The Remote Transmission of Images
A Cultural Chronology of Telephotography in the French Press

Myriam Chermette
Translator: James Gussen
The Remote Transmission of Images
A Cultural Chronology of Telephotography in the French Press

Myriam Chermette
Translation: James Gussen

The remote transmission of images, known as phototelegraphy or telephotography, has been the subject of scientific research since the first half of the nineteenth century. Yet despite the indisputable significance this technology represents for the world of the press, it is rarely discussed in the context of French history. The basic facts put forward in studies that are already decades old have been regularly repeated in numerous works dealing with the press or press photography in the absence of a specific study of the subject. In these works, the emphasis is on technological innovation, with the assumption that there is of necessity an association between photography and the press, which is presented as an inevitable phenomenon of contemporary journalism. From this perspective, the remote transmission of images is viewed primarily as a set of technical obstacles that press professionals were anxiously waiting to see overcome. Emphasis is therefore placed on the progress achieved by the invention of Arthur Korn and Édouard Belin in the first decade of the twentieth century, an experimental phase that would be followed in the 1920s by an expansion in the field regarded as the automatic consequence of those advances.

Beyond questions of chronology, which deserve to be clarified, this analytical perspective carries with it the risk of teleology and neglects the uses of telephotography in the press, which will, on the contrary, be the central focus of this study. This objective requires, on the one hand, that we turn away from analyzing the forms and finished product of the publication itself, in order to focus on the process of production, and on the other that we analyze the expectations and practices of the professional milieu in question. I will try to achieve this twofold ambition in this essay by focusing on the daily press, whose attitude toward these innovations was strongly determined by its own specific constraints, and on France in particular, while occasionally turning to international examples for purposes of comparison. Once again the French context is certainly linked to the development of a particular process, belinographie, or Belinography, which achieved a dominant position in
France but failed to gain a foothold in other countries, where systems developed within a different cultural and journalistic context.

By examining the uses of a new technology in this manner, my intention is to highlight, not simply the innovation as such, but rather a cultural chronology of that innovation as embodied in the needs to which it did (or did not) respond in editorial offices and newsrooms and in its influence on the visual culture of the age.

A Half-Century of Research

Even before the invention of photography, the remote transmission of images was an object of scientific reflection in various countries. Recounting the history of this innovation means going back to the early nineteenth century, when research was focused on using the novelties of the era, the telegraph and the electrical grid, to transmit line drawings or handwritten documents. Without attempting to recapitulate the entire chronology of this evolution, I will review its most significant milestones.

In 1842, the Scotsman Alexander Bain demonstrated that a drawing could be reproduced using electric current; a few years later, the Englishman Frederick Bakewell proposed rolling the drawing on a cylinder so that it could be read by an electro-optical transmitter, transmitted via the electrical grid as discontinuous current, and received in real time by the receiver at the other end. Enunciated in 1848, this principle was embraced by most of Bakewell’s successors, including the Italian Giovanni Caselli, who created the ‘pantelegraph.’ Adopted in France during the Second Empire, the latter was subsequently abandoned for reasons of cost and image quality.

During this period, research was focused on the line drawing – hence on black and white – whereas photography involves halftones. Shelford Bidwell explored this domain by turning to selenium, a chemical element that becomes more conductive the more brightly illuminated it is. His apparatus was received with interest by the Physical Society of London in 1881, but it was not sufficiently perfected to allow commercial use. The German Arthur Korn pursued this avenue further at the beginning of the twentieth century, conducting a demonstration in 1904 in which a photograph was transmitted between Munich and Nuremberg. The press was enthusiastic; the newspaper L’Illustration even signed a contract with Professor Korn for control of the process in France, but without great success: the photographs transmitted were fuzzy, the details were difficult to make out, and the transmission process was slow and expensive (figs. 2 and 3).

In France, Édouard Belin, an engineer with a passion for photography, applied himself to this question, seeking to build on the advances of his predecessors: an image scanned onto a cylinder, its transmission via electric current, and the required synchronization of the transmitting and receiving apparatuses. He went further, however, by basing his research on a mechanical process that avoided the use of selenium, a chemical agent that is rarely stable or reliable. For this he turned to the properties of dichromated gelatin: when photographs were developed using this process – more commonly referred to as ‘carbon printing’ – they had a slightly raised surface. By increasing the thickness of the gelatin layer, the relief became more visible, with the elevated areas corresponding to the lighter portions of the image and the depressed areas to the dark portions. Mounted on the cylinder of the transmitting set, which the engineer called the ‘telestereograph,’ the image was scanned by a stylus, which imparted to a lever movements whose amplitude
precisely corresponded to the varied height of the surface. A rheostat affixed to the arm of this lever transmitted a current of variable strength across the telephone line, with the current always proportional to the height of the relief. At the other end, the receiver was equipped with an oscillograph that translated the variations in strength, reproducing the image on a sensitive surface which was also rolled on a cylinder.

At first, the government and the Post Office, chastened by their experience with previous experiments that had spawned little emulation, did not provide support to the young engineer, but an initial trial took place thanks to the intervention of Pierre Lafitte, the owner of illustrated newspapers like *La Vie au Grand Air* and *Je Sais Tout*. On November 9, 1907, on a circuit running from Paris to Lyon and Bordeaux, then back to Paris again, the image of a little Alsatian chapel travelled 1,717 kilometres in twenty-two minutes. The contours of the image were accurately transmitted and the halftones reproduced; however there was no real continuous gradation but rather a succession of discrete, disconnected shades. In the years that followed, Édouard Belin, who was awarded a gold medal for his work by the Société d'Encouragement pour l'Industrie Nationale, continued to refine his apparatus. He also managed to miniaturize it, in 1913 producing a portable version that for the first time he called a bélinographe: the various components could be fitted into two suitcases weighing twenty-five kilograms each. He also conducted new transmission trials, culminating in a trial at the Exposition Internationale de Lyon that was featured on the front page of the major daily newspaper *Le Journal* on May 12, 1914 (fig. 4). The photograph shows Édouard Herriot, the mayor of Lyon; Dr. Courmont, the organizer of the exposition; Marc Réville, the minister of commerce; and Victor Rault, the prefect of the Rhône department. The caption reads, 'The photograph published here was taken yesterday in Lyon and transmitted across the telephone line in four minutes.' Nevertheless, the quality of the image still leaves much to be desired: while the figures are clearly visible, their faces are difficult to distinguish.

### Reluctance of the Press

This experiment has often been regarded as the first example of transmission by telephotography, initiating the use of the technology by the French press. However, an analysis of the publications and operations of newspapers in the 1920s and 1930s reveals that the reality was more complex: while the process did exist, many factors worked to limit its use until the second half of the 1930s.

On the technical plane, the process, which still needed improvement, did not seem fully compatible with the workings and constraints of the press. In fact, the transmission of a photograph required the creation of an original print using gum bichromate, a substantially longer and more complex operation than producing a silver bromide gelatin print. Moreover, operating the transmitter required professional skills that journalists did not have, which meant a specialist was needed. Finally, the quality of the image received was not always sufficient for a reproduction that met the standards of the press. Halftone engraving, the process used at the time to reproduce images, diminishes the quality of the image and hence requires a high-quality original image.

These limitations were largely removed in 1927, when Édouard Belin replaced the stylus with a photoelectric cell: the image was scanned by a beam of light that acted on the cathode of a photoelectric bulb; the light's intensity corresponded to the values of the original document. This critical modification made it possible to dispense with...
dichromated gelatin prints and instead to send an ordinary photograph (fig. 5). It also produced an image that was sharp enough to be read, and the various shades were rendered correctly, thanks to the use of a ‘shade spectrum’ screen.21

Despite these improvements, the French press was still ambivalent about the innovation, hailing its importance while remaining reluctant to involve itself further. Time and again, front-page articles praised Édouard Belin’s experiments, and glowing descriptions paid tribute to the benefits of his invention. The bélinographe allowed the national dailies to overcome an obstacle that they were constantly confronting: if the events being covered did not take place in the capital, it was physically impossible for the journalists to send their photographs as quickly as the corresponding texts, which were submitted by telephone or telegraph. The latter reached Paris the same day and could be published in the following day’s edition, whereas the images, sent by mail or railroad, arrived – at the earliest – one day later, assuming no incidents or accidents occurred en route. This disjunction between text and image necessitated the disjointed publication of text and image.

Yet none of the big national dailies were willing to commit to a large-scale implementation of Belinography. The few experiments conducted were always undertaken on the initiative of Belin’s laboratories and were rarely of long duration. Thus, on the occasion of the 1920 Summer Olympics, Le Matin published a few photographs transmitted from Anvers by bélinographe, and in 1930, again at the instigation of Belin’s labs, two dailies, Le Matin and L’Intransigeant, attempted to provide photographic coverage of the Tour de France. A van was equipped to follow the various legs of the Tour,22 two engineers were charged with making the necessary adjustments, and the papers were able to publish the day’s photographs that very evening.23 This experiment was regarded as ‘a scientific trial’24 and was not extended to the coverage of other events.25 Significantly, in 1929, when Wide World, the photo agency of the New York Times, offered Le Journal a subscription to its service, including telephotography, the newspaper declined,26 not for technical reasons, since the telephotography service was overseen entirely by Wide World, but for editorial ones. For his part, Édouard Belin, having received no more than a lukewarm reception from the French press, continued to develop his process in Great Britain, where a network was set up in 1928.27

One of the arguments that might be put forward to explain the French dailies’ reticence is the significantly higher cost of telephotography as compared with conventional methods: two hundred fifty francs, for example, for a classic format image (9 x 12 cm) as compared to thirty francs for a French photograph and fifty francs for a foreign one.28 This additional cost was due on the one hand to the use of the apparatus provided by Belin, but also, and above all, to a tax levied by the Post Office.29 However, recent studies have shown that photography only represented a small portion of the cost price of a newspaper, far below the cost of paper and ink.30 So this explanation should probably not be given too much weight.

To pursue the analysis beyond purely technical and economic factors, one must look to the practices and more generally to the professional culture of the press in this period. The newspapers of the 1920s and early 1930s were conceived as essentially textual products. After the effervescence of the belle époque, newspapers generally chose to illustrate their stories with stock photographs, portraits and geographic views that had no direct connection with the news item, but represented its setting or its protagonists. These two categories of images represented eighty per cent of all published photographs
at this time; images of current events were published sparingly, and reserved for the political life of Paris, sports, and exceptional or unusual events. From this perspective, telephotography did not answer any urgent need on the part of the press. Nor did it receive a much more favourable response from the fast-growing sector of weeklies and illustrated magazines, which relied on quality illustrations and innovative layouts. That they appeared less frequently made rapid transmission, which was the principal advantage of Édouard Belin’s technology, of less interest to them. Finally, the French photo agencies were reluctant to embrace the rapid rise of telephotography for fear that it might undermine their position: if journalists could transmit their images directly to the newspapers, the latter would no longer need the agencies’ services. Despite the excitement surrounding Édouard Belin’s invention, the constraints that limited its use still outweighed its appeal.

**New Context, New Applications**

Over the course of the 1930s, these cultural misgivings started to ease. Images, and photographs in particular, now began to occupy an entirely new place in the professional culture of the French press. Confined to a marginal role since the end of the First World War, presented in unchanging layouts without innovation, they now took centre stage against the backdrop of broader transformations of society’s relationship with images, including the proliferation of illustrated magazines, the growing attendance at movie theatres with the advent of the talkie, and the development of amateur photography. In the daily press, the rapid, even stunning, commercial success of *Paris-Soir* clearly demonstrated these developments and forced the newspaper’s competitors to take note. This success, surprising at a time when the worldwide economy was sluggish – and the economic crisis was beginning to affect the press – is generally attributed to the paper’s ambitious and innovative use of images. Following the example of *Paris-Soir*, the dailies started to increase the amount of space they devoted to photographs. They built new advertising campaigns around them, proof of photographs’ new symbolic importance. Thus, *Paris-Soir* described itself as a ‘major illustrated newspaper,’ *Le Petit Journal* announced that it was ‘lavishly illustrated,’ *Le Matin* that it published ‘entire pages of photographs,’ and *Le Journal* that it was ‘laid out to be seen, written to be read.’ This new situation prompted Alex Garaï, director of the Keystone agency in Paris, to write, ‘Our victory is that of the photographic report, which has acquired a dominant place in journalism.’ According to him, the photograph, long ‘the Cinderella of the journalism world,’ had now become ‘a citizen whose rights very few would dare contest.’

When Cinderella becomes a princess, she puts on a new dress: whereas static images (portraits and landscapes) had previously been the order of the day, more often than not drawn from sizeable collections of stock images compiled over time, the news snapshot now became the norm. In the second half of the 1930s, four out of every five images published were photographs of current events; editors no longer wanted to publish ‘portraits without character …, scenes without action, as [they have] too often [done] in the past.’ The photographs were now required to do more than merely illustrate the articles; they also had to show the news, providing a visual representation that complemented the written depiction.

This new credo was partially inspired by the model of the Anglo-Saxon press, which permeated the world of the French press at the time and emphasized the *news value* of a
The latter, which was much more important than its aesthetic quality, required that it be as close as possible, especially in time, to the photographed event; hence its interest was fleeting, and it must be used immediately if it were not to lose all of its value. Pushing the argument to its logical conclusion, it was better not to publish an image at all than to publish one that was too old and held no interest for the reader. As Maurice Broc-Dubar, head of the illustrations department at *Ce Soir*, wrote, ‘American newspapers prefer not to publish a portrait if it dates from too long ago, even if they have no other photographs of that person.’ This requirement of speed gradually extended to the French press as well: in 1937, Jacques de Marsillac, editor in chief of *Le Journal*, discouraged his Beirut correspondent from sending images, since they ‘generally arrive so late that the public’s interest has already moved on to other events.’ Once the topicality of the image and the speed with which it reached the newsroom started to become important, Édouard Belin’s technology was a perfect match for the newspapers’ editorial needs.

The New Economics of the News Image

This is the context in which telephotography developed in France, using Belinography but also rival technologies. Parallel to Belin’s work, other processes came into existence elsewhere in the world. In the United States, the leading companies of the telecommunications sector, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company and the Bell System, equipped cities with transmitting stations throughout much of the country. In Germany, the physician August Karolus, building on the work of Arthur Korn, developed an apparatus that was manufactured by Siemens and marketed by Telefunken beginning in 1927. The international press photo agencies, less reticent than their French counterparts, were quicker to express an interest in these processes. By the mid-1930s, they were in a position to offer customized services. In 1935, Associated Press and United Press acquired the ‘Bell System,’ which was capable of sending an image to twenty-five cities at once. Wide World Paris received its telephotographs on a Siemens-Halske machine. Keystone Paris, finally, looked to the belinographe.

The subscriptions agencies offered to the newspapers at this time routinely included remotely transmitted images, and fierce competition developed among them to win the dailies’ business. The coronation of King George VI of England on May 12, 1937, provided a telling example. Since the Court had announced that it would only allow 150 photographers to cover the ceremonies, tickets were particularly expensive. Keystone sent nineteen reporters, and Wide World nine, to capture every moment of the ceremony. But Wide World’s correspondents won the day by coming to London with their own belinographe, paying fifty thousand pounds in customs duties for the privilege, to ensure that they had the best possible conditions for transmitting their images. The scale of the resources deployed by these agencies allowed them – to use a term heard frequently at the time – to griller, or scoop, their competitors. Thus, when the French prime minister, Pierre Laval, travelled to Italy in January 1935 to sign an accord with Benito Mussolini, the Keystone and Wide World reporters used the Rome-Paris Belinography line so that their images reached Paris that same day, whereas the French agency Trampus sent its photographs by mail. The two days’ difference in arrival time represented an appreciable lead for the American agencies, whose images were ultimately the only ones to be published.
This race to cover the news also prompted many newspapers – *Le Journal, Le Matin, Le Petit Parisien, L’Intransigéant, Paris-Soir, Ce Soir, Excèsior* – to purchase telephotography receivers, and at major national events their journalists jostled one another to be the first to transmit their images. When a telephone line was busy transmitting an image, no other photograph could be sent across it. In order to demonstrate to their readers the efforts they’d made to obtain the images as quickly as possible, newspapers showcased the publication of telephotographs in their pages. On October 13, 1934, following the assassination of King Alexander of Yugoslavia and Louis Barthou in Marseille, a photograph of the two suspects was published in *Paris-Soir* above the caption, ‘Novak and Bénès photographed at the Annemasse special police station (photos by our special correspondent, brought to Lyons from Annemasse and transmitted from there to Paris-Soir’s Belin receiver).’ This type of caption routinely appeared whenever extraordinary efforts were required to obtain a photograph, and the trade press – *Le Photographe, L’Instantané, or Presse-Publicité* – recounted the exploits of the various photographers. In March 1938, for example, during the Anschluss, *Presse-Publicité* observed that French journalists had been equal to the challenge: ‘The newspapers had their bélinogrammes transmitted from Vienna by the hundreds, and despite the strict censorship, this time the French newspapers weren’t ‘scooped’ by the British as they have sometimes been in the past.’

This distribution dynamic was accompanied by the development of the necessary infrastructure in France – both cause and effect of this new demand – along two main lines: the big cities were equipped with transmitting stations, which gradually coalesced into a national network radiating out around Paris, and the development of remote transmission devices – Belinographic suitcases, automobiles, and vans. First to be equipped were Paris, Lyon, Strasbourg, Marseille, Nice, and Bordeaux, followed in 1937 by Toulouse, Lille, Clermont-Ferrand, Nantes, and Saint-Étienne, while the Post Office had three suitcases which could be carried to the scene of major events like the Tour de France (fig. 7), official openings, and presidential voyages. Reliable international connections were established: London, Berlin, Vienna, Stockholm, Rome, and Amsterdam between 1934 and 1937, then Kiel, Frankfurt, Oslo, Copenhagen, Brussels, and Prague. Finally, the Paris-Algiers connection became operational, starting in January 1939. At the end of the 1930s, radiophotographic transmission trials were conducted between Paris and New York, but a regular commercial application was still a long way off.

However, this new trend did not mean that newspapers were predominantly illustrated by remotely transmitted images. Without precise documentation for the entire set of newspapers under study, taking the *Le Journal* as an example may offer an approximate order of magnitude. In the second half of the 1930s, telephotographs represented between five and ten per cent of all images published, and focused on (primarily international) politics, sports, and any topic liable to make headlines. Hence their publication was not a regular occurrence, but depended on the events that were making news from week to week. On the eve of the Second World War, telephotography, although far from occupying a dominant position or even constituting a majority of the photographs published, had received recognition that was theoretical, in relation to the technical capabilities of the process, as well as practical, in terms of its use by the press.
This recognition resonated with the sense, often reported in the late 1930s, that time was accelerating. ‘Modern man’ was described at the time as a person in a rush, far different from the flâneur of the belle époque, as Paul Morand writes in his essay De la Vitesse. According to Christophe Studeny, ‘the three familiar Keystones – the walking pace, the time, the place – are fading; with each passing day, walking, horses, and paths recede a little bit further from everyday experience.’ These measures of a time that passes slowly were being replaced by the automobile, the railroad, and the new means of communication. Telephotography was creating a desire, if not a demand, for speed, indeed even immediacy. A photographer for Agence France-Presse observed that it ‘seems normal for a photograph to be taken in the morning, several hundred, even several thousand kilometres from Paris, and published in that evening’s newspapers.’ This was confirmed by a 1935 editorial in Le Journal: ‘Since 1892, the earth has shrunk considerably. People laugh at distance. We want to know everything and know it very quickly.’

Such assertions were above all a reflection of the coverage of especially newsworthy events, which justified the newspapers’ deployment of similarly extraordinary means. The Sudetenland crisis, which shook Europe in September 1938, epitomizes this dynamic in news coverage. In the national dailies, readers followed current events as they unfolded in front-page photographs and headlines: on the one hand, the trips back and forth between their capitals and Germany made by the representatives of the pacifist powers, Édouard Daladier and Arthur Neville Chamberlain (fig. 8); on the other, the scenes of negotiation between the various countries. In Le Journal, for example, readers were present on September 16 for the British prime minister’s ‘Departure from London.’ The following day, back on British soil, they could see ‘Chamberlain disembarking from the airplane in Heston.’ On September 19, for the signing of the Franco-British agreement, ‘the film of the voyage’ of the French delegation was featured on the front page. The next day, the same delegation could be seen waving to the crowd on its return to France. On September 22, readers were shown Winston Churchill arriving in Paris, and the following day, Chamberlain being greeted by Joachim von Ribbentrop upon his arrival in Cologne. Finally, on the twenty-sixth, beneath the headline ‘London and Paris deliberate,’ the photographs showed ‘Mr. Daladier embarking for London’ and ‘Messrs. Daladier and Bonnet in the cabin of the airplane about to take off.’ Certain meetings were also photographed. On September 17, a telephotograph was published of the Berchtesgaden talks between Chamberlain, Hitler, Ribbentrop, and Neville Henderson, British ambassador to Berlin; on the twenty-fourth, a photograph of ‘Hitler and Chamberlain conversing’; and on the twenty-fifth, a handshake between Chamberlain and Hitler. Finally, on September 30, came the image that symbolized the Munich accords, showing ‘Chamberlain, Hitler, Mussolini, Ciano, Daladier, Von Ribbentrop, and Schmidt’ (fig. 9).

More often than not, these images provided no information about the content of the negotiations or the development of the geopolitical situation, despite the profound consequences of these events. Their main purpose seems to have been to express in visual terms the fast-paced, disjointed, and unpredictable rhythm of current events in a mode of representation that was utterly new. Indeed, although this type of visual representation, which kept pace with events as they unfolded, was also utilized by newsreels and...
illustrated weeklies, their publication schedule, weekly at best, entailed an irreducible delay. By contrast, newspapers were able to create a visual daily record of these events. The press coverage of the Sudetenland crisis bears witness to this capacity and to the contribution of newspapers to the revitalization of visual culture in the late 1930s.

An illustration of the dichotomy – well known to historians of technology – between the availability of an innovation and of its practical assimilation into the economic and social fabric appears to be the first lesson to be drawn from the study of telephotography. Although Édouard Belin’s technology was theoretically usable as early as 1914, the obstacles to its use outweighed its appeal. The chronology of its implementation by the press is much more that of a gradual process of adoption than of a revolution. From this perspective, one must abandon a strict chronology marked by clearly identifiable milestones and enter into a subtle interplay of oscillations between scientific experiments and commercial applications. Beginning in the mid-1930s, under the combined effects of demand from newspaper editors, competition between agencies, and technological progress, its use expanded, leading to the enhancement of the infrastructure and driving the newspapers’ race to be the first to cover the news.

Broadening the perspective even further reveals technical innovation as a meaningful, albeit partial, expression of the tendencies of the period in which it occurs. The reception telephotography received was affected by the working practices, production process, and the culture of the press. These were linked to the evolution of the era’s currents of thought and to the construction, in the interwar years, of a visual culture that fed them and that they in turn helped to nourish.

NOTES

1. Telephotography is also referred to as phototelegraphy. Hence today the term has two meanings: the remote transmission of images and photography using a telephoto lens. I use it here exclusively in the former sense. See Eugène AISBERG, La Transmission des images: Principes fondamentaux de la phototélégraphie et de la télévision (Paris: E. Chiron, 1930), 13.
4. It should be noted, however, that Françoise Denoyelle, in La Lumière de Paris, supplies a number of previously unpublished historical facts regarding telephotography. See Françoise DE NOYELLE, La Lumière de Paris (Paris: L’Harmattan), vol. 2: 53–56.
7. Ibid., 186.
8. The ‘pantelegraph’ was so called because it was supposed to be able to transmit various types of documents – letters, drawings, and photographs. See Julien Feydy, ‘Le Pantégraphe de Caselli,’ La Revue du Musée des arts et métiers, no. 11 (June 1995): 16–18.

9. The photograph was placed on a cylinder with a light source inside it. Then the image was scanned by a lever containing selenium: the lighter the image, the stronger the electric current. See Shelford Bidwell, ‘Télé-photographie,’ Nature, no. 23 (February 1881): 354.


11. F. Denoynelle, La Lumière de Paris (note 4), 54.


15. The first suitcase contained the mechanical and scanning components and the transmission amplifier, the second the tuning fork and its transmission amplifier as well as the energy sources: J. Jacob, Les Installations télégraphiques (note 6), 220.

16. Le Journal reports that ‘portraits, views, and drawings’ were ‘telephoned from Bordeaux to Paris in four minutes’; Le Journal, January 14, 1913, p. 1.


20. A photoelectric cell allows one to transform light into current. See J. Jacob, Les Installations télégraphiques (note 6), 57.

21. Placed inside the receiver, this screen eliminates the succession of discontinuous shades produced by the earliest sets. Ibid., 58.

22. The luggage area became a darkroom, and the Belinography set was attached to the back of the van. The van stopped at a post office, where it connected to a telephone line to transmit the images: L’Instantané, no. 3 (August 1930): 49.

23. It sometimes took several minutes to complete the transmissions: Le Matin, July 1, 1930, p. 1; minutes of board of directors meeting, May 1931, fonds du Matin, 1 AR 23, Archives Nationales.


25. The experiment was repeated by these dailies the following year and then by Paris-Soir in 1933. Paul Renaudon, ‘Un progrès considérable dans la transmission des documents photographiques: La valise bélinographique,’ L’Instantané, no. 40 (September 1933): 84.


27. In its original version, the network contained eight lines running between the main British cities, primarily for use by the daily press: E. Aisberg, La Transmission des images (note 1), 157.


29. Set at 1 franc 90 centimes per square centimeter, with a minimum assessment of 190 francs.


40. Annaire de la presse française (note 38), 711.
44. M. Chermette, ‘Donner à voir’ (note 30), 410.
45. Note by Jacques de Marsillac, June 20, 1935, fonds du Journal, 8 AR 279, Archives Nationales.
50. According to Édouard Belin, a photograph could be published less than two hours after being taken. See Édouard Belin, ‘Conférence de Monsieur Édouard Belin,’ L’Instantané, no. 59 (April 1935): 291.
51. In 1924, in an initial experiment, images were transmitted between Cleveland, Ohio, and Chicago, Illinois. Technically, the Bell System differed slightly from Belin’s: J. Jacob, Les Installations télégraphiques (note 6), 195.
52. In 1927, the first line between Berlin and Vienna was established using this system, in which the photograph is scanned by a diffuse reflection rather than a beam of light: J. Jacob, Les Installations télégraphiques (note 6), 196.
54. ‘Déclic,’ Presse-Publicité, no. 6, April 18, 1937, p. 13.
57. Of the thirty-nine photographs preserved in the collection of Le Journal, twenty-three are belinogrammes: Dossier Laval, Qe 1123, L 142, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Est., Paris.
60. ‘Déclic,’ Presse-Publicité, no. 34, March 21, 1938, p. 31.
ABSTRACTS

In the history of photography and the media, telephotography – or the remote transmission of images – has primarily been discussed from a technological perspective, with a focus on the earliest years of its existence. Centred on the French example, this article seeks to revisit this history and to examine this innovation in the context of the uses of photography in the press. It brings to light a different chronology from that which has been proposed thus far, one that reveals a limited and gradual development of the new technology throughout the 1920s, followed by a phase of visible expansion in the last years of the interwar period. This analysis makes it possible to abandon an exclusively technological perspective and reveals that, beyond the refinement of the process, the reasons for its initially slow adoption and subsequent rapid expansion lay in the evolution of professional practices in the press, the role assigned to photographs in the construction of the news, and the excitement sparked by the introduction of ‘snapshots’ of current events.

AUTHORS

MYRIAM CHERMETTE

Myriam Chermette is a curator at the Bibliothèque Interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne. A graduate of the École des Chartes and a PhD in history, she focuses her research on the history of press photography. She is the author of a doctoral dissertation entitled ‘Donner à Voir: La Photographie dans Le Journal: Discours, Pratiques, Usages (1892–1944).’