



World Communication Cables and Ernst Kapp's Philosophy of Technology

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In 1877, Ernst Kapp published his "Fundamentals of a Philosophy of Technology" (*Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik*, Braunschweig) – which was a decade after "wiring the abyss" (A.C. Clarke) between Europe and America with the submarine transatlantic telegraph cable finally worked and made business. In these years of building an international network of communication cables, the notion of "communication" itself changed. Unlike most academics, German philosopher Kapp, who also lived in Texas, USA, was very well aware of this shift from personal communications to what he called "Weltcommunication" (world communication). He came up with the philosophical concept of the relations between biology and technology, explaining the international cable networks as an organic projection: mechanical tools are unconscious projections of the osteomuscular apparatus, instruments are projections of human organs, and cable networks are projections of the nerve system. The various use of techniques would lead to a morphology of cultures, and rewriting cultural history would be a necessity in terms of an evolutionary process which responds to the "larger mind" (Charles H. Cooley). The paper will explore some basics of Kapp's attempt to reconcile technology and biology, which makes him a philosopher not of industrial society but of the nascent information age, with its concealed impact in 20th century media philosophy (from Heidegger to McLuhan). It questions some assumptions about the world being online, anteceding communication networks with the application of electricity for the infrastructure of an unforeseen "highway of thought".