



School: School of Humanities

Researcher: Dr Cassie Newland

Project Title: *Victorians Decoded: Art and Telegraphy*

UOA: 28: History

300-Word Statement

Victorians Decoded was the final output of an AHRC project entitled *Scrambled Messages*. The project brought together an interdisciplinary group of scholars from English Literature, Art History, Education, Archaeology, Engineering, and the History of Technology to examine the multiple and changing relationships between the new technology of telegraphy and artistic and literary output. The *Victorians Decoded* exhibition was the culmination of four years' research into the interplay between science, technology, metaphor, and new cultural forms between 1857 and 1900; a span covering the invention and deployment of trans-Atlantic Telegraphy.

A series of four core workshops brought together practitioners from every conceivable discipline (including dance, psychology, curation, music, architecture, physics) to think through the impact of telegraphic ideas and forms on their discipline, personal outputs, and the wider world. The results of these workshops fed into the development of four key themes around which the *Victorians Decoded* exhibition was structured: distance, coding, transmission, and resistance. The detailed content and context of each term was then further explored by the *Scrambled Messages* team through a myriad of workshops, discussions, performances and writings, allowing us to shape our complex ideas into an impactful and above all understandable public-facing exhibition and conference.

Using powerful 19th century imagery drawn from a variety of public and private collections, the exhibition sought to place painting, archival materials and telegraphic objects in conversation, as a means of highlighting the synergies, tensions and contradictions between them; sketching-out the inherent coactions and incongruities in our understandings of telegraphy, messaging, and cultural production in the late-Victorian period. The *Victorians Decoded* exhibition was committed to the public accessibility of these ideas and offered free entry to the public. Visits from schools and colleges were encouraged through photo competition prizes, tours, and supporting curriculum materials. The accompanying exhibition catalogue was free to download.