

exuberant.

In those rare cases in which the news was met with different responses, the news reports mocked, chided, and justified them. For example, the *New York Times* reported on the less effusive reactions of some northeastern cities as a curiosity, explained them away, and then described their ultimate participation in the enthusiasm:

It is very curious to observe the skepticism with which the first news was received in such quiet, conservative places as Boston and Hartford, and even the little town of Rutland, in Vermont, at the West, and in the backwoods settlements. The event came upon the good people in those parts too suddenly. It unsettled them, and discomposed their nervous systems. But when, like doubting Thomases, as they were, they couldn't help believing, then they all went mad together, and the consequence was a general outbreak of enthusiasm.³⁰⁶

The report from Columbus similarly indicated an initial absence of celebration but assured readers that celebration would surely come: “The citizens here are very much excited. They have been deceived once, and are awaiting certain confirmation before having a great celebration.”³⁰⁷ This pattern was especially true in a report from the *Boston Atlas* on the reactions of the people of Boston:

Boston was cautious. It was prudent. It looked up and down, it went forward and backward, it scratched its head and stroked its nose, it run its hands into its capacious pockets, it guessed yes, and it guessed no; and finally concluded to sleep on it before it went into very large and outward demonstrations. And so no guns were fired, and no bells rung, no shouts thundered, nor bunting flung to the fluttering breezes on Thursday. Boston held itself, martingale-like, back. But it

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-10903219BA8A4078@The+Cabinet.+Wednesday+Morning%2C+August+11
%2C+1858.

³⁰⁶ “Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise,” *New York Times*, August 9, 1858.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

was only to give vent to its pent-up Utica of enthusiasm upon another occasion and time. This was yesterday, when the city authorities set the ball of rejoicing in motion. Hardly had the hour of high noon arrived, when bell and cannon proclaimed the 'glad tidings' that Boston, too, felt to its center the great event. For a full hour the bells of the city pealed forth their blessed and blessing tones, never before so cheerful, and the guns of the Boston Light Artillery, directed by Capt. Nims sent forth from their capacious throats such a grand international salute as Boston ears are unaccustomed to hear. One hundred voices of earthquakean quality rolled out and out, over city, country, over seal and land and into the ocean of blue above. Then it was that Boston threw off its reserve and threw up its hat; then it was that it pulled its hands free from its pantaloons and clapped and applauded for the Cable.³⁰⁸

In these cases and others, the demand for a certain affective formation was expressed in the insistence that any lack of enthusiasm was temporary and would indeed be overcome by the national joy.³⁰⁹ Explanations were offered to justify any response that was less than fully celebratory, and each narrative of resistance to the celebration cast that resistance as wariness that succumb to inevitable delight.

This American affective formation commanded little influence in Europe. In editorial comments submitted to the *New York Times* from Heidelberg on September 3, 1858, shortly after the initial success of the telegraph cable, the effect of location on the experience of the cable was clear:

We, in this region, have been greatly amused at the reports of the celebration in America of the successful completion of the Atlantic Telegraph, of which recent

³⁰⁸ *Boston Atlas*, quoted in "Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise," *New York Times*, August 9, 1858.

³⁰⁹ For example, the *New York Times* described the reaction of some as an explosion of celebratory energy: "When, therefore, towards night the rumor was confirmed, no excitement followed. All were too eager in digesting the important fact itself to be excited. The subject was the all-absorbing topic of conversation everywhere during Friday and Saturday; and it was not until the confirmatory telegraphs of Saturday afternoon that the people dared give vent to their heretofore suppressed emotions—fearing, after all, that the news 'was too good to be true.' By Saturday evening the most sceptical [sic] were convinced and great was the rejoicing." "Atlantic Telegraph: Absolute Success of the Enterprise," *New York Times*, August 9, 1858.

numbers of the American journals have been full. By the time this reaches you, the excitement will have died away, and very likely the whole affair will be well nigh forgotten. You may, therefore, be able, in some degree, to sympathize with the astonishment felt by Europeans at demonstrations so greatly transcending the achievement.³¹⁰

Undeniably, by the time this report was published in the *New York Times*, the line had failed and spirits were severely dampened. But the very lack of investment in celebration on the European shore underscored the striking investment on the part of the Americans. Celebration of the Atlantic Cable was an American affective practice for an American imaginary.³¹¹

After the cable failed, attention to affect in the news continued. In the following report from the *San Antonio Ledger*, the same pattern of subsuming any disappointment into a progressive narrative of ultimate success prevailed even after the cable was irreparably damaged with no chance of resuscitation:

The failure of the attempt last summer to lay a telegraphic cable between the continents of Europe and America, caused a universal feeling of disappointment throughout the United States and England. Immense interests were bound up in the experiment, and thousands looked anxiously to the expected achievement. There was comparatively but little doubt entertained that the formidable obstacles which interposed would be eventually overcome, for so certain in their results are the means selected by modern science to effect its object, that people have come to consider it as almost omnipotent. The public confidence, therefore, was great that the experiment would have a satisfactory termination, and that a triumph would be achieved unparalleled in the history of the world. The unfortunate accident which caused the failure shook that confidence to some extent; but the general opinion still is, not only that the project is practicable, but that a second

³¹⁰ “Our Foreign Correspondence,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1858.

³¹¹ Part of the European surprise at the American enthusiasm was the understanding in England that this was not an American endeavor. “The contrast in the manner in which the news of the event was received in England and in America, was also very striking, and has been, as you will see, the occasion of comment in most of the London papers. The Times is quite indignant at the attempt of the Americans to monopolize the credit of the whole affair.” “Our Foreign Correspondence,” *New York Times*, October 1, 1858.

trial will have a fortunate result.³¹²

Public confidence was again directed toward optimism and continued investment in the cable's ultimate success.

These reports on the affective formation around the cable were pedagogical, directing social energy into a particular formation that invoked failure as a site of investment while interpreting failure as a sign of progress and ultimate fulfillment. These reports often dismissed and ridiculed doubt and concern, and encouraged celebration and optimism. Public discourse around the Atlantic Telegraph taught Americans to hold fast to the imaginary of a united global community. The gaps between the desired world and the experienced world served as the locus for affective investment. Thus, a formation of affect that orbited failure—the Great Fizzle—gave shape to this imaginary, powered it through repeated failure, and used that failure to sustain commitment in the impossible dream this global imaginary offered.

Conclusion

The idea that a few copper wires would speed text across the Atlantic Ocean and thereby create a unified global community was suffused with impossibility. The failure of the cable itself, the numerous wars with Native Americans that shook young America, the violent conflict over slavery, the infinite miscommunications and battles of colonial expansion, and the rise of anti-colonial resistance all suggested that there was nothing likely about an imminent world community. Yet Americans in the nineteenth century

³¹²“The Atlantic Telegraph,” *San Antonio Ledger*, April 3, 1858.

invested a great deal of social energy into this vision of the world and the practices it demanded. The work of instituting this modern global imaginary took place through the double movement of declaration and deferral, but neither declaration nor deferral could explain how an imaginary of the world that was quite obviously impossible came to serve as such an important and central node of American affective commitment. Impossibility opened a space for affective investment in this imaginary and thereby this impossible imaginary was sustained.

Declaration and deferral framed this imaginary with failure—the failure of the present to live up to American dreams for it and the failure of the future to ever be precisely what Americans imagined. Between these failures was a productive space of world making. Failure’s part in this creative action was not as an obstacle to be overcome or subsumed, as it was often cast in narratives of progress and perfection, but as a generative gap. Failure as failure was constitutive of this imaginary, its network, and even communication itself. To envision failure as an obstacle presumes that this imaginary and this network came into being despite the failures that litter their histories. Rather, this imaginary and this network came into being because of the failures and would not have come into being without them. Even in the ages, then and now, dominated by the metaphor of the network and its principle that connection enables social life, disconnection plays a vital role in building electric networks and the social worlds constructed around them. For the telegraph, this is apparent in its most basic function: in order to communicate through Morse code, one must connect and disconnect the circuit to signal dots, dashes, and the critical space between them.

Without failure, there would be no room for the kinds of affective investment the

cable amassed. Doubt, disconnection, and past failures conjoined to garner energy for a technological possibility and a social impossibility. Affect provided the social energy that made this cable in this world meaningful in these ways. Affect also made these meanings matter. American enthusiasm for this impossible imaginary of a united world was neither delusion nor gullibility; Americans were aware that the world the Atlantic Cable seemed to promise was incongruous with the world they experienced. On the contrary, participation in this imaginary should be understood as an investment of affect. Religion channeled that energy and directed avenues for its application. These sites of affective investment produced new meanings, gave such meanings weight, and organized cultural life around what mattered.

On the very night that jubilees were held for the Atlantic Cable up and down the eastern seaboard, the cable fell silent. The energy for the cable and the unified global community imagined to spring forth from it did not wane. The Great Fizzle became a durable affective formation that adhered to later attempts and developments, from the 1866 Atlantic Cable to the fiber optic cables of the internet. Shaped by the failures of the mid-nineteenth century, this particular affective formation has come to define our persistent dreams of a world united by communication technology.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSION

In the mid-nineteenth century, Americans perched between the world they desired and the world they encountered. The nation expanded with westward movement spurred by the alluring promise of gold while the world appeared to contract with new technologies of travel and communication as well as new forms of global commerce and Christian mission. Waves of religious and scientific innovation suffused the middle of the century with a sense that the world was on the cusp of something radically, wonderfully new. Yet, at the same time, these very changes were forging relationships of violence, including the country's own numerous wars between the U.S. Army and Native Americans, increasing tension and violent conflict over slavery in the U.S., and global colonial conflicts from the Crimean War (1853 to 1856) to the Taiping Rebellion (1850-1864).³¹³ The Atlantic Telegraph Cable itself was slow and faulty, and failed after only twenty-three days. Many Americans invested energy, time, and resources in a modern global imaginary of a world united by communication technology in the face of overwhelming evidence that neither more technology nor more communication would

³¹³ Notably, the Taiping Rebellion was led by Hong Xiuquan, who tried to establish a "Heavenly Kingdom" in southern China. Hong absorbed a Protestant missionary tract into his visions; the tract was given to him by Edwin Stevens, a missionary of the ABCFM. Jonathan D. Spence, *God's Chinese Son: The Taiping Heavenly Kingdom of Hong Xiuquan* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 31.

unify the world. Despite the mounting evidence refuting this vision, this imaginary has proved remarkably resilient and remains a powerful shaping force in and for America.

The world is made, not given. In 1858, as two large ships slowly unrolled what would be the first successful transatlantic telegraph cable, a set of diverse and heterogeneous cultural practices coalesced around the promise of a world united by communication technology into a tightly knit Christian community. The envisioning and inhabitation of that world were entwined practices, and both relied on imagination. Imagination, a practice that is always a rough and improvisational combination of experience and fantasy, is never simply giving an image to an object. It is a production of its own object: what we imagine is created in the process of imagining. We scavenge the resources available to us, negotiate the limits and possibilities of our present, and create the worlds in which we live. The complicated relationships imagination forges between perception and creation upend any deterministic causality: what we find informs what we create, and what we create informs what we find. Likewise, we produce the world and the world produces us.

Understanding social imaginaries as enactments helps to highlight this complex matrix of relationships. The imaginary of a unified world in the nineteenth century was a performance and institution of that world, in which material technological connection was understood as proximity and unity. This form of globalization—a set of entangled practices that included religion, technology, finance, transportation, government, and imagination—has persisted from the nineteenth century until today. Imagination has run as a current within globalization and has animated globalization's pretenses to inevitability and description. Imaginaries are not the ideas behind the material practices

of finance, travel, and technology. Because imaginaries are practices of institution and performance and because imaginaries entail affective investment, imaginaries are themselves material practices. Imaginaries enact particular social forms through habits, relationships, energy, attention, and circulation of texts. Only through enactments of the world as a networked totality do international commerce and global flows of information come into being.

Imaginaries are never in stasis; rather, they are sustained through cultural practices of meaning-making and affective investment. This study has demonstrated how these variable practices sustain imaginaries in dynamic form. The concept of global imaginaries is related to similar concepts that describe the ways individuals create meaning and establish the habitual practices that constitute social lives, such as ideology, discourse, and symbolic structures. The concept of global imaginaries, however, affords an opportunity to account for the affective investment that enables and sustains these cultural practices. Moreover, global imaginaries orient attention to the impossibility for closure and stasis in our world.

This study of imagination has outlined three practices that constituted a modern global imaginary in nineteenth-century America: declaration, deferral, and investment. These three worked in concert and suspended imaginaries between the announcement of their arrival in the present and the promise of their arrival in the future. Declaration established the rupture of a new context, and deferral established the fixed end for that future-fantasy. The gap eked out in this slim temporal margin provided the necessary room for the creative action of imagination. The paradoxical temporal location of modern

global imaginaries between now and soon and its contradiction of lived experience was sustained by the social investment of affective energy.

This study has explored utopian declaration through the Oneida Community's proclamation of global peace in the context of their perfectionist theology. The Oneida Community epitomized a pervasive tendency among American Christians to see communication technology as a mechanism for unifying a Christian world. Their belief that the impossible was readily achievable provides a vivid illustration of the American habit of announcing the arrival of an idealized world, a utopia that is not relegated to a distant land or far-off future. The missionary work of the ABCFM, which aimed toward the teleological horizon of global Christianity, illustrates the practices of deferral for this imaginary. Because of its significance as a powerful American Christian institution in the nineteenth century and because of its promotion of Christianity as a global institution, the ABCFM provided an important rendition of this imaginary. Akin to the Oneida Community, the ABCFM promised a world united through communication. For the ABCFM, however, this perfect world lay just ahead and, thus, required active Christian labor to spread both technology and Christianity throughout the globe.

To resolve the paradox of a world that is both here and yet-to-come and to withstand the undermining effects of the reality Americans experienced, this utopian vision also required a shared social practice of commitment to the unified world. The work required to inhabit this imaginary in the face of concrete evidence of its impossibility reveals the potency of affect as a structuring social force and the power of religion to marshal the investment of affect toward particular social forms. This study has explored investment through the varied attempts in public texts to accommodate the

failures that accompanied this global imaginary. Discussions of the world and emerging telegraph networks in newspapers and public speeches provides an important illustration of religious language and imagery in American public discourse. These texts demonstrate how large and diverse populations could share and sustain a utopian imaginary of a world as one. In nineteenth century America, we find a distinctive affective formation organized around failure that sustained this imaginary in ways that could make use of enduring disconnection to produce the persistent imaginary of a connected world.

The Impossibility of Being Protestant, Modern, American, or Global

The imaginary of a united world built in the mid-nineteenth century was modern, American, and global, but it could never be fully or quintessentially any of these. The modern global imaginary that emerged around the 1858 Atlantic Telegraph Cable was American, deriving from and producing a sense of the young, expanding, and nearly torn nation. It was grounded in new forms of American Protestantism, drawing on and reproducing theological commitments to a divine plan, communities of neighbors, the accessibility of the impossible, public religion, and a universal Christianity. Similarly, this imaginary incorporated modernity's constitutive elements of imperialism, capitalism, sovereignty, and the thrill of new technology. Yet, each of these adjectives—American, Protestant, modern, and global—are themselves constructed social forms that wrestle with their own impossibilities. Moreover, the singular “imaginary” is also misleading: what this study has called an imaginary was a complex set of imaginaries that held certain motifs in common.

A dominant American public produced this imaginary through vehicles of power such as missionary membership, publication, and religious and political office. While that public was diverse and included a fringe utopian commune, a massive engine of Protestant missionizing, and public texts by powerful white male politicians, journalists, and leaders with no pretense to any kind of doctrinal orthodoxy, it excluded broad swaths of the population who might imagine the world otherwise. Because this imaginary emerged in diverse renditions with no authoritative form, different versions offer slightly different shapes to the world, slightly different meanings for the telegraph, and slightly different hopes for what was possible in the new age of their “now.” Each time this imaginary was enacted, it was recreated. Thus, these varying renditions, even when by the same author, changed the constellation of elements and their meanings, and these varying renditions, even when by vastly different authors, regenerated repeating motifs. This imaginary was never a system; for all its sedimentation, it never stood still.

A critical example of a different imaginary built around the telegraph that illuminates the strict exclusions of this imaginary can be found in the ways African Americans in antebellum America used the telegraph and incorporated it into social imaginaries. Limited access prevented use of the telegraph by many African Americans to communicate, but other important uses became critical parts of pre-Civil War history. John Brown cut the telegraph lines to take Harpers Ferry in his October 1859 rebellion.³¹⁴ In his journals, Henry David Thoreau mentions that African Americans fleeing slavery

³¹⁴ Junius P. Rodriguez, ed., *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance and Rebellion*, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), s.v. “Brown, John (1800-1859).”

followed telegraph lines when railroad tracks were unavailable.³¹⁵ The telegraph also served as a metaphor for the transmission of information among African Americans and abolitionists in the south. Just as slaves escaped to free states and Canada through the “underground railroad,” so did information in the service of escape and resistance pass along a network of messengers referred to as the “underground telegraph.”³¹⁶

In the dominant modern global imaginary of this study, much of the meaning given to the telegraph was racialized in ways that forged a global universalism that was emphatically invested in the power of whites as can be seen in the ABCFM’s imaginary of a Christian world community. Paul Gilmore, in “The Telegraph in Black and White,” offers a compelling study of the discourse on the telegraph in antebellum America and its reliance on heavily racialized understandings of civilization in order to situate the telegraph within the “march of progress.”³¹⁷ There is a notable absence of universalist rhetoric or dreams of global community in African American writing on the telegraph before the Civil War.³¹⁸ For example, Anna Hope writes in the abolitionist *National Era*, “I rejoice in my good little sewing machine, and I wish every family in the land possessed one like it. Perhaps I am selfish in thinking so much more of this humble friend

³¹⁵ Henry David Thoreau, *The Journal of Henry David Thoreau*, ed. Bradford Torrey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1906), 3:37-38.

³¹⁶ Rodriguez, *Encyclopedia of Slave Resistance*, s.v. “Underground Telegraph.”

³¹⁷ Paul Gilmore, “The Telegraph in Black and White,” *ELH: English Literary History* 69, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 806.

³¹⁸ The progress of the 1858 Atlantic Telegraph Cable was a subject of regular reporting, but very little discussion was made of a global community in the following African American and abolitionist newspapers: *Christian Recorder*, *Colored American*, *Fredrick Douglass’ Paper*, *Freedom’s Journal*, *National Era*, *North Star*, *Provincial Freeman*, and *Weekly Advocate*. Searched through <http://www.accessible-archives.com/collections/african-american-newspapers/>.

than I do of the long [Atlantic] cable, and the thousands of charms it has scattered throughout the country, but I cannot help feeling that these machines do more for the comfort and happiness of the world than will these wires that are stretched from continent to continent.”³¹⁹ The universalism of the imaginary of a world united by communication technology reflects its constitutive exclusions and the provincial resources of citizenship, whiteness, and cultural power on which it relied. Thus, the American-ness and global-ness of this imaginary are partial and themselves imaginary ideals for particular participants.

America and the global present an important kind of impossibility for this imaginary. Both are social totalities and thus, as Fredric Jameson notes, are “always unrepresentable.”³²⁰ It is not the particular fault of this imaginary that the global was rendered familiar nor that America was rendered as a limited ideal vision of the new nation. No imaginary can fully represent the totality it claims. This inherent failure of global imaginaries to represent the world and of national imaginaries to represent a nation requires creativity and invention from its participants. Every imaginary is in many ways a fiction, but that in no way diminishes its power.

Modernity and religion also prove to be slippery descriptors of this imaginary. As Randall Styers demonstrates in *Making Magic*, the modern work of creating boundaries for religion was always a failing endeavor. Moreover, as he notes, “Modernity itself has

³¹⁹ Anna Hope, “New York Correspondence,” *National Era*, October 14, 1858, <http://www.accessible.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/accessible/print?AADocList=1&AADocStyle=STYLED&AAStyleFile=&AABeanName=toc1&AANextPage=/printFullDocFromXML.jsp&AACheck=1.13.1.0.1>.

³²⁰ Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future*, 14.

always been fractured, contested, and ultimately illusory.”³²¹ In the American context, religion moved in and out of a nascent national public, took on new forms in innovative and heterodox religious movements, and slipped into speech and practices of everyday life that appeared to have little to do with religion at first glance. The religion that contributed to this modern global imaginary was deeply influenced by Protestantism, particularly in the forms that emerged from national and transatlantic revivals in the early nineteenth century, but also diverged from Protestant theology and practice in surprising ways, as seen in the Oneida Community. Even the ABCFM, which could easily be considered a dominant institution of nineteenth-century American Protestantism, included missionaries who disagreed with each other deeply and adapted their religion to their context, and vice versa, in radically creative ways. The distance from—or, perhaps, impossibility of—a “mainstream” does not make the role of religion in this imaginary less important. Rather, it points to the heterogeneous appearance of expansive Protestantism in the complex processes that made the world for America.

Many vectors of influence worked through this imaginary: religion, technology, capitalism, colonialism, nationalism, modernity. These forces, which converged and diverged in the burgeoning nation, were lines of force that determined the form of this imaginary and how it would work. Religion might not be the primary vector nor the direct cause of this imaginary, but an account of religion’s diffuse work in fostering the idea of a united world remains critically important to understanding the forms of globalization that emerged in nineteenth-century America.

³²¹ Styers, *Making Magic*, 17.

The Echo in the Internet

The present haunts this study of the past. It is almost impossible to hear the mid-nineteenth-century clamor of excitement for a whole world united by electric communication without also hearing the echo of excitement for digital communication 160 years later. Both technologies are constituted by similar kinds of imaginative effort, articulate similar sets of social practices and institutions, produce similar social effects, and are fueled by similar energies and affects. In both imaginaries, we see the construction of a particularly limited dream for a global community that, despite its utopian tone, looks a great deal like America, at least as America can be imagined. In both imaginaries, the global community is united, peaceful, and prosperous, and witnesses the happy annihilation of time and space. In the 1850s, the telegraph was understood to usher in a global community characterized by scientific innovation, adamant Christianity, and proud progress. Today the internet is hailed as the harbinger of a democratic and intertwined global community. In its contemporary form, this global imaginary declares that we are all now networked “next-door neighbors” busily eradicating poverty, disease, and unhappiness around the world. Social networking technologies appear to promise pro-democracy revolutions in non-Western countries and thus defer the universality of this exultant community into only the near future. In an uncanny echo of our past, Americans emphatically celebrate the scientific innovation, globalized capitalism, adamant democracy, and proud progress of this global imaginary.

The constellation of practices that tethered the telegraph to an imagined global

community holds sway over how we understand, use, and build the internet.³²² This study of the modern global imaginary built around the telegraph may offer some ways to account for the contemporary American global imaginary built around the internet and global imaginaries at other times, in other places, by other communities. However, there are also many ways in which this modern global imaginary was indelibly marked by its distinctive moment in time and location in space. Applying the possibilities and limits of the modern global imaginary constructed around the telegraph directly to its early twenty-first-century echo or positing a causal relationship between the two would collapse the critical particularities of what happened when the telegraph was strung across the Atlantic in 1858.

The role of religion is a particularly important site of the simultaneous continuity and distinction between these two imaginaries. Protestantism's power in America changed dramatically in the time intervening between the advent of the telegraph and the internet. Expansive Protestantism's overt presence in the modern global imaginary built around the telegraph gave way to a subtler but still powerful influence in the imaginary of the global village wrought by the internet. Communication theorist James Carey identified the dominant understanding of communication in the nineteenth century as a process of sending information or people from one place to another that he names the "transmission view of communication." In this view, the movement of goods, people, and information were considered identical processes and, thus, were all called "communication." According to Carey, despite the changes in communication wrought

³²² For example, while the internet is understood as a global phenomenon with no tie to geopolitics, most internet traffic passes through thirteen root servers, ten of which are in the United States. Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2004), 44.

by the telegraph, in which the transmission of information no longer relied on a human messenger, “our basic orientation to communication remains grounded, at the deepest roots of our thinking, in the idea of transmission: communication is a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people.”³²³

Carey insists that the rise of the transmission view of communication was deeply influenced by religion. Carey, citing the expansive religiously motivated movement of European colonialism, writes “The vast and, for the first time, democratic migration in space was above all an attempt to trade an old world for a new and represented the profound belief that movement in space could be in itself a redemptive act. It is a belief Americans have never quite escaped... The moral meaning of transportation, then, was the establishment and extension of God’s kingdom on earth. The moral meaning of communication was the same.”³²⁴ According to Carey, this initial religious celebration of communication soon fell prey to “the forces of science and secularization,” which meant that “the obvious religious metaphors fell away and the technology of communication itself moved to the center of thought.”³²⁵

Yet, as Carey notes, Americans have never quite escaped the belief that communication is redemptive. The religious logic of a transcendentally ordained future of global unity never fully disentangled itself from ideas about technology nor the practices

³²³ Carey, “A Cultural Approach to Communication,” 15.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 16.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17. While Carey offers religion a central role in the formation of these ideas about communication, the causality he proposes leaves little room for what missionary writings demonstrate: that religion was just as shaped by the emerging practices and discourses of communication as it shaped them.

of science and so-called secularization. We find religious thought and imagery at the heart of global imaginaries of bounded worldwide cohesion not as a withering historical root but as a persistent source of momentum. The religious metaphors that Carey so aptly identifies did not fall away. This is not the nature of metaphors. Rather, they adhere to language and weight it so that the meaning of words like network, world, connection, and the global carry the possibilities and promise of the modern global imaginary built around the Atlantic Telegraph Cable of 1858.

That the ambitious endeavor of building a global electric communication system for a global community adhered to the institution of both telegraphy and the internet is neither simply coincidental nor strictly causal. Rather, over time particular meanings have adhered to the possibility of global community and particular conventions have determined the habits of discourse that surround new communication technologies. These different media both produce and adopt conventions. As possibilities for widespread electric communication recur, they are marked by the particular social conjuncture in which they take place but also bear with them practices, habits, demands, and protocols from past renditions. Much like a metaphor accrues meanings that constellate around it, inflecting the meanings primarily at stake in a given instance with the shadows of past usage, so also do media accrue meanings and conventions that partially determine their reception and use. The link between the telegraph and the internet is not that they are both global communication networks. Rather, they participate in imaginaries that institute the very possibility of the global and the network, and the particular contours that such a globe and such a network can assume.

These media, then, should not be understood primarily as modes of transmission

of information. Rather, they are technologies that bear their own interpretive and procedural demands. The technologies of communication and their associated global imaginaries are best understood as “interfaces” in Alexander Galloway’s helpful redefinition. According to Galloway, an interface is not only a threshold between two formats, as we might think of a television screen mediating between television content and our viewership. An interface is a “fertile nexus” that “indicates the implicit presence of the outside within the inside.”³²⁶ That is, the viewership and its practices and the television’s technologies and programming content, even the social conjuncture in which this interface occurs, all participate in and constitute the interface itself. The global telegraph network and the global internet are interfaces that transmit information but also determine, in part, what we can communicate, how we communicate, and indeed who we are when we communicate in that way. Both function through conventionalized patterns in which communication technology is articulated to a global social form. Both are situated in a negotiation between reality and a dream for living otherwise that relies on declaration, deferral, and investment.

Religion plays a very different role in the nineteenth-century and contemporary global imaginaries of global unity through communication technology. In the nineteenth century, religion, particularly expansive American Protestantism, suffused public speech, shaped the images, vocabularies, and logics with which these imaginaries were built, and organized the affective investment that sustained them in the face of their radical impossibility. Religious thinking and religious resources are neither as public nor as

³²⁶ Alexander Galloway, “The Unworkable Interface,” *New Literary History* 39, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 946. Galloway takes the language of “fertile nexus” from François Dagognet, *Faces, Surfaces, Interfaces* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1959), 124.

present in the contemporary imaginary built around the internet. Other cultural practices and institutions, such as democracy and transnational capitalism, may hold more influence in the contemporary global imaginary of a world united by communication technology; yet religion continues to be a part of American public discourse, and the religion in American public discourse remains dominated by Protestantism. Expansive Protestantism still adheres to the global imaginaries of the internet. The logics of this Protestantism—such as the impossible as the particularly achievable—are still at work despite the fading mark of Protestant thinking and even as other social institutions have become the vehicles for these ideas. As with any good metaphor, the idea of a world united by technology still bears its religious inflection from an earlier era. The nineteenth-century global imaginary of a whole world united by communication technology thus reaches into our late-modern present.

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