



“We’ll all be happy then!” (Life, 1911)

Erkki Huhtamo comments:

"An elderly man sits in his parlor, surrounded by all kinds of technical gadgets and robot servants. The tense is a kind of future-in-the-present. Compared with many earlier depictions of the social role of the new domestic technologies, there is an important difference: the family unit (usually shown together looking at stereoscopic photographs, listening to phonographic recordings, and later listening to radio or watching the television in the cosy atmosphere of the living room) has disappeared. Indeed, other human beings are present only virtually, by means of a TV-like device called "observiscope", a fantasy device and another manifestation of the "telectroscope", a nineteenth century discursive invention (see Erkki Huhtamo's essay in the Media Archaeology dossier). In this dystopian vision, the observiscope is used as a personal surveillance device, enabling the central figure to peep at his son Willie courting a girl. The view is from behind their backs, of course, and other options include "The Family", "The Office", "Golf Matches", and "Aeroplane Races". Nearby is an "International Wireless Home News Service", which transmits "events as they transpire, accurately recorded", again by choice from a menu, foreshadowing the present commercial on-line services. Additional gadgets emphasize "mediatization" of domestic life - contact with the outside world will happen exclusively by means of various communication technologies, leaving humans isolated with their perversions. In this image, from the beginning of the twentieth century, we are not very far from the pessimistic late-twentieth-century Baudrillardian vision about the home turned into a "communication satellite"

(from: Timothy Druckrey (ed.), *Electronic Culture*, Aperture, New York, 1996, p. 296)