Issue No.6 Summer 2014

Research Journal

Edited by Angela McShane

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VICTORIA AND ALBERT MUSEUM, LONDON

Contents

Editorial

Angela McShane, Victoria and Albert Museum

Clio, soft-paste porcelain figure and stand, Joseph Willems, about 1758–69. Museum no. 792:1-2-1864 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Welcome to this year's edition of the V&A Online Journal. Our sixth issue features writing from current Museum staff, external scholars and graduates of the V&A/RCA MA in the History of Design. In this issue, each article uncovers the hidden histories embedded in objects: from computer-generated art and design, through a rare manuscript written by an 18th-century artisan, to the Museum's collection of theatrical

prompt books. Each author, in taking seriously the seemingly slight or previously slighted, shows how by bringing new research questions and innovative methodologies we can discover fresh social, cultural and political meanings in the Museum's collections.

We begin with Melanie Lenz's study, which celebrates the significant contributions made by women to the history of computer art. Using extensive evidence from the Archive of Art & Design and the Museum's Word & Image collections, Lenz's piece offers a corrective to much of the existing scholarship on the subject, which has yet to fully engage with the critical role played by women as artists, curators and educators. The article explores these developments against the broader currents of the relationship between gender and technology in the 20th and 21st centuries, offering a compelling case for the V&A's ongoing commitment to collecting computer-generated art and design.

Katrin Seyler focuses on an object that quite literally remained hidden until its rediscovery on 26 December 1967. This short manuscript, written by the German cabinet-maker Jacob Arend, was hidden inside the elaborate writing cabinet he made, alongside his fellow journeyman, Johannes Wittalm, in the

Würzburg workshop of Servatius Arend. As Seyler shows, this document, in spite of its brevity, offers an exceptionally rare insight into the cognitive and emotional worlds of early modern craftsmen, suggesting how and why artisans used writing, a comparative unfamiliar cultural practice for them, as a coping mechanism during challenging life experiences. Sophie Cope's companion piece explores what Arend and Wittalm's writing cabinet tells us. Using close analysis of materials, form and techniques, Cope sets this extraordinary object in the contexts of luxury production, consumption and global trade. The writing cabinet will soon be available for closer scrutiny: after a period of relative seclusion in the V&A's stores at Blythe House, it will take pride of place in the Europe 1600–1800 Galleries, which open to the public in early 2015.

Next, Beverley Hart's survey of the prompt book collection in the V&A Department of Theatre & Performance reveals how the annotations and coded markings that cover these documents offer vital clues to the staging of plays. Hart's study provides an invigorating discussion of the challenges inherent in any examination of past performance practices, as well as those currently faced by the Museum in its conservation of these once hardworking documents. And, as her article demonstrates, close scrutiny of prompt books can disclose not just what happened on stage but can also provide fascinating insights into life behind the scenes.

And finally, Miranda Clow's essay concerns a different kind of printed ephemera: an early 19th-century trade card produced to promote the Hope Insurance Company. In showing how the nascent insurance industry 'nurtured objects to compensate for its lack of material product', Clow shows how this trade card functioned as a deftly realised example of conceptual

design, marrying immateriality with abstract virtues to make something out of nothing.

The V&A Online Journal aims to provide a forum for research papers from scholars inside and outside the Museum, in a bid to promote dialogue and open up new ways of interrogating material culture, current design practice, histories of design and all other related fields. Provided that submissions meet the academic standards set by our Editorial team and peer reviewers, we welcome articles for future issues on the history of art, architecture and design relating to the V&A's collections, public programme or institutional history; features focusing on new acquisitions or objects linked to V&A exhibitions; reflections on the educational or creative industries role of the Museum and reviews and previews of V&A publications, conferences or displays.

Further details on submission are available on the Submission Guidelines page and we can be also contacted at vandajournal@vam.ac.uk.

We would very much like to thank our authors and all who contributed to the successful production of this issue.

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Cataloguing Change: Women, Art and Technology

Melanie Lenz, Patric Prince Curator of Digital Art and Digital Programmes Manager, Victoria and Albert Museum

Abstract

Focussing on key objects in the V&A's digital art collection, this article considers the relationship between women, art and technology. It contextualises early digital practices and documents the significant contribution made by female artists, curators and educators inspired by the creative potential of new technologies.

Introduction

Figure 1 – Women and Technology, silkscreen print, Barbara Nessim, 1986. Museum no. E.62-2013 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Barbara Nessim

The recent acquisition of 'Women and Technology' (fig. 1), a silkscreen poster by Barbara Nessim, highlights the key theme addressed in this article – the important contribution made by women who have used the computer in the visual arts. Computer art is a broad label used, in the context of the V&A, as a historical term to describe work made using the computer as a tool from around the 1960s until the early 1980s.[1] Digital art, another general term used in the following decades, also defines a range of artistic works and practices that use digital technology as an essential part of the creative process. Focussing on the V&A's national collection of computer art, the discussion reflects on the work of contemporary practitioners and an earlier generation of artists. It explores the divergent interests and approaches that have driven aesthetic experimentation and offers an insight into the experiences of those working in what became a predominantly male domain. By examining individual and collaborative practices, we will see where artists have both programmed their own code and adapted commercial software to creatively experiment with the possibilities of the medium. More importantly, the article addresses the development of computer art to reveal how significantly it has been shaped by the influential role of

women as artists, curators and educators.

The V&A began to collect computer-generated prints in the late 1960s, around the same time as the seminal exhibition *Cybernetic Serendipity* held at the Institute of Contemporary Arts. In 1969 the Museum acquired a *Cybernetic Serendipity* collector's set published by Motif Editions, a London-based publisher of fine art prints.[2] In the years that followed, very few works acquired by the Museum illustrated the early years of computer-generated art and design. Today the strength of the internationally significant collection is the result of two major acquisitions – the Patric Prince collection and the archives of the Computer Arts Society. Together, these major acquisitions form the basis of the V&A's national collection of computer-generated art – the subject of Honor Beddard's article in Issue No. 2 (Autumn 2009) of the V&A Online Journal.[3]

The first major collection acquired by the V&A was assembled by Patric Prince, an American archivist and historian of computer art. She was responsible for organising some of the key computer art exhibitions, including the SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Technologies) retrospective in 1986, as well as lecturing and writing on the subject extensively.[4] In addition to the artworks, the Patric Prince collection contains a large quantity of books, archival material and ephemera, including monographs, manuals, exhibition catalogues, slides and interviews with practicing artists. The Museum also holds the archives of the Computer Arts Society (CAS), which includes over 200 artworks that are located within the Museum's Word & Image Department. The V&A continues to actively acquire works and its collection of computer and digital art currently stands at over 800 artworks. These range from early experiments with analogue computers and mechanical devices, to examples of contemporary software-based practices that produce digital prints and computer-generated drawings. The collection consists predominately of two-

dimensional works on paper, such as plotter drawings, screenprints, inkjet prints, laser prints, photographs and artists' books. It also includes a small but growing number of born digital artworks – objects that are produced, distributed and consumed solely in digital form.

The impact of the computer on the creative process and creative industries marks a culturally significant development, and the V&A's holdings chart and illustrate some of these changes. The collection contains artworks made by both men and women, with the latter embracing technology as their mode of expression since the arrival of the computer and its use within the arts. Art historian Grant D. Taylor even suggests that it was the unnamed women working at ENIAC (Electronic Numerical Integrator And Computer) in 1963 who made the first computer art through their collaborative efforts on scientific visualisations at the Ballistic Research Laboratories, Aberdeen, Maryland.[5] These women programmers were referred to as human 'computers'. The technological achievements of such women are increasingly recognised through initiatives such as The Ada Project.[6] This online resource, named after Ada Lovelace (1815-52), credited with being the first computer programmer, acknowledges the role of past and present women working at the forefront of change and computing in technology.[7] While acknowledging the much broader contributions made by women to the history of computer technology, this article specifically focuses on the role played by trained artists who have expressly used the computer in the visual arts. Much of this research is particularly indebted to the Women, Art and Technology Project begun in 1993 by the journal *Leonardo*, and Judy Malloy's anthology of the same title.[8]

Early pioneers

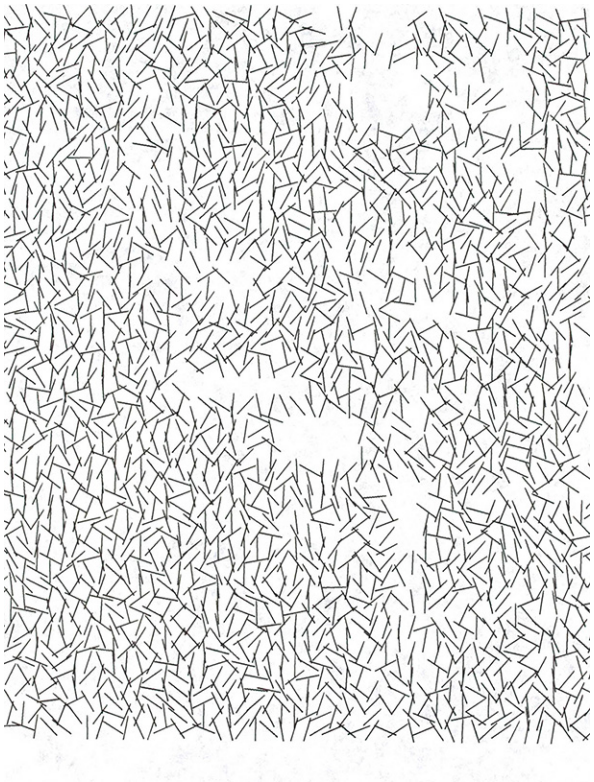

Figure 2 – Interruptions, plotter drawing, Vera Molnar, 1969. Museum no. E.269-2011 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Vera Molnar

The earliest works in the V&A's computer art collection created by female artists were made in 1969. *Interruptions* (fig. 2) by Vera Molnar is a plotter drawing. The image was made by a pen attached to a computer-controlled drawing machine – in this instance an IBM 370 with an IBM 2250 cathode ray tube (CRT) monitor and plotter. Molnar, who studied at the Academy of Fine Arts, Budapest (1942-7), started using the computer in 1968. However, her systematic method for creating art began in 1959 when she developed the concept of the 'machine imaginaire'.[9] Through this she identified a series of (hypothetical) steps by which an image would be created. Describing this technique, Molnar stated:

> *I imagined I had a computer. I designed a programme and then, step by step, I realised simple, limited series which were completed within, meaning they did not exclude a single possible combination of form. As soon as possible I replaced the imaginary computer, the make believe machine by a real one.*[10]

Molnar went on to use a limited number of geometrical elements such as circles, lines and squares in her art, exploring fundamental concepts relating to order and

structure. As one of the first fine artists to use the computer as an artistic tool, she placed a high value on the computer's speed and greater calculation capabilities to generate visual possibilities.[11]

Grace Hertlein, like Molnar, was born in 1924 and also began to use computers to make art in 1968. Hertlein studied art, printing and sculpture at the Art Institute of Chicago (1961-5) and went on to attain a BFA (1968) and MFA (1970) in sculpture at California State University, Chico.[12] She first exhibited her computer art in 1969, when it was selected for a show at the Fall Joint Computer Conference, Las Vegas.[13] Hertlein was conscious of her status as one of only a few women working with computer art, writing in her 1970 resume:

> *Since 1970 my work has been included on an invitational basis in all the major computer art exhibitions. As an example, 20 artists were invited to show their work in Zagreb, Yugoslavia in 1973. I was one of those 20 artists, the only woman in the world to participate in this important exhibition.*[14]

Hertlein played an important role in championing The Computer Art Contest.[15] This was one of the earliest, if not the first, award dedicated to computer art.[16] The magazine *Computers and Automation* launched the contest in its February 1963 issue, although Hertlein only became involved with the contest when she became arts editor for the publication in 1974. Hertlein worked alongside Edmund C. Berkeley, chief editor and co-publisher of the magazine, to develop the concept of the contest. The winner of the competition was subsequently featured on the cover of each year's August issue.[17]

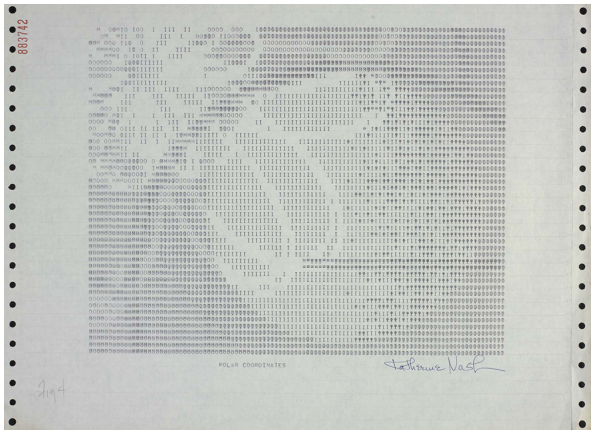

Figure 3 – Polar Coordinates, computer-generated drawing, Katherine Nash, 1971. AAD/2007/11/1/2 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

In common with other artistic practitioners, Katherine Nash (fig. 3) began experimenting with computer-generated art in the late 1960s.[18] She made her early computer art using ART1, a program developed at the Department of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science at the University of New Mexico.[19] To create ART 1, Nash, who worked at the University of Minnesota, collaborated with Richard Williams, an engineer at the University of New Mexico. These sites of artistic production reflected the prohibitive cost of the new technology, with only research laboratories and universities able to afford the required equipment.[20] In 1970 Nash and Williams published *Computer Program for Artists: ART 1*, an article which set out the different ways an artist could approach art using the computer.[21] The following year, in 1971, Nash created the three works held in the V&A's collection.

Artists also gained access to computers by negotiating with the large corporations that had invested in the technology. One such individual was Sylvia Roubaud, who created artworks at Messerschmitt-Bölkow-Blohm (MBB), a German aerospace company based in Ottobrun, near Munich, Germany.[22] The V&A holds a copy of *Computergrafik-Galerie: Sylvia Roubaud* by H. W. Franke, which illustrates her work.[23] Roubaud was a member of the MBB Computer Graphics founded in 1971 by her husband, Winfried Fischer. Significantly, she was the only academy-trained artist within the group, while the other members had backgrounds in engineering and mathematics.[24]

One of the most progressive research laboratories and a leading

authority in the field of new technology was Bell Laboratories (also known as Bell Labs).[25] Based in New Jersey, it was influential in initiating and supporting the early American computer-art scene and, in 1966, contributed to a series of performances entitled *9 Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*.[26] This was the first event in a series of projects that would become known as EAT or Experiments in Art and Technology. Artist Lillian Schwartz was a member of EAT.[27] She first began to experiment with picture-processing techniques at Bell Labs in 1968, after being introduced to the research laboratory by Leon Harmon, a computer scientist who was working there at the time.[28] He had previously met Schwartz when their work was exhibited together in *The Machine: As Seen at the End of the Mechanical Age*, held at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in 1968.[29] Schwartz described her interest in technology and desire to work with computers, stating: 'It seemed to be an obvious source of new visual imagery and my art has been nurtured by harnessing the technology that invades our everyday life.'[30] Since the 1960s Schwartz has used the computer as an analytical and creative tool, with access to computers

enabling her to develop her artistic practice. Reflecting on this, she has said, ‘Computers and all the various technologies that exist today actually spark me into new ways of thinking. Certainly the computer has pushed me into thinking in ways that I otherwise would not have allowed myself to think.’[31]

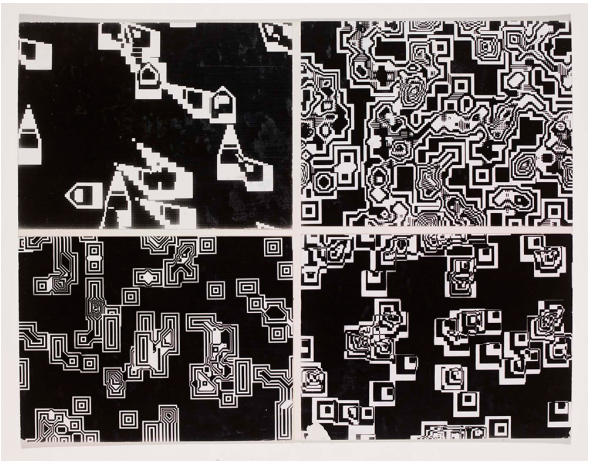

Figure 4 – Pixillation, photographic film stills, Lillian Schwartz, about 1970. Museum no. E.184-2008 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Lillian Schwartz

Schwartz was among the first American artists to use computer-coding language to create motion-graphic-based film and video art. In 1970 she created *Pixillation* (fig. 4), a four-minute film commissioned by AT&T Bell Laboratories.[32] During the development of the work Schwartz used EXPLOR (EXplicit Patterns, Local Operations and Randomness), a computer animation language coded by Ken Knowlton.[33] In 1971 the film received the Cine Golden Eagle award, an accolade presented by the CINE (Council on International Nontheatrical Events) to signify excellence in the film, TV and digital media industry, the same year MoMA acquired the work.[34]

In 1984 MoMA also commissioned Schwartz to create a poster and a public service announcement (PSA) to celebrate the opening of its newly renovated gallery space.[35] The resulting work, *Big MoMA*, is a computer-generated collage that incorporates examples of the Museum of Modern Art’s collection in the shape of a female form. Schwartz worked with physicist Richard Voss to scan in images of the collection using the prototype program he developed at the IBM Thomas J. Watson Research

Laboratory. The 30-second advert took two years to create and was the first computer-generated TV commercial to win an Emmy.[36] Of her work with computer scientists Schwartz has remarked, 'These collaborations have produced systems, languages and subroutines that are responsive to my artistic needs.'[37]

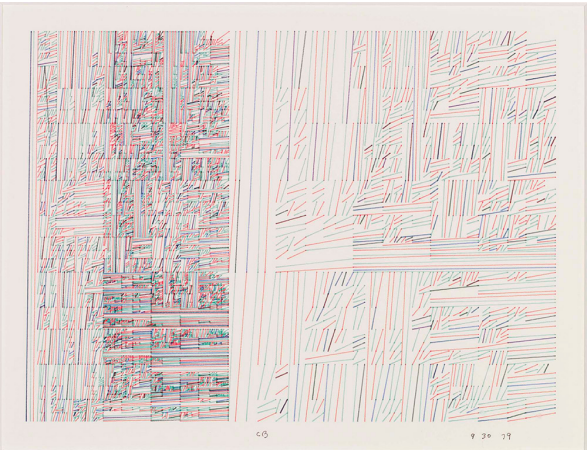

Figure 5 – GRASS: series 1, plotter drawing, Colette S. and Charles J. Bangert, 1979. Museum no. E.1063-2008 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Colette and Charles Bangert

Collaborative practices

In a 1971 interview Colette Bangert described the complexities of technological art, commenting that it often necessitated team effort to produce good results.[38] The collaborative practice of Colette and Charles Jeff Bangert is an integral aspect of their work. As Colette has written, 'Think of my work as the record of many conversations between myself, the mid-western landscape, and Jeff Bangert, my computer art collaborator.'[39] Colette Bangert trained as an artist and was the only woman in the 1957 graduating class at the John Heron Art Institute in Indianapolis. She went on to complete a Masters degree in Fine Arts from Boston University. In 1967 she started making computer drawings with Jeff, who was a supervisor of applications programming at the University of Kansas Computation Centre.[40] Colette described their process of working together stating, 'We talk about form and colour like

other artists, but our ‘words’ are brush strokes and software, colour and math…’[41]

The mid-western landscape, with its transforming colours and form, is a central part of the Bangerts’ work, where they use the computer to reflect the changing seasons (fig. 5). Their algorithmic drawings were first created on a General Electronic 635 computer, produced by one of Jeff Bangert’s programs called MELL and were written in the FORTRAN programming language. On her use of the computer as a drawing medium, Colette has commented, ‘It [the computer] allows me to explore more fully what a line can do.’[42] In a later interview she contemplated the relationship between drawing by hand and on the computer: ‘The resulting drawings produced by the plotter help me to understand and clarify my visual conceptions of what I have done, what I might have done and what it would be possible to do, and, thus, help me in making subsequent hand drawings’.[43]

Although less well documented, the V&A’s archive also holds papers on the collaborative practices of Monique Nahas and Hervé Huitric, who were part of GAIV (Groupe Art et Informatique de Vincennes), and Joan Kirsch, a printmaker and art historian who, together with her computer scientist husband Russell Kirsch, wrote on the use of the computer in the fine arts.[44]

Innovation and new techniques

Figure 6 – Virtual Implants, barrier-strip autostereogram, (art)n, 1990. Museum no. E. 1060-2008 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/(art)n

Through their individual and collaborative practices artists have embraced technology as their mode of expression, developing new and innovative processes and techniques. *Virtual Implants* (fig. 6) is an example of a PHSCologram, a registered trademark for barrier-strip and lenticular autostereograms made by art collective (art)n. The group was formed by Ellen Sandor and her peers from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago in 1983. In the same year, Sandor coined the term PHSCologram, which is an acronym for photography, holography, sculpture and computer graphics. By 1990 PHSCologram had become a digital photographic process constructed using (art)n's proprietary art software.[45]

Sonya Rapoport makes participatory computer-assisted interactive artworks. Rapoport, born in 1923, began her career as an abstract expressionist painter, using drawing, painting, text and cross-cultural imagery. Since the 1970s she has utilised digital tools.[46] Her work, such as *Shoe Field* (fig. 7), engages with and incorporates audience responses: in this instance as an interactive installation that created computer plots of people's responses to their shoes. Conceived in 1977, the work was originally about

American Indian designs and sandals.[47] Rapoport superimposed drawings on the computer that related to anthropological research encoded in computer printouts; she then repeated the process with her own collection of shoes, before developing the work into an interactive happening.[48] In 1978, Rapoport worked with anthropologist Dorothy Washburn and completed *A Shoe-In*, a participation performance held at Berkeley Computer Systems. In 1986 *Shoe Field* was exhibited at Media Gallery in San Francisco.[49]

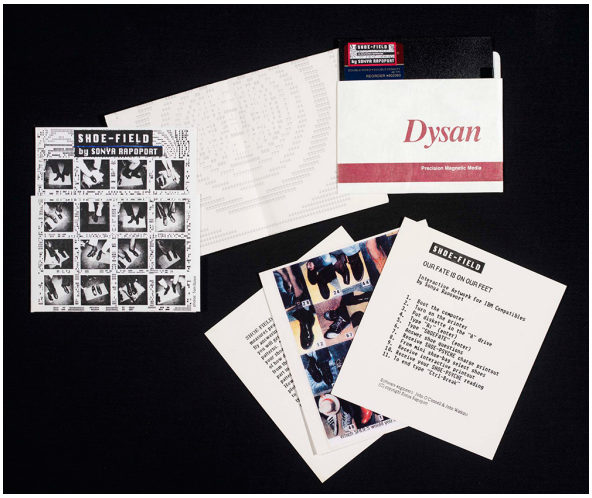

Figure 7 – Shoe Field, interactive artwork, Sonya Rapoport, 1989. Museum no. E.1012:5-2008 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Sonya Rapoport

Papers in the archive show how artists used available technologies in different, innovative ways: from the experimental computer animation and artwork of Vibeke Sorensen and Rebecca Allan in the 1970s, to Jane Veeder's artwork inspired by video games in the mid-1980s.[50] The archive also documents artists who have both written their own software to create artworks, such as Alyce Kaprow, who collaborated with Walter Bender at the MIT Architecture Machine Group Lab, and artist Eudice Feder, who collaborated with Russell J. Abbott, a professor of computer science at California State University.[51]

Other artists in the collection have adapted existing commercial packages. IBIS (fig. 8) is an example of a work by Karen Guzak, who studied painting and printmaking at the Cornish Institute, Seattle, in 1976.[52] It was named after the early colour graphics package and program tool, the IBIS System, which was developed in the early 1980s by Carl Youngmann, Associate Professor of Geography at the University of Washington, and Ellie Mathews, a graphic designer.[53] The IBIS computer program was originally used to rapidly produce variations of an image for commercial applications, such as mapping oil deposits.[54] In 1987, Youngmann lent the software and a colour printer to Guzak.[55] Her print *IBIS* was made with an FCG computer with 896 kb of memory, a cathode ray tube and a Tektoniks 4695 colour ink jet printer, and was drawn on a digitising tablet with an electronic stylus. Guzak's Seattle studio provided a collaborative hub; she worked with eight fellow artists who shared technical solutions and encouraged each other to explore the potential of the computer as an art-making tool.[56]

Figure 8 – IBIS, inkjet print, Karen Guzak, 1987. Museum no. E.1014-2008 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Karen Guzak

Gender, technology and art

Acknowledgement of women's role in computer art has, until recently, remained a comparatively hidden history.[57] A number of important research publications and projects, such as Hybrid Momentum: Women/Art/Technology, have documented and mapped the impact of women and early digital art.[58] However, few, as Taylor points out, have dealt with the complex relationship between gender and technology.[59]

Artist Joan Truckenbrod highlights the gendered politics of computer culture in the 20th century. Like many, she points to its history rooted in the military and engineering.[60] 'Computing is one of these social constructs that has been formulated within a socio-political milieu.'[61] She describes this culture as being encoded and compounded by the syntax, command and control structures that reflect computing operating systems and their associated history with business and military applications, suggesting how this context has made many female artists working with computers feel alienated.[62] Lillian Schwartz's description of her collaborations with computer scientists is also revealing, with her provocative use of the word 'prostitute' intimating the uneasy gendered dynamics of women as producers of computer art:

> *'I had a reputation in the arts before I got involved in these*

> *areas but when I started using computers, my fellow artists began to look on me as a prostitute. I haven't been able to find an artistic circle where I can discuss the aesthetics of my work. I've had to replace my artist friends with computer scientist friends.'*[63]

It is surprising, then, that the early years of electronic computing saw the role of programming remarkably receptive to female labour and not as stratified along gender lines as other technical professions.[64] This unexpected state of affairs illustrated by 'The Computer Girls', an article in *Cosmopolitan Magazine* from April 1976. The feature encouraged the magazine's fashionable female readership to consider careers in programming, describing the field as offering promising job opportunities for women. The author of the feature, Lois Mandel, quoted the distinguished computer scientist, Dr Grace Hopper, as saying programming was, 'Just like planning a dinner. You have to plan ahead and schedule everything so that it's ready when you need it. Programming requires patience and the ability to handle detail. Women are "naturals" at computer programming.'[65] For contemporary readers the tone of the article may seem flippant and condescending. And yet, the feature does provide an indication of the growing number of women working in computer programming at the time.[66] In this wider context, the article provides a valuable and informative insight into the gender dynamics of computer work in the formative decades of electronic computing.

The decades following the 1960s saw the programming profession becoming increasingly masculinised. The creation of professional associations (such as the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) and the Data Processing Management Association (DPMA)), the emphasis on educational requirements for programming careers and advertising campaigns that increasingly targeted men, led to the computer being deemed a more masculine pursuit.[67] This in turn

served to reinforce contemporary gendered preconceptions and stereotypes. Truckenbrod has argued that it was on account of the masculine framework and context that some women artists, such as herself, felt outside of this culture.

> *'FORTRAN, for me was like writing a series of mathematical equations. This method for developing algorithms and writing programs reflects organisational patterns of top-down, hierarchical modes of thinking used primarily by men. A woman's approach to programming is found in the more conversational languages such as COBOL, developed by Grace Hopper in 1960. As women are involved with knowledge in a more relational manner, visually orientated programming processes using icons or figures that are moved around on the display screen, and connected to produce procedures, are more accessible to women.'*[68]*:*

Truckenbrod's assertion supports the view that Western technology itself embodies patriarchal values.[69] However, a growing number of feminists, including Flis Henwood and Judy Wajcman, have used the emerging cultural analyses of technology as a framework to examine the relationship between gender and technology.[70] These cultural analyses frame technologies as 'cultural products', or 'processes'. From this perspective, gender and technological meanings are not fixed or given; they are made.

Curatorial and educational legacies

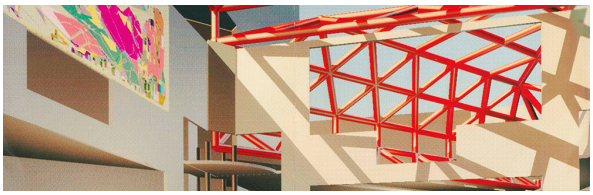

Figure 9 – Frame from 3D animation Raffles City, inkjet print, Darcy Gerbarg, 1984. Museum no. E.1035-2008 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Darcy Gerbarg

Since the 1960s women, as educators and curators, have been formative and formidable key agents responsible for expanding, challenging and theorising computer and digital art practices. *Cybernetic Serendipity*, curated by Jasia Reichardt, was the first large international exhibition of electronic, cybernetic and computer art. This hugely influential exhibition opened at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London on 20 October 1968 and explored the connections between creativity and technology, particularly cybernetics. In doing so, it linked scientific approaches and intuition, and dealt with the relationship between the computer and the arts. At 6,500 square feet, housing 325 participants and seen by over 40,000 people, *Cybernetic Serendipity's* combination of graphics, computer-composed music, film and cybernetic machines marked a critical moment in computer art history.[71]

In the years since this groundbreaking exhibition, other shows have continued to inform the way the public perceive computer art. The V&A's collection includes works by key figures in coordinating major projects, such as Darcy Gerbarg (fig. 9). In 1981 she co-curated the first formal art show to accompany SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques)[72]. Gerbarg, born in 1949, obtained her BA from the University of Pennsylvania (1967) before completing an MBA at

New York University (1971).[73] She began using computers to make art after Alvy Ray Smith created an interactive colour paint system at the Computer Graphics Lab, located in the New York Institute of Technology, where Gerbarg also worked.[74] Gerbarg was an educational pioneer, going on to establish the graduate program in Computer Art at the School of Visual Arts, where she was also the founding director of the Computer Institute for the Arts.

Figure 10 – Untitled, Iris print, Sue Gollifer, 1999. Museum no. E.17-2011 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/Sue Gollifer

Women have continued to take leading roles in computer art teaching and criticism – contributions that are reflected by the holdings of the Word and Image Department and materials in the Patric Prince Archive. These include works by Sonia Sheridan, who created the Generative Systems programme in 1970 at the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. This course explored the implications of the communications revolution for the arts, and had a significant impact on the development of technological arts education.[75] Similarly, from 1970 to 1998, Grace Hertlein was a professor in the Department of

Computer Science, California State University, where she taught information technology specialists about computer art.[76] More recently, Sue Gollifer (fig. 10) has lectured at the University of Brighton School of Art, Design and Media since 1989, while Patricia Search is currently Professor in Interaction Design and Digital Art at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, New York. Women have also shaped critical discourses around the place of the computer in the visual arts, with notable contributions including those of art historian Patric Prince; artist, author and educator Anne Morgan Spalter; curator and writer Cynthia Goodman and scholars Christiane Paul and Margot Lovejoy.[77] Artists represented in the V&A's collection have also published widely on the subject, most notably Ruth Leavitt, the editor of *Artist and Computer*, one of the earliest anthologies about computer art.[78]

Contemporary engagement and acquisitions

This essay has used the V&A's collection of computer art to contextualise early digital practices,

readdress the gender imbalance in treatments of the subject and draw attention to the long-standing tradition of women engaged in the fields of computer and digital art. In part, the impetus for this discussion has been the renewed interest in new media art histories and, more specifically, the place occupied by women in the history of computer art, both in the V&A and beyond.[79] Tellingly, a growing number of contemporary art and design networks have been established to address the imbalance of women artists working in the field of new media, computer arts and technology.

G.Hack (Girl Hack), CoDesign, Flossie and MzTEK, to name but a few, are organisations that have worked with the V&A's Digital Programmes team.

Figure 11 – Is anyone there?, tea towel, Thomson & Craighead, 2002. Museum no. E.748-2012 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London/ Alison Craighead/Jon Thomson

Clearly, the renewed focus on and debate about the continued exclusion of women from current

exhibitions of new media art directly concerns the V&A.[80] The Museum's first major exhibition of digital art, *Decode: Digital Design Sensations* (8 December 2009 to 8 April 2010), featured the solo work of just one female artist, reiterating exactly why more critical attention is needed in this field.[81] Through exhibition programming and acquisitions, the V&A is actively engaging with the issue. Following the 2013 exhibition, *Barbara Nessim: An Artful Life*, a large number of works by the artist were acquired for the collection including a series of works she made using a Norpak computer system at TIME Video Information Services in 1982, and the computer animation *Face to Face* created in 1983.

The recent acquistion in 2012 of artworks by Alison Craighead and Jon Thomson further illustrates the importance for the Museum of collecting the most recent digital artworks. Craighead and Thomson's collaborative practice explores how global communication networks transform the way we perceive and understand the world around us. Using technology, their work considers conceptual and emotional issues surrounding the evolving digital and cultural landscape. The V&A's set of four Google tea towels are printed with the authentic search-engine results returned to a user when the emotive phrases 'Please Help Me', 'Is Anybody there?' (fig. 11), 'Please listen to me' and 'Can you hear me?' were entered into the search field using Google in Netscape 4.7 on Mac OS 9.2 and Netscape 6 on Windows 98. Most of the results come from internet bulletin boards, reflecting the

predominant use of the web at the time. The tea towels are part of a body of work that highlights the artists' acute critical awareness of the web's amorphous qualities and its far-reaching implications. Like Craighead and Thomson's other works, and, indeed, those of the artists considered in this essay, the piece scrutinises a moment of significant cultural and technological change, while their recent acquisition illustrates how the V&A is continuing to engage with the issue of collecting digital art and, more specifically, new media works created by women.

Endnotes

1. Further information about Computer Art: Technology & Terminology can be found at on the V&A website (accessed 2014)

2. The *Cybernetic Serendipity* collector's set consisted of seven lithographs printed after plotter drawings. All of the artists represented were male. The artists were Charles Csuri and James Shaffer, Donald K. Robbins, Maughan Sterling Mason, William Fetter, Kerry Strand and CTG, an artist group whose members were Haruki Tsuchiya (systems engineer), Masao Komura (product designer), Kuni Yamanaka (aeronautic engineer), Junichiro Kazizaki (electronic engineer), Makoto Ohtake (architectural designer), Koji Fujino (systems engineer) and Fujio Niwa (systems engineer).

3. Honor Beddard, 'Computer art at the V&A', *V&A Online Journal*, no. 2 (2009) (accessed 2014)

4. *ACM SIGGRAPH 86: Art Show Catalog, 13th Annual Conference On Computer Graphics And Interactive Techniques, Dallas, August 18-22, 1986* (Dallas: ACM SIGGRAPH, 1986); Beddard, 'Computer art at the V&A' (accessed 2014)

5. Grant D. Taylor, '"Up for Grabs": Agency, Praxis, and the Politics of Early Digital Art', *Lateral (The Journal for the Cultural Studies Association)*, issue 2 (2013) (accessed 2014)

6. The Ada Project, 'Pioneering Women in Computing Technology' (accessed 2014).

7. Joasia Krysa, *Ada Lovelace: introduction* (Ostfildern: Hatje Cantz, 2011), 4.

8. Judy Malloy, ed., *Women, Art and Technology* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

9. Patric Prince, 'Women and the search for visual intelligence', in *Women, Art and Technology*, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003), 8.

10. Vera Molnar, 'Artist's Statement: Inconceivable Images', Digital Art Museum (accessed 2014).

11. Wulf Herzogenrath and Barbara Nierhoff, eds, *Vera Molnar: Monotie, Symétrie, Surprise* (Bremen: Kunsthalle, 2006), 11.

12. Margit Rosen, ed., *A Little-Known Story about a Movement, a Magazine, and the Computer's Arrival in Art: New Tendencies and Bit International, 1961–1973* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2011), 554.

13. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/39, Grace Hertlein, Curriculum Vitae, 1970.

14. Ibid., 14.

15. In 1974 Hertlein was art editor of *Computers and People* (the magazine previously known as *Computers and Automation*). She was the art editor for the magazine again in 1976, 1977, 1979 and 1980. Hertlein wrote extensively on computer art and was an editor of *Computer Graphics and Art* (from 1976 to 1978), also published by Berkeley Enterprises Inc.

16. Taylor suggests that it was the launch of the first art contest by *Computers and Automation* that facilitated the birth of computer art. Grant D. Taylor, 'The Soulless Usurper: Reception and Criticism of Early Computer Art', in *Mainframe Experimentalism: early computing and the foundations of the digital arts*, ed. by Hannah Higgins and Douglas Kahn (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 17–33.

17. BITSAVERS: Computers and Automation Journal Documents Library, The Internet Archive (accessed 2014); 'The Computer Art Contest', The compArt database Digital Art (daDA).

18. University of Minnesota Archives, Katherine Nash Papers, 1910-1982. Examples of other artists who created

computer art in the late 1960s are Frederick Hammersley and Charles Mattox, who both taught at the University of New Mexico. Elizabeth East, 'Foreword', in *Frederick Hammersley: The Computer Drawings 1969*, ed. by Christina Carlos and Lisa Jann (Venice, California: L.A. Louver, 2013), 7.

19. Katherine Nash and Edmund C. Berkeley, 'Computer Program for Artists: ART 1', *Leonardo*, Volume 3, (1970): 439.

20. Catherine Mason, 'A History of Computer Art' (paper presented at the CHArt conference, Birkbeck, University of London, 11-12 November 2004); also available online (accessed 2014).

21. Nash and Berkeley, 'Computer Program for Artists: ART 1', 439–42.

22. Rosen, ed., *A Little-Known Story about a Movement*, 557.

23. Herbert W. Franke, *Computergrafik-Galerie: Sylvia Roubaud* (Wiesbaden: Vieweg, 1981).

24. 'Sylvia Roubaud biography', The compArt database Digital Art (daDA) (accessed 2014)

25. Formerly known as AT&T Bell Laboratories and Bell Telephone Laboratories.

26. *9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering/presented under the auspices of the Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, Inc., in cooperation with Experiments in Art and Technology, Inc.* (New York: Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts, 1966).

27. A collection of documents published by EAT can be accessed at http://www.fondation-langlois.org/html/e/page.php?NumPage=237.

28. 'Discoveries and Firsts', Lillian F. Schwartz Website (accessed 2014).

29. Carolyn L. Kane, 'Digital Art and Experimental Color Systems at Bell Laboratories, 1965-1984: Restoring Interdisciplinary Innovations to Media History', *Leonardo*, Volume 43, issue 1 (2010): 55.

30. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/87, Lillian Schwartz quoted in an interview by Rebecca Coffey, *Computer Pictures*, Jan/Feb 1984: 55.

31. Ibid., 54.

32. Laurens R. Schwartz email to author, 18 May 2014.

33. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/87, 'Artist's Resume 29 April, 1984'.

34. Email to author from The Museum of Modern Art Film Study Center, 10 October 2013.

35. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/87, Correspondence between Luisa Kreiseberg, Director of Public Information at MoMa, and Lillian Schwartz, 28 August, 1984; Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/87, 'Artist's Resume 29 April, 1984'.

36. 'On Digital Art, Animation, Perception, Analysis', Lillian F. Schwartz Website (accessed 2014).

37. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/87: 54.

38. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/3, Colette Bangert quoted in an interview, *Lawrence Daily Journal-World*, 1971.

39. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/3, Colette Bangert, Artist Statement 10 April 1990.

40. Patric Prince, 'Women and the search for visual intelligence', 7.

41. Ibid., 37.

42. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/3, Colette Bangert quoted in *Topeka Daily Capital* (Kansas), 31 December 1971.

43. Colette Bangert, 'Experiences in Making Drawings By Computer and by Hand', *Leonardo*, Volume 7 (1974): 289.

44. Joan L. Kirsch and Russell A. Kirsch, 'Computers viewing artists at work', in *Syntactic and Structural Pattern Recognition*, ed. by G. Ferrate et al. (Berlin: Springer Verlag, 1988); also accessible online.

45. Robert J. Krawczyk, *Ellen Sandor (art)n: Multi-Dimensional Imagery*, exhibition catalogue (Chicago: Illinois Institute of Technology, 2006-2007) (accessed 2014).

46. Anna Couey and Judy Malloy, 'A Conversation with Sonya Rapoport', *Interactive Art Conference on Arts Wire*, June 1995 (accessed 2014).

47. Sonya Rapoport, 'SHOE-FIELD: Our Fate is on Our Feet' (accessed 2014); Interview with Sonya Rapoport by Judy Malloy, 'The process of creating new media', *Authoring Software* (accessed 2014).

48. Ibid.

49. Sonya Rapoport, 'Process(ing) Interactive Art: using people as paint, computer as brush, and installation site as canvas', in *Women, Art and Technology*, 188.

50. Further information on these artists can be found in the following artist files, held at the Archive of Art & Design: AAD/2009/19/10/86, Vibeke Sorensen; AAD/2009/19/10/1,

Rebecca Allan; AAD/2009/19/10/99, Jane Veeder.

51. Further information on these artists can be found in the following artist files, held at the Archive of Art & Design: AAD/2009/19/10/43, Alyce Kaprow; AAD/2009/19/10/24, Eudice Feder.

52. Madeline Courtney, ed., *Karen Guzak Prints: 1974-1999* (Washington: AngelArmWorks/Blurb, 2011), 73; Karen Guzak, 'Between Geometry and Gesture: Combining Electronic Media with Traditional Artistic Methods', *Leonardo*, Volume 30 (1997): 19–22.

53. Cynthia Beth Rubin, 'Digital by Choice: imaging in the pre-photoshop era', *Leonardo Electronic Almanac*, Volume 13, No. 5 (2005), http://lea.mit.edu (accessed 2014).

54. Karen Guzak email to author, 19 June 2014.

55. Ibid.

56. From 1985 to 1987, eight artists – Carl Chew, Karen Guzak, Lorna Jordan, Carolyn Law, Gail McCall, Bill Ritchie, Norie Sato and Janet Yang – created a series of prints using the IBIS System.

57. Judy Wajcman refers to the 'hidden history' of women in technology. Judy Wajcman, 'Reflections on Gender and Technology: In What State is the Art?' *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 30, no. 3 (2000): 447–64. Also accessible online.

58. Hybrid Momentum: Women/Art/Technology is a community of women engaged with creative technology and art. It is organised by Rutgers Institute for Women and Art in collaboration with Arizona State University, School of Art. For more information, see: http://www.momentum-women-art-technology.com/momentum-motherboard.htm.

59. Grant D. Taylor, 'Humanizing the Machine: Women Artists and the Shifting Praxis and Criticism in Computer Art', *Journal of the International Digital Media and Arts Association*, volume 4, no. 2 (2013).

60. Angela Creager, Elizabeth Lunbeck and Londa Schiebinger, eds, *Feminism in Twentieth-Century Science, Technology, and Medicine* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), 4.

61. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/97, Joan Truckenbrod, 'Gender Issues in the Electronic Arts Inform the Creation of New Modes of Computing', [paper from the Patric Prince collections, 25 June, 1998]: 3.

62. Ibid.

63. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/87, Lillian Schwartz quoted in Charles Solomon, 'The computer as art medium', *The Los Angeles Times,* 4 December 1982.

64. Thomas J. Misa, 'Gender Codes: Defining the problem', in *Gender Codes: Why Women are Leaving Computing*, ed. by Thomas J. Misa (New Jersey: Wiley, 2010), 4–5; Nathan Ensmenger, 'Making Programming Masculine', in *Gender Codes: Why Women are Leaving Computing*, 116.

65. Lois Mandel, 'The Computer Girls', *Cosmopolitan*, April 1976, 52–6. Also accessible online.

66. The acceptance felt by some women in computer programming is also documented in: Janet Abbate, 'Bridging the gap between popular images of computing and women's historical experiences', in *Gender Codes: Why Women are Leaving Computing*, 213–28; Jeffrey R. Yost, 'Women entrepreneurs in software and computer services', in *Gender Codes: Why Women are Leaving Computing*, 229–50.

67. For a more extensive discussion of changes in the composition of labour in computer programming, see: Nathan Ensemenger, *The Computer Boys Take Over: Computers, Programmers, and the Politics of Technical Expertise* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2010).

68. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/97: 3.

69. In the 1980s, feminists, such as Joan Rothschild, supported the view that technology embodied patriarchal values. See Joan Rothschild, ed., *Machina Ex Dea: Feminist Perspectives on Technology* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1983).

70. Flis Henwood, 'Establishing Gender Perspectives on Information Technology: Problems, Issues and Opportunities', in *Gendered Design? Information Technology and Office Systems*, eds Eileen Green, Jenny Owen and Den Pain (London: Taylor & Francis, 1993), 32–44; Judy Wajcman, *Feminism Confronts Technology* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 22.

71. Jasia Reichardt recorded more than 60,000 visitors to the exhibition during the eleven weeks it ran. Jasia Reichardt, '"Cybernetic Serendipity": Getting Rid of Preconceptions', *Studio International* 176, no. 905 (November 1968): 176–7. However, Michael Kustow, then director of the ICA, cited a much lower figure of 45,000. See also: Terry Coleman, 'Wild in the Mall: Terry Coleman on the ICA's Financial Crisis', *The Guardian*, 5 December 1968. The 325 participants in *Cybernetic Serendipity* included

artists well known for their computer art, contemporary artists who worked with machines, avant-garde musicians and film makers. The number of participants also encompassed corporations, such as IBM, Boeing and General Motors, and research institutes, like Bell Telephone Labs.

72. SIGGRAPH (Special Interest Group on Graphics and Interactive Techniques) was first held in 1974; however, it was not until 1981 that the conference included a formal exhibition. This inaugural show was co-curated by Darcy Gerbarg and Ray Lauzzana.

73. Eli Noam, Jo Groebel, Darcy Gerbarg, eds, *Internet Television* (New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2004), xiii.

74. Darcy Gerbarg, 'Computers as artist's tool', *The Visual Computer* volume 2 (1986): 178.

75. Sonia Sheridan fonds, 'Biography', The Daniel Langlois Foundation for Art, Science, and Technology. See also: Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/89, Sonia Sheridan, artist's file.

76. Archive of Art & Design, AAD/2009/19/10/39, Artist's Resume.

77. Publications by the writers cited include: Cynthia Goodman, *Digital Visions: computers and art* (New York: Abrams; Syracuse: Everson Museum of Art, 1987); Margot Lovejoy, *Digital Currents: Art in the Electronic Age* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Christiane Paul, *Digital Art* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003); Anne Morgan Spalter, *The Computer in the Visual Arts* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley Longman, 1999).

78. Ruth Leavitt, *Artist and Computer* (New York: Harmony Books, 1976).

79. For information on the history of media see: [Media Art Histories, conference series and archive] (http://www.mediaarthistory.org) (accessed 2014); associated publications include: Sean Cubitt and Paul Thomas, eds, *Relive: Media Art Histories* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2013). *Woman, Art & Technology* is a series of interviews on the *Furtherfield* website conducted by Rachel Beth Egenhoefer, exploring the different perspectives of women currently working in art and technology; see: http://www.furtherfield.org/user/rachel-beth-egenhoefer (accessed 2014)

80. In February 2014, the 'new-media-curating' discussion list debated the poor gender balance in new media art exhibitions. This was in response to the exhibition *Digital Analogy: Pioneers of New Media*, held at Museo de Arte Contemporáneo, Bogotá, from 8 to 28 February 2014. No female artists were represented.

Simultaneously, an *Art and Feminism Wikipedia Edit-a-thon* took place across the globe on Saturday 1 February 2014; for more information, see Wikipedia (accessed 2014)

81. Austrian artist Lia was the only individual female artist represented in *Decode: Digital Design Sensations*. In addition, the show included objects produced by collaborative practices comprising both men and women, as well as studio work by Jason Bruges studio, Everyware, Universal Everything and Trokia.

The Letter in the Writing Cabinet: The Emotional Life of an 18th-Century Journeyman

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Abstract

This article examines a note written by the journeyman cabinet-maker Jacob Arend (1688–1744) in 1716. Arend concealed this note in a writing cabinet, now in the collection of the V&A, which he produced in the workshop of his brother Servatius Arend at Würzburg. The article reveals the note's emotional subtext by considering the social and cognitive worlds of early modern artisans.

Introduction

Among the many treasures in the V&A, there is a rather unassuming piece of paper (figs 1 and 2). It was found in an 18th-century writing cabinet owned by the Museum (fig. 3), the subject of Sophie Cope's companion piece in this issue. There are a few hurried lines on it, which speak of deprivation, an imminent departure on a dangerous journey and the making of a baroque writing cabinet. These lines were written by the journeyman cabinet-maker Jacob Arend (1688–1744) on 22 October 1716.[1] According to his own account, Jacob and his fellow journeyman, Johannes Wittalm, were about to leave the workshop of Servatius Arend (1673–1729), Jacob's older brother, cabinet-maker to the court at Würzburg. He wrote in his note that 'both of us will not be found here [at Servatius' workshop on Korngasse] for much longer', as they set forth to travel from workshop to workshop, a journey that took some of their fellow journeymen as far as Bohemia, Scandinavia or England.[2] These particulars make Jacob's note a rare document composed by an early modern journeyman and, as the following discussion makes evident, it provides unique insights into the emotional and intellectual experiences of an artisan about to set off into a potentially perilous world.

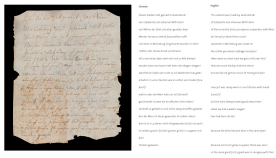

Figure 1 – Manuscript written by Jacob Arend, as found inside the writing cabinet (recto), 1716. Museum no. W.23:41-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

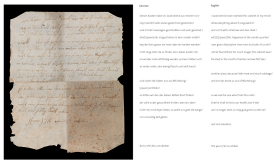

Figure 2 – Manuscript written by Jacob Arend, as found inside the writing cabinet (verso), 1716. Museum no. W.23:41-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 3 – Writing cabinet, Jacob Arend and Johannes Wittalm, 1716. Museum no. W.23:1 to 41-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The circumstances surrounding the composition and concealment of Jacob's note are a mystery. Since its discovery on 26 December 1967 by the writing cabinet's previous owners, the note has baffled the few who have set eyes on it with its peculiar references to cabbage and peas. To date, scholars have failed to acknowledge the note's multiple meanings and wider significance. The following discussion is an attempt to redefine the status of Jacob's note by engaging with the place of writing in early modern artisanal culture, as well as the nature of the journeys young craftsmen like Jacob were required to undertake to reach social, professional and cognitive maturity. By examining the recollections of other early modern craftsmen regarding their journeyman travels, it is possible to appreciate just how dangerous, gruelling and potentially fatal these experiences could be. This approach also produces the wider contexts that will reveal the emotional charge embedded in Jacob Arend's brief note.

Reading what artisans wrote

At first glance, the note's narrative seems straightforward: Servatius's workshop was hungry, with Jacob remarking that, 'it was rarely warm in our kitchen with bread'. The wording is ambiguous here, as the word 'broden [bread]' could also be read as 'braden [roast]', which would fit better with the reference to a lack of meat. Both readings are feasible, although a lack of bread would have made the hunger and malnutrition suffered by Jacob and the rest of the workshop more severe. According to Jacob, the workshop's inhabitants were forced to subsist on 'cabbage and peas [erwes is a term still existing in dialects of south-western Germany and refers to peas or puréed peas]', which made them 'so fat [...] that one could hardly climb the stairs'. This bloating was either intended as an ironical observation, or, more seriously, may have been a symptom of prolonged starvation. Shortages of grain were caused by a particularly harsh winter in 1714–15, which had disastrous implications for the following year's harvests.[3] Wine production was also affected by these adverse weather conditions, and the resulting increase in price meant that the two cabinet-makers could no longer afford to find solace at the bottom of a bottle.[4] Unable to bear the shortage of meat, alongside too 'much cabbage and turnips', Jacob and Johannes made the decision to seek their fortunes elsewhere and ventured out into the world as journeymen. At this point, other stories become enfolded in this narrative of deprivation, as Jacob moves to the creation of the writing cabinet, laying claim to its authorship, and onto the wider world and the 'big war in Hungary against the Turks'.

So far, the note appears a rather matter-of-fact, in parts even

humorous, account of the economic and professional concerns of a young cabinet-maker at the beginning of the 18th century. But if we adjust our reading techniques according to the specificities of artisanal writing, the note reveals a much greater emotional and narrative depth. Before tackling the broader issues suggested by Jacob's note – famine, war and authorship – we must first reflect on the most appropriate ways to read this type of document.

How might we classify the text? How might we make sense of it alongside other pieces of writing by early modern craftsmen? James Amelang has dealt with first-person artisan authorship in his survey of early modern artisanal autobiographies, which provides some valuable insights into the ways in which early modern artisans wrote about their life experiences and how they expressed themselves textually.[5] Comparison of Arend's note with other texts written by craftsmen poses challenges, as the latter differ greatly in length and compositional modes from the note found in the writing cabinet. Noticeably, Arend's note does not fit Amelang's porous categories for artisan autobiography. We are not dealing with a full-length, planned autobiographical text, such as a memoir, an autobiography or travel journal; neither was the note conceived as a letter in the strictest sense. And yet, Jacob clearly wrote about what was happening in his life and about his immediate plans for the future. It becomes useful, therefore, to approach the note as an autobiographical 'snapshot'.

Although understanding craftsmen's self-referential writing in terms of specific categories has its merits, it is also crucial to avoid letting such

classifications become the driving force in an analysis of artisans' thoughts and motivations. Rather than suggesting that Jacob's note should be treated as the exact counterpart of longer autobiographies, careful, selective comparison can result in valuable insights. In seeking out passages in journals and autobiographies that deal with the topics found in Jacob's note, we can establish how his contemporaries felt about certain issues, such as shortages of food. So far, this is conventional contextualisation, but it is also possible to use these contexts as an interpretative platform to unearth covert, emotional meanings and push our interpretation further.

This discussion takes seriously Amelang's observation that 'most early modern texts write less about the self than around it'.[6] Omissions, repetitions and patterns within a text need to be assessed for what they can tell us about authorial intentions.[7] Such an analysis enables informed conjecture on authors' motivations, which provides a crucial interpretative 'key' for understanding artisanal autobiography, when combined with relevant contextualisation.[8] Departing from Amelang's discussion of authorial motivation and its significance for understanding these texts further, we need to extend his approach beyond explicitly documented motivations to encompass unuttered ideas and mindsets.[9] Specifically, this means going beyond a rather narrow focus on social and literary practices to explore the cognitive dimension of the early modern artisanal

experience as well. The following will show which material we can use to access this dimension and how other artisanal texts can enable us to decode the silences, repetitions and idiosyncrasies of Jacob's note.

First and foremost, however, we need to properly engage with the circumstances in which the note was written. Envisioning this encourages re-evaluation of the significance of writing in early modern artisanal culture. One can almost imagine Jacob writing at a workbench in Servatius's workshop, in close proximity to the cabinet on which he and Johannes Wittalm had just finished working. If he had felt particularly audacious, he might even have written it at the writing cabinet itself, taking momentarily the place of its intended courtly owner. Workshop days were long, even in winter, when work was carried out by candlelight, and one can almost glimpse Jacob writing his few lines late at night, once the rest of the workshop were in bed, sneaking it into a place where it would remain unseen for over two centuries. Even when framed imaginatively, it is crucial to acknowledge the specific moment of writing. What was written at a workshop bench cannot be read in the same way as texts composed at a desk in a study or library.

While those who work with and appreciate historical objects and documents are aware of the specific and different ways in which things of the past were used and understood, we still fail too often to take into account alternative ways of knowing that are embodied in these texts. The ways in which we read are specific to our time and are often at odds with how people in the past wrote. In the case of artisanal writing, texts can defy the linear and expository format to which we are accustomed, while scholarly writing of the past adheres more closely to literary qualities we recognise and appreciate. For these reasons, perhaps, we are more inclined to

accept the latter as the documents that best reflect contemporary modes of thought.

By contrast, writing seems to have been a less familiar cultural practice for most early modern craftsmen.[10] This certainly seems to have been the case for Arend as his manuscript shows some signs of struggle. The repetition of 'great' in the sentence, 'Es ist auch im selben grosen ein grosen griech [There was also in the same great a great war]', presumably should have read 'in the same year'. Irregularities in spelling do not necessarily indicate a weakness at writing, since early modern German manuscripts evidence a range of orthographic conventions. It would also be wrong to equate Jacob's limited writing skills with limited knowledge and cognitive abilities. Writing was not so much an unfamiliar cultural practice, as one less compatible with other modes of learning and understanding that were prevalent among craftsmen.

Like most early modern artisans, Jacob's mind operated primarily through modes of learning and understanding that were visual and oral. Storytelling and observation were vital to make sense of the many diverse groups of people and objects encountered during a journeymen's travels and throughout an artisan's working life.[11] Considering that Jacob was already 28 years old in 1716, it is likely that he had already been on his journeyman travels, which were, on average, undertaken not long after completion of a young artisan's apprenticeship, when they were approximately 19 to 21 years of age.[12] Unless Jacob was a late bloomer, which would have caused him considerable embarrassment, probably even some abuse by his peers in the form of mocking songs that compared untraveled artisans to old maids, he would have already acquired considerable knowledge on previous journeys.[13] This knowledge did not come from books, but from seeing new places and from conversations with other artisans about the history of a place, its objects and people. Once we realise this, it becomes easier to see that

this knowledge could not be adequately expressed in writing, partially accounting for the formal peculiarities found in artisans' texts.

When an artisan made the decision to write, therefore, he had to compress knowledge comprised of oral and visual impressions into a textual format. The mindscape of early modern artisans contained elements for which they had no words, only images, rendering their textual production incomplete by nature. For example, descriptions of artworks by the journeyman sculptor Franz Ferdinand Ertinger (1669–1747) in his travel diary are rather plain and formulaic (he describes sculptures and altarpieces consistently as either 'beautiful' or 'artful'), but this did not mean that his responses to these art works automatically lacked depth or sophistication.[14] To distil 'word-less' impressions into a linear, textual narrative must have posed great difficulty to an artisan.

The unfamiliar stylistic characteristics of texts like Jacob's note, with their abrupt changes in subject matter and stream-of-consciousness quality, must, instead, be understood as indicators of an alternative culture of communication and learning, rather than a cognitive or literary shortcoming. While Amelang does not explicitly address these epistemological specificities of craftsmen's learning, he does account writing an 'intense and ambiguous experience for those for whom writing was not a "normal" cultural practice or expectation'.[15] Writing in artisanal culture, framed, thus, as a marginal practice, makes it all the more important for scholars to develop sensitivity to the complex subtexts and background stories that underpin these pieces of writing.

Elsewhere, scholars such as Sigrid Wadauer have challenged the relationship between artisanal writing and authenticity. Wadauer's survey of artisanal autobiographies argues that such texts are practically devoid of authenticity,

serving instead as textual constructions that were closely tied to an authorial agenda, usually of self-presentation.[16] While the motivations of authorship certainly need to be explored, self-referential writing by artisans is one of the few ways into a visual and oral culture that is now largely concealed from us. More compellingly, the circumstances of Jacob's note, written in great distress on the eve of his departure, frustrate any attempt to read it as a calculated, literary construction.

The issue of to whom Jacob wrote further complicates the matter of how we read his text. Although the note masquerades as a letter with its salutation, asking 'him who finds this note to drink to our health', proper consideration of where it was found in the writing cabinet, alongside the text's formal qualities, derails this attempt at classification. In his 1971 article, Max von Freeden identified the note's hiding place as underneath a secret drawer.[17] More recently, in the process of cataloguing the cabinet for the V&A's new Europe 1600–1800 Galleries, Sarah Medlam established more precisely the location of the manuscript, which was originally concealed in a recess underneath the base of the lower right-hand drawer within the piece's main flap-fronted compartment (figs 4 and 5).

Figure 4 – Writing cabinet: detail of main flap-fronted compartment, Jacob Arend and Johannes Wittalm, 1716. Museum no. W.23:1-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 5 – Writing cabinet: detail showing base of lower right-hand drawer. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 6 – Writing cabinet: detail showing recess where Arend's letter was hidden. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In her study of French 18th-century furniture, Carolyn Sargentson shows how cabinet-makers had become 'proficient in designing secret compartments and internal mechanisms undetectable to the uninitiated' in France, England and Germany.[18] Although the V&A owns examples of pieces of furniture employing sophisticated 'hiding' mechanisms, the recess in Arend's writing cabinet did not fulfil this function.[19] Instead, access to the recess that contained the note required the forceful removal of one of two wooden panels that made up the base of the drawer; the piece of wood removed even showed traces of glue on its underside (fig. 6). The violence implicit in this act of exposure suggests that the secret space was not intended for its 'owner's security and delight', but for Jacob's genuine (and, as he probably expected, permanent) act of concealment.[20]

Similarly, the form and content of the text further undermines the notion that Jacob's note was intended as a letter. After all, Arend was fully aware that the writing cabinet had been commissioned by Johannes Gallus Jacob (1670–1736 or 1737), finance minister in the service of the Prince-Bishop of Würzburg, Johann Philipp von Greiffenclau (1652–1719), as either he or Johannes had set in engraved pewter their patron's name as a series of ciphers on the writing cabinet's flap and base panel (fig. 7).[21] Yet, the note made no attempt to reflect Gallus Jacob's elevated position, an essential feature of official correspondence between an early modern artisan and his patron, which proposes that Jacob had not

expected the piece's future owner to discover his note.[22]

Figure 7 – Writing cabinet: detail showing 'JEALUS / JACOB' (for 'Gallus Jacob') represented as a series of ciphers. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

Why, then, did the note most closely resemble a letter? Most likely, this was the form of writing Jacob was most familiar with, especially if he had travelled away from home before. Letters between journeymen and their families are not widely preserved, but autobiographical texts by other craftsmen attest to the use of correspondence by artisans. For example, the sculptor George Paul Eckstein (1739-c.1828), during his time as journeyman, requested financial support from a relative who had become a successful cabinet-maker in Sweden, as noted in an autobiographical fragment.[23] The choice of the familiar, epistolary format enabled Jacob to articulate personal concerns textually.

Curiously, the front and reverse of the sheet resemble each other through a repetition of themes. It is possible that these two sides represent two versions of what Jacob tried to put in writing; when he deliberately concealed this sheet in the cabinet, both 'stories' were conserved. In view of Amelang's observation about the significance of repetition in artisans' autobiographies, the two sides might not be distinct drafts.[24] Instead, the revisiting of subjects can be read as a reinforcement of what was important to Jacob. We cannot say whether this was conscious or not, but it certainly highlights his dual preoccupation with starvation and his legacy.

The circumstances of the note's composition, written clandestinely and for no obvious reader, prompt further questions about its function and artisanal writing practices at

large. If it was not destined for a reader, at least a contemporary reader, why did Jacob write this note? Did he wish to assert his legacy for a distant posterity? Can the note be understood as a 'space' for private reflection similar to a private diary? Or was it supposed to function as a secret signature for the writing cabinet itself?

Fried pinecones and a staff steeped in blood: the realities of journeyman travel

Having considered Jacob's note in terms of its content, form and literary genre, we now need to turn to the social and cultural world of early modern artisans for further contextualisation. Artisanal writing is best understood in relation to the peripatetic, sometimes uncertain, lives of journeymen, calling to mind Amelang's description of artisanal autobiographies as a 'literature of displacement'.[25] After all, Jacob's note's most unique quality for a historian is the moment of its composition: on or near the eve of his departure. Arguably, these circumstances invest it with immediacy and spontaneity unlike any other piece of text written by an early modern craftsman. The emotion of its moment of composition and clandestine nature provide us with an unparalleled insight into the psychological implications of journeyman travel and its hardships. When Jacob composed his note, he did not look

forward to adventures and the opportunity to gain wisdom, as promised by the songs and speeches shared at gatherings of journeymen brotherhoods, which Jacob undoubtedly would have heard when he became a journeyman.[26] Instead, his note tells us that, nearing his journey, Jacob was scared to death.

Evidence of the experiences of other artisans on the road suggests that Jacob's fears were well founded. Life outside his brother's workshop was daunting even during economically stable times. Comparison with longer texts shows that the preoccupation with food that characterises Jacob's note was not unusual. Food and its quality was a recurrent motif since good quality food was often in short supply in workshops across Europe. It was generally the weakest members of the workshop, such as young apprentices and journeymen, who suffered malnourishment the most. While with Servatius, Jacob and Johannes at least had some cheap vegetables to fill their bellies, others fared much worse. Writing several years after Jacob and Johannes's departure from Würzburg, the French printer Nicolas Contat (active 1730s-60s) described his apprenticeship as a feat of endurance, with the food that he and resident journeymen received of such poor quality that even cats refused it. This was a defining factor in the 'massacre' of the workshop's cats, an act of defiance by the journeymen and apprentices against their mistreatment.[27]

Other responses to the disgusting food served up by stingy masters were less dramatic than those of Contat and his fellows. The 17th-century Alsatian tin-engraver Augustin Güntzer (1596-c.1657) ironically remarked in his travel journal that a maggot-infested ham he was given was 'quite tasty' because his 'stomach was used to digesting rock-hard bread and fried

pinecones'.[28] This remark may not have been entirely humorous, since Augustin certainly suffered his share of hunger on his travels, and it is not implausible that he and his companions actually resorted to consuming fried pinecones.

An early 19th-century craftsman's account shows that hunger remained a common condition of workshop life. In his autobiography, Eberhard Dewald (active 1830s) recalled a conversation between journeymen in a tavern, loudly complaining about the sparseness of food served up by a previous master who was a 'cheapskate, who would count every spoonful that went into a journeyman's mouth, and who could not complain enough about how dear the food was'. Sickened by the master's complaints, the journeymen were ready to throw up their dinner, had they not been worried that 'the mistress would make another meal out of it'.[29] By contrast, hunger in Servatius's workshop seems to have been the result of genuine shortages. There, not being able to eat did not reflect workshop hierarchy or its corruption, but attested, instead, to the intense anxieties that were linked to the availability of provisions in the workshop.

While meat must have seemed like a luxury to Jacob and Johannes in 1716, it was more readily available to journeymen during better times. Before Güntzer dined on hard bread and rotten meat, he had enjoyed the fruits of Bohemia abundantly in 1616, listing the treats he had purchased for mere pennies, which included roast pigeons, a roast duck, a piece of white bread 'as wide as an acre', as well as dark and light beer.[30] When Güntzer arrived in Venice in 1618, having suffered a period of privation, he even had the opportunity to feast on fresh fish and exotic delicacies he termed 'sea spiders'.[31]

Lack of food was not the only challenge Jacob and Johannes faced. Robberies and even murders

were regular occurrences on the road and frequently featured in artisans' journals, showing why travelling in pairs or groups – as Jacob and Johannes did – really mattered. The sculptor Ertinger recalled how he and his companions were shown a grisly relic on their travels: 'The coachman showed us a stick on which could be seen human blood about a foot high, and he said when he drove through these parts [Bohemia] 14 days ago he had come across a murdered journeyman lying in fresh blood and [with] his head squashed in'.[32] Others, like the glazier Jacques-Louis Ménétra (1738-c.1803), were actually robbed on the road. After his shoes were stolen, Ménétra walked barefoot to the nearest town, where his fellow journeymen in a display of solidarity replaced the belongings that had been taken from him.[33] This example suggests the ambivalent relationship journeymen had with their peers, who could provide a vital support system, but at other times might mug, beat and even rape a lone colleague. (The unfortunate Güntzer reported an assault in an inn where he spent the night: 'When he saw that I was fast asleep, he wanted to inflict his foolery and

wantonness upon me, relating to my anus.')[34]

Additional risks on the road were evoked by Jacob's reference to war 'in Hungary with the Turks'. At first reading, this statement seems isolated and detached from the note's wider narrative. However, if we start from the notion that Jacob was unaccustomed to translating the complexity of his thinking adequately into text, the statement regarding the 'great war' between Turkey and Hungary could be interpreted as part of a bundle of mental images and corresponding emotions that encompassed hunger, his uncertain future and Ottoman invasion. In 1716, the threat was, in fact, very real, with war breaking out between Austria and the Ottoman Empire, a conflict that lasted until 1718.[35] As young, physically capable young men travelling on foot, journeymen were vulnerable to conscription. Ertinger described an episode where he joined a group of other travellers on route to Wrocław, then the capital of Silesia, as 'it was very unsafe to travel on one's own because of the harassment to enlist'.[36] In this case, the strategy of travelling in a group worked in the travellers' favour: Ertinger and his companions were assaulted by a group of soldiers, who 'did not take away even one of our travel companions because we were stronger than them'.[37]

In combination, these accounts show that life beyond the workshop was more than just uncomfortable or inconvenient. The world Jacob and Johannes were about to enter was full of potential dangers, promising deprivation and, in some cases, death. For Jacob and Johannes their lives were at stake, with Jacob's note showing how young journeymen in his position might hope for the best while preparing for the worst. In this context, the note takes on an intensely emotional quality – its invocation to an anonymous reader becoming especially haunting: 'so we ask the one who finds this note/ that he shall drink to our health, but if we/ are no longer alive, so may god grant us eternal/ rest and salvation'. Mortality can, perhaps, be seen as

the note's implicit, overarching theme – something that only really becomes apparent when Jacob's fragmentary narrative is read with a fuller understanding of the realities faced by early modern journeymen and the sense that, as the day of his departure drew ever nearer, Jacob's emotional state became increasingly unsettled.

Leaving a legacy

The uncertainty of Jacob's future must be contrasted with the certainty of his authorship of the writing cabinet. In fact, his direct assertion – that he was responsible for its design and execution – was an exceptionally unusual act for a journeyman. Although journeymen in many trades often had considerable professional agency in workshops, it was not customary for them to take credit for their contributions.[38] It is tempting to read this act of self-determined authorship as underpinned by Jacob's genuine belief in the likelihood of his death. If convinced that his prospects were less bleak, would he have felt the same need to assert his authorship of the Würzburg writing cabinet? With a more positive outlook, he might have envisaged it being followed by many more exquisite pieces of furniture, possibly even the masterpiece that would officially elevate him from the status of journeyman to that of master. By including the note in the writing cabinet, Jacob affirmed his legacy, even if only to himself.

The hiding place of the note, concealed where it could not be easily found, raises the question of to whom Jacob wished to proclaim his artisanal accomplishments. Could Jacob, fully aware of the durability of the writing cabinet he

had created, have written with a distant posterity in mind? Framed thus, the note resonates with the idea that discussions of work were employed by artisan authors as a means to elevate themselves socially and artistically.[39] Given the note's particularities, it is plausible, too, that this piece of writing had an additional introspective function. The note can, perhaps, best be understood as a hidden signature: one aimed at easing Jacob's emotional turmoil, rather than earning him fame after his death. By including this signature, which to Jacob's knowledge might never have surfaced again, he made sure to himself that his existence would leave behind a meaningful material trace.

This notion – that the note's disparate subjects were combined to create a kind of momento mori – conflicts with the ways in which journeyman travels were promoted elsewhere in early modern artisanal culture. Songs and rituals, which mostly consisted of drinking and spending time together in taverns, portray journeyman travel as an adventure that turned boys into men.[40] In the lewd and loud environment of the journeyman brotherhood, where introverted behaviour was frowned upon, anxieties of the kind betrayed by Jacob Arend's note were most likely unacceptable. Güntzer, the tin-engraver, was mocked for his melancholic and solitary nature, which led him to avoid the raucous pastimes relished by his fellow journeymen.[41] In this environment, Jacob's fears about the future would most likely have met with derision and contempt. In the absence of a

confidant, the note might be read as his attempt to work through intense emotional experiences on the cusp of a perilous and unpredictable journey – providing valuable insights into a less readily accessible part of the world of the early modern artisan.

Conclusion

Fortunately, Jacob's worst fears remained unrealised, at least for himself. (Johannes Wittalm's fate remains obscure, like the lives of many other early modern craftsmen.) Although we do not know the precise details of Jacob's travels, exactly ten years later his fortune changed for the better. In 1726, Arend was appointed cabinet-maker at the court of Fulda.[42] Several more of his works are preserved at Fulda, including a Regency-style bureau.[43] To date, other known pieces by Arend have not been examined to establish whether they contain clandestine writing, leaving open a potentially fascinating line of enquiry. Jacob's son, Carl Philipp Arend, followed in his father's footsteps and became court cabinet-maker at Fulda in 1746, two years after his father's death in 1744. According to Wolfgang Eller, members of Jacob's family were to remain in the service of the court until 1892.[44]

Jacob Arend's 'letter' is an extraordinary document providing unique insights into a journeyman's emotional state at the beginning of the 18th century. Most exceptional is its status as an extremely rare piece of writing by a journeyman, and not a retrospective account by a mature craftsman like most autobiographical writings attributed to early modern artisans. Few, if any, of the preserved documents written by craftsmen convey the same kind of emotional immediacy. This discussion has shown how, in spite of its brevity, the note demonstrated how individuals were thrown into

emotional turmoil by the pressures of life in and outside of the workshop, and revealed how writing could serve as a coping strategy. Arend's note should, therefore, encourage historians of early modern artisanal writing to re-evaluate autobiographical writings for their potentially hidden emotional content. Moreover, Jacob's note has shown, possibly for the first time, how artisans wrote for purposes other than correspondence or autobiography. Read in the context of other writing by early modern artisans, this rare piece of text highlights, too, that some aspects of journeyman culture discouraged more emotionally introspective modes of expression, and that sometimes the only way for young artisans to resolve an emotional crisis was through writing a clandestine, despairing note.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1. Note written by Jacob Arend, as hidden in the writing cabinet he made with Johannes Wittalm, 1716. Museum no. W.23:40-1975.

2. The tinsmith Augustin Güntzer (1596–1657) documented his journeys to England and the Baltic countries; he eventually got as far as Latvia but abandoned his plan to travel to Scandinavia due to the bitter cold that claimed the lives of some of his fellow travellers. See: Augustin Güntzer, *Kleines Biechlin von meinem gantzen Leben – die Autobiographie eines Elsässer Kannengiessers aus dem 17. Jahrhundert,* ed. by Fabian Brändle (Köln: Böhlau, 2002), 184–92. Franz Ertinger (1669–1747), journeyman sculptor and author of a travel diary, travelled as far as Prague from his birthplace near Lake Constance. See: Franz Ferdinand Ertinger, *Franz Ferdinand Ertinger's Reisebeschreibung durch Österreich und Deutschland* ed. by Erika Tietze-Conrad (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1907), 81. Members of the Eckstein family, who were mostly sculptors and cabinetmakers, can be traced in Sweden, England and America (c.1760s-1800). See: Katrin Seyler, *Opening the Cognitive Tool-box of Migrating Sculptors (1680–1794): An Analysis of the Epistemic and Semiotic Structures of the Republic of Tools* (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Birmingham, 2011), https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3275/. For a broader discussion of artisan travel in the early modern period, see: Geoffrey Crossick, ed., *The Artisan and the European Town 1500–1900* (Aldershot: Scholar Press, 1997).

3. Michael Stürmer, *Herbst des Alten Handwerks – Zur Sozialgeschichte des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich: DTV, 1979), 111.

4. Ibid., 111.

5. James Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus – Artisan Autobiography in Early Modern Europe* (Standford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

6. Ibid., 123.

7. Ibid., 181.

8. Ibid., 7.

9. Ibid., 48.

10. Ibid., 48.

11. Seyler, *Opening the Cognitive Tool-box of Migrating Sculptors* (1680–1794), https://etheses.bham.ac.uk/3275/

12. Wolfgang Eller, *Schreibmöbel 1700–1850: in Deutschland, Österreich und der Schweiz* (Petersberg: Michael Imhof, 2006), 160.

13. Sigrid Wadauer, *Die Tour der Gesellen – Mobilität und Biographie im Handwerk vom 18. bis zum 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2005), 43.

14. Seyler, *Opening the Cognitive Toolbox of Migrating Sculptors (1690-1794)*, 173–7.

15. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus*, 48.

16. Sigrid Wadauer, 'Fremd in der Fremde Gehn: die Erzeugnung von Fremdheit im Unterwegssein von Handwerksgesellen', *in Walz – Migration – Besatzung: Historische Szenarien des Eigenen und Fremden*, ed. by Ingrid Bauer et al. (Klagenfurt: Drava Verlag/Bundesministerium für Bildung, Wissenschaft und Kultur, 2002), 52.

17. Furniture and Textiles Department, V&A, London, museum object file: W.23:1 to 41–1975, Max von Freeden, 'Ein fränkischer Prunkschrank in England'.

18. Carolyn Sargentson, 'Looking at Furniture Inside Out: Strategies of Secrecy and Security in Eighteenth-century French Furniture', in *Furnishing the Eighteenth Century: what furniture can tell us about the European and American Past*, ed. by Dena Goodman and Kathryn Norberg (New York and London: Routledge, 2011), 222.

19. Ibid., 205–33.

20. Ibid., 206.

21. For more information on Johannes Gallus Jacob, see: Peter Thornton, 'A Cabinet for a Würzburg Patron', *Apollo* LXXXIX, No. 88 (1969): 448.

22. See, for example: Landeshauptarchiv Schwerin, 2.26–1 Großherzogliches Kabinett I, 10162, letters by court sculptor Johann Eckstein to the Duke Friedrich of Mecklenburg-Schwerin between 1769 and 1786.

23. Georgiana Eckstein, *A Few Particulars Respecting the Eckstein Family* (London: Strangeway, 1908), 21.

24. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus*, 181.

25. Ibid., 124.

26. Rudolf Wissell, *Des Alten Handwerk Recht und Gewohnheit* (Berlin: Colloquium, 1971), vol.6, 11–12, 228.

27. Robert Darnton, 'Workers Revolt: The Great Cat Massacre of the Rue Saint-Séverin', in *The Great Cat Massacre – And Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (London: Penguin, 2001), 76.

28. Güntzer, *Kleines Biechlin von meinem gantzen Leben*, 174.

29. Johann Eberhard Dewald, Aufzeichnungen und Briefe des Handwerksburschen Johann Eberhard Dewald, 1836–1838; cited in Wadauer, Die Tour der Gesellen, 245.

30. Güntzer, *Kleines Biechlin von meinem gantzen Leben*, 130.

31. Ibid., 138.

32. Ertinger, *Franz Ferdinand Ertinger's Reisebeschreibung durch Österreich und Deutschland,* 81.

33. Jacques-Louis Ménétra, *Journal of My Life*, ed. by Daniel Roche (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 64.

34. The original German reads: 'Da er sahe, daß ich hardt schlieff, wolte er seine Schelmenstuck und Unkischheidt an mihr volpringen, mitt Refferentz am After'. Güntzer, *Kleines Biechlin von meinem gantzen Leben*, 139.

35. Jeremy Black and Roy Porter, eds, *A Dictionary of Eighteenth-century World History* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 53.

36. Ertinger, *Franz Ferdinand Ertinger's Reisebeschreibung*, 65.

37. Ibid., 66.

38. For information on the work processes of journeymen, see: Emanuel Poche, *Matthias Bernhard Braun – Der Meister des Böhmischen Barock und seine Werkstatt* (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag, 2003), 41–5.

39. Amelang, *The Flight of Icarus*, 120–3.

40. Wissell, *Des Alten Handwerk Recht und Gewohnheit*, 228.

41. Güntzer, *Kleines Biechlin von meinem gantzen Leben*, 130,152.

42. Eller, *Schreibmöbel 1700–1850*, 160.

43. Gloria Ehret, *Deutsche Möbel des 18. Jahrhundert: Barock, Rokoko, Klassizismus* (Munich: Keyser, 1986), 126.

44. Eller, *Schreibmöbel 1700–1850*, 161.

The Cabinet with the Letter: Luxury and Poverty in 18th-Century Würzburg

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The letter hidden inside the writing cabinet made by the journeymen Jacob Arend and Johannes Wittalm paints a rather bleak picture, as revealed in Katrin Seyler's article in this issue of the V&A Online Journal.[1] Faced with food shortages and the impact of war, the makers turned first to drink, and then sought to leave Würzburg, their place of employ, altogether. Yet in contrast to this sombre note, the cabinet itself embodies both luxury and extravagance (figs 1 and 2).

All the surfaces, including doors and drawers are curved, whilst marquetry in a whole range of materials has been used to decorate the piece from almost top to bottom. Curtained doors, flowers, birds, lanterns and even the gallery of a house, complete with balustrade, are all featured in this elaborate marquetry (fig. 3). The upper set of doors, meanwhile, are inlaid with the arms of Von Holach, the title taken by the first owner of this cabinet, Johannes Gallus Jacob (although at the time of completion, 1716, Gallus Jacob had not yet been ennobled) (fig. 4).[2] Despite their differences however, like the letter, this writing cabinet tells us a great deal about the men who made it, and the wider cultural contexts within which they worked.

Figure 1 – Writing cabinet in three-quarter view

Figure 2 – Writing cabinet with desk open

Figure 3 – Writing cabinet detail of decoration

Figure 4 – Writing cabinet detail of decoration

Figure 5 – Writing cabinet: detail of doors, Jacob Arend and Johannes Wittalm, 1716. Museum no. W.23:1 to 41-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The creation of such a writing cabinet was no small technical feat, and is testament to the great skill of its makers. Boulle marquetry, used to decorate this piece, involved several stages. Before the marquetry could be cut, the materials had to be flattened and sanded down to the same thickness, whilst some of the layers like shell or horn might be coloured using pigmented fish glue. The layers of marquetry were then assembled into a packet, the design glued on top and then cut, starting from the centre outwards. Once the entire design was cut out, the marquetry could then be assembled in contrasting light and dark shapes. Panels of these designs were then glued to paper, ready to be sold.[3]

Since the panels could be bought ready to be inlaid on a piece of furniture, it is unclear whether Arend and Wittalm were the craftsmen behind the actual creation of the marquetry. Yet even if they were not, we can see their technical skill in the application of the panels. Since all the surfaces of the cabinet are curved, the marquetry would have been far from straightforward to apply. Indeed, even the doors are not flat, and thus the panels would have to have been shaped accordingly (fig. 5).[4] Where might these skills have been acquired?

In the letter, Arend notes that he originated from Koblenz. A little under halfway between Koblenz and Würzburg lies Mainz. In his article on the cabinet, Ian Caldwell suggests that it is likely that Arend passed

through Mainz on his way to Würzburg. If so, this can offer some suggestions regarding Arend's training. Mainz was renowned for its cabinet-makers, and the Joiners' Guild regulations in particular required members to produce a cabinet as their masterpiece.[5] It is possible, then, that it was here that Arend honed his skills. Indeed, the Schloss Fasanerie museum in Fulda has two other cabinets attributed to Jacob Arend, which further demonstrate that he had acquired notable skill in cabinet-making and the application of marquetry.[6]

Meanwhile, the sheer range of materials used in this piece reveals the wider contexts of trade in this period. The carcase of the cabinet is made from pine, whilst the marquetry contains turtle shell, horn, brass, pewter, ivory and a variety of woods including walnut, sycamore, boxwood and tulipwood. The mounts are in lacquered brass and the drawers lined with embossed paper (figs 6 and 7). Whilst the woods might come from closer to home, the more exotic materials were sourced from further afield. Turtles were found in the seas around Africa, Asia and America, whilst ivory might come from Ethiopia, Guinea, or the coast near Zanzibar.[7] Not only did the use of so many different types of material indicate the cost of the piece, and thus prestige of the owner, but it also bears testament to the wider trade networks operating in the 18th century.[8]

Figure 6 – Writing cabinet: detail of drawer, Jacob Arend and Johannes Wittalm, 1716. Museum no. W.23:4-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Figure 7 – Writing cabinet: detail of embossed lining paper, 1716. Museum no. W.23:4-1975 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Once assembled and finalised, the cabinet functioned not just as a utilitarian object, but as a status symbol, speaking volumes about its owner and his wider cultural contexts. Writing cabinets such as these had become important items of furniture by the 18th century, occupying a space in either a study or library.[9] They displayed the eminence and learning of the owner by housing significant documents and writing materials. Indeed, their role in storing personal treasures is evident from the name given to them in German, trisur, relating to treasure.[10] Despite the prestigious message embedded in this cabinet, its owner, Gallus Jacob, fell from favour soon after its completion.[11] The fate of the cabinet immediately after this is unclear, yet over a century later, in 1843, it was purchased by the Englishman John Gibbons, and appears in the background of the 1846 painting by Charles Robert Leslie of two young women, assumed to be part of the Gibbon family.[12] Entitled The Shell, the cabinet is shown to be the storing house for a collection of shells – a new family's own collection of treasures.

Acknowledgemer

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Endnotes

1. *Writing cabinet*, Jacob Arend and Johannes Wittalm; workshop of

Servatius Arend, 1716. Museum no. W.23:1 to 41-1975.

2. Peter Thornton, 'A Cabinet for a Würzburg Patron', *Apollo* vol. LXXXIX (1969): 451.

3. Peter Hughes and Paul Tear, *Sources & Techniques of Boulle Marquetry* (London: The Wallace Collection, 1996), no pagination, f. 12–13.

4. Christopher Wilk, *Western Furniture 1350 to the Present Day* (London: V&A Publications, 1996), 84.

5. Ian Caldwell, 'A Cabinet for Gallus Jacob', *The Antique Collector 2* (1985):52; Thornton, 'A Cabinet for a Würzburg Patron', 453.

6. Heinrich Kreisel, *Die Kunst des Deutschen Möbels* (Munich: Verlag C.H. Beck, 1970), vol.II, 276, 641.

7. Hughes and Tear, *Sources & Techniques of Boulle Marquetry*, no pagination, f. 13–14.

8. On 18th-century luxury goods, see: Dena Goodman, 'Furnishing Discourses: Readings of a Writing Desk in Eighteenth-Century France', in *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, ed. by Maxine Berg and Elizabeth Eger (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002), 71–82; and Michael North, *'Material Delight and the Joy of Living': Cultural Consumption in the Age of Enlightenment in Germany* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

9. Wilk, *Western Furniture 1350 to the Present Day*, 84.

10. Kreisel, *Die Kunst des Deutschen Möbels*, vol.II, 90–1.

11. Thornton, 'A Cabinet for a Würzburg Patron', 452.

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Contradicting Prospero: the prompt book collection in the V&A Department of Theatre & Performance

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Abstract

Prompt books are some of the most important records of theatrical performance on the British stage. These documents, with their annotations, coded markings and doodles, offer vital clues to the staging of plays, often in an era before technology enabled productions to be photographed or recorded. They help us to reconstruct how a performance might have looked or sounded,

providing unique insights into performers' gestures and movements, and how props and scenery were used, from Handel to the 21st century.

Towards the end of *The Tempest*, Prospero's elegy on theatrical ephemerality claims that performances leave 'not a rack behind.'[1] At the risk of usurping him a second time, this is not quite true. Even on a bare-ish Jacobean stage, props, lendings, and other artefacts would have survived performance, if only to be used for further performances. We no longer have Prospero's book or Miranda's chess set to display, but this reflects the flammability of the contemporary theatres as much as lack of foresight for what posterity has its eye on.

The collections of the Department of Theatre & Performance at the V&A are rich in surviving ephemera, including prompt books.[2] These documents act as road maps for stage productions: 'final' copies of the script were marked up with cues for actors, lighting, sound and moves, for use by the stage manager (historically, the prompter) and often contain details or diagrams of settings, and lists of stage properties. These master copies record changes to the script during rehearsal and provide a wealth of information about the evolution of a production.

The prompt book known as *Mikado Z* (as it is described on its cover label) gives a clear sense of what these documents did and what they can tell us about historical performances. It is believed to be the copy used at rehearsals for the first production of the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera in 1885; whether the prompt was revised for the opening night remains a matter for scholarly conjecture. A pre-production printed copy of the libretto, disbound and mounted in a workbook, has copious and detailed attention to performers' moves and stage props, as well as textual cuts and additions, probably in the hand of D'Oyly Carte's stage manager at the Savoy Theatre, W. H. Seymour. *Mikado Z* reveals last-minute

decisions such as the transfer of Yum-Yum's song 'The Sun Whose Rays' from Act I to Act II.

From the moment 'the ladies make their 1st entrance in the following order', with a diagram of how they fan out, to the final curtain call, there is extensive annotation recording each gesture, movement, amendment and second thought. While the chorus is singing, 'If you think we are worked by strings / Like a Japanese marionette', the singers are indeed being manipulated like puppets. Such is the attention to detail that at the end of the volume the manuscript notes on Japanese dances run to several pages.

Early prompt books

The earliest prompts in the V&A's Collection date from the 18th century, with the department continuing to collect from modern company archives, such as the Royal Court Theatre, the Young Vic and the Tricycle Theatre, Kilburn.[3] Prompts differ in the amount of detail they include. Some contain nourishing scraps in addition to the marked-up script, for example, rehearsal schedules, tour dates, props lists, even fabric swatches or show reports (the nightly, and frequently mordant, post-mortem on how the performance has gone). Prompt books are working documents and often look as if they have lived a little (*The Mousetrap*), some resemble birds' nests (the touring Prospect Theatre Company), while some are almost freakishly neat, carefully sectioned by file dividers (Cheek by Jowl).

Prompt books are an important primary source to be mined for clues to performance practice and production history, but should perhaps be treated with caution. Charles H. Shattuck, Shakespearean scholar and descriptive

bibliographer, calls the Shakespearean prompts 'tricky, secretive, stubborn informants.'[4] Like the 'Bible', to which they are sometimes compared, prompts are open to multiple interpretations and lively critical debate, as well as downright scepticism. Nonetheless, in conjunction with the theatrical jetsam of performance history, they are a useful addition to the yield of evidence, whether consulted by theatre professionals re-staging a work (their own or other directors'), or for academic historians reconstructing performances in the mind's eye.

Figure 1 – Radamisto, prompt book, George Frideric Handel and Nicola Haym, 1720. Museum no. S.501-1985 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The format of prompt books, before the invention of the typewriter, takes one of two forms: manuscripts are usually bound and markings made on the verso of the leaf facing the text. The relevant move, cue or effect is noted parallel to the line it accompanies. An alternative is the printed edition, frequently disbound and interleaved with plain leaves of paper, enabling notes opposite the text.

One of the earliest prompt books in the collection is the marked text, in English and Italian, used for the opening night of Handel's (1685-1759) opera *Radamisto*, 27 April 1720, a three-act opera written to an anonymous libretto attributed to

Nicola Haym (1678-1729), and the composer's first opera for the newly-forged Royal Academy of Music (fig. 1).[5] This company attracted support from George I (1660–1727), who earns a printed dedication from Handel. The libretto is not only an important example of its kind, but a record of a glittering social occasion, the Academy's second production, publicly marking the recent reconciliation of the king and the Prince of Wales after a period of estrangement.

The manuscript markings, in two hands, indicate the singers' calls, moves made by the performers on stage, and cues for sound effects. Judith Milhous and Robert Hume consider that the prompt book provides important hints about the semiotic function of supernumeraries in opera production of the 1720s and speculate that this incompletely annotated copy was an early draft for performance 'whose contents were then for some reason transferred to another book'. The assumption here is that printed copies were available far enough in advance to enable preparation of this kind.[6]

Figure 2 – Omai, set model, Philip James de Loutherbourg, 1785. Museum no. E.158:1 to 5-1937 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The arrival in Britain in 1774 of the Polynesian Omai (actually Mai, c.1753-c.1780), courtesy of Captain Cook's expedition, neatly coincided with contemporary intellectual debate about the 'noble savage'. Omai's brief stint as the darling of

English society, renowned for its low boredom threshold, was still memorable enough nearly a decade later to sustain the remarkable pantomime *Harlequin Omai.* Written by John O'Keeffe (1747-1833) and designed by Philippe Jacques de Loutherbourg (1740-1812) it opened at the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden in December 1785, and is an imaginative account - to say the least - of life on a South Sea Island. The farcical plot takes in Kensington Gardens and a (literal) Cook's tour of exotic locations. In addition to Harlequin and Columbine it features a learned pig, who communicates by gesture and squeak, and a flock of menacing penguins. Though not a full prompt copy, rather a narrative description of the action, this manuscript account belonged to the composer William Shield (1748-1829) and is marked with cues, probably in his hand, placing the songs and recitatives that punctuate its improbable plot.[7] In this case the prompt book plays a part in fitting together the puzzle of how a long-defunct production might have looked, since the V&A also holds some of de Loutherbourg's set models and an engraving of Mrs Martyr (d. 1807) in role in this piece. (Fig. 2)

The Discovery by Frances Sheridan (1724-66), mother of the more famous Richard (1751-1816), was produced at Drury Lane in 1763. It was revived in 1776 when David Garrick (1717-79) offered Sheridan mère's play as a counter-attraction to Sheridan fils's *The Duenna*. A printed second edition was prepared as a prompt copy, probably for this revival, and is one of the most fully marked 18th-century prompts in the collection. Rather poignantly bound with an unmarked copy of her play *The Dupe*, whose failure adversely affected her reputation, *The Discovery* furnished Garrick with a favourite role, Sir Anthony Branville, and provided another for her husband, Thomas Sheridan (1719–88). The prompt contains a new epilogue in manuscript, beginning 'Ladies before you go will you allow', probably composed and almost certainly spoken by Garrick in character as Sir Anthony.

Marginal numbers refer to the actors' entrances along with abbreviations denoting from which side they appeared: PS (Prompt side) and OP (Opposite prompt). The 'prompt side' reflects the British practice of siting the 'prompt corner', housing the prompter who fed forgetful actors lines, downstage left, or on the right from the audience viewpoint. The stage is a looking-glass world in which perspectives are reversed and terminology derives from the business end of the operation. Even

more confusingly, the location of the prompt side may have been reversed at Drury Lane.

The library holds a substantial cache of Theatre Royal, Drury Lane prompts from the late 18th century and early 19th century. *The Times* by Elizabeth Griffith (1727-93) was first performed at Drury Lane in December 1779, though it would appear that the library's prompt dates from c.1780, with a largely different cast, whose variant members are faintly pencilled in, just discernible opposite the names of the original actors in the printed cast list of the edition published by Fielding, Walker, Dodsley et al in 1779. It has the name of Mr Waldron boldly scrawled across the head of the title page. According to a note in the hand of Gabrielle Enthoven (1868–1950), founder of the Theatre collections, at this time Waldron was still acting, though he later became prompter at the Haymarket Theatre.

The printed stage directions are expanded upon with manuscript marginalia. The published description of the scene stipulates 'a dressing-room, books, music, clothes scattered about' (Act I Scene 1), to which is added the information that this is a 'chamber with folding doors' [underlined several times] with 'table, music, 2 chairs, pr of laced ruffles, snuff box, papers &c'. We learn from which side actors entered, at what point in the action, what they carried with them and which of their lines were cut or changed.

The prompter also refers to the contemporary stage technology that ran in grooves parallel to the front of the stage, enabling scenery to be moved on and off stage, sometimes creating a perspective effect. Grooves would be numbered from the front of the stage (downstage) to the back (upstage), so scenery could be precisely designated as, for example, '2nd groove.'

A rare surviving example of an 18th-century manuscript prompt copy of an unpublished comic opera is *Summer Amusement*, also known as *A Trip to Margate*, where the action

is set. Written by William Augustus Miles (1753?-1817) and Miles Peter Andrews (1742-1814), it was first performed at the Haymarket in c.1779 for the benefit of Mr Palmer. The quarto volume, in its original marbled boards, is marked with stage directions and cuts for a production at Margate; the bookseller's description records that it is 'written in a fine 18th century clerkly hand, in red and black ink.' The music, by Dr Arnold (1740-1802), is not reproduced in this copy.

As with modern prompt books, colour-coding is used to differentiate instructions about acting and stagecraft from spoken text. Names of characters and stage directions are in red. Cuts to the text are neatly scratched through in black. The scribe also observes the convention of including a 'catchword' at the bottom of each page, namely the first word on the following page is written (with a flourish, sometimes in contrasting red) at the foot of the preceding page. This was a helpful reminder to the binders about the order of the leaves, though in this volume the pages are also numbered in red. In places, extra, pencilled notes are added in the generous gutter margins. Interpreting the 'coding' of prompt markings is problematic as it cannot be assumed that the shorthand used by a prompter in one theatre equates to that used by others. A circle symbol can mean many things, depending on whether it is unadorned, dotted, or decorated with a variety of other squiggles, or has a letter written within it. As Edward A. Langhans translates: 'A for act, B for bell or border, D for drop or draw, R for ring, or W for whistle.' He adds,

> *Some prompters may have used circled numbers for silent cues – holding up the appropriate number of fingers. It could be*

> *that a circled R meant a partial change [of scenery]... and a circled W a complete change. The plain circle sometimes meant no change of scenery – the scene 'continued' – but the plain circle is also found marking a definite scene shift.*

Further 'local' customising of this symbol adds to the variables, but 'all meant essentially the same thing: scenery, usually a change of scenery'.[8]

Sub-collections of prompt books

Figure 3 – Edmund Kean as Richard III and Mr Cooper as Richmond, tinsel print, about 1821. Museum no. E.114-1969 © V&A Images

Substantial holdings related to particular actors, directors, or managements reveal much about the 'house style' of a performer or company. One such sub-collection belonged to the American actor James Henry Hackett (1800-71), a noted Shakespearean and a talented mimic, whose enthusiasm for the work of Edmund Kean (1787-1833) extended to playing Richard III entirely in character as Kean, much as Peter Sellers would later guy Laurence Olivier's Richard in the lyrics of 'A Hard Day's Night', but with more serious purpose. (Fig. 3) In seeking to reproduce what is virtually choreographic notation for Kean's Richard, Hackett tries to capture the precise emphasis the

older actor gave on individual words. Nor is this prompt book solely the record of a star hogging the limelight: Alan Downer, the editor of the facsimile edition prepared from this one by the Society for Theatre Research, claims that this attention to detail gives us valuable clues to 'the movement of blank verse as delivered in the theatre of the 1820s.'[9]

Mr Hackett-as-Kean-as-Richard, first acted in 1826 in New York, was something of a party turn. Even a contemporary reviewer's back-handed comment, that elements of his impression 'only reminded us of the pre-eminent talents of the original', could not flatten it.[10] Academic arguments about the 'authenticity' of reconstructed 'original performance' pale by comparison with the diligence of Hackett's tribute-act, though perhaps telling us more about the imitator than the imitated. In addition to faithfully transcribing the company prompt book, Hackett augmented his delivery with multiple viewings of Kean's performances.

Kean's star blazed brightly, but burnt out. Contemporary critics lit upon his dash and passion in interpreting an iconic villain ('like reading Shakespeare by flashes of lightning' remarked Coleridge of his uneven delivery) but Hackett doggedly – indeed, obsessively – delivers not only a sense of the reputation the role garnered for Kean but the mechanics and pulse of the performance.[11] The text is less reliable, tinkered with by Colley Cibber (1671–1757) and others. The limitations of 1950s technology prevented the Society for Theatre Research's facsimile from reproducing the prompt exactly as prepared, since it does not distinguish between ink and pencil markings, somewhat distorting the appearance of the original leather-bound and interleaved copy of the Boston edition of 1822. As with the

additional details listed in the prompt book for Griffith's *The Times*, Hackett's conscientious record fills out the sparse printed details and enables us to picture scenes and characters more clearly. At the first appearance of 'Gloster' (Richard), the scant description listed as 'Costume' was elaborated considerably: 'hose, hat, cloak' becomes 'hat with black feathers, white hose… order of St. George - Garter - white pocket hkf - gauntlets - sword & chain, also black belt for 2nd dress.'[12] The white handkerchief makes a timely appearance in Act II Scene 2, when Richard needs a prop to mop and authenticate his crocodile tears.

Other notable Shakespeareans feature: the actor and director William Poel (1852-1934), founder of the Elizabethan Stage Society, and his disciple Walter Nugent Monck (1877-1958), who founded the Maddermarket Theatre, Norwich. Poel's striving after simplicity of setting and fidelity to Renaissance staging convention contrasted with prevailing fashion. The prompt books in his hand are not all complete, but *Measure for Measure*, performed at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, and the Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1908, opens with a flourish in red and black ink worthy of the trumpet fanfare it cues. The library also holds the copy of Poel's prompt made by Annie Horniman (1860-1937), manager of the Gaiety. Although effectively a 'fair copy' with some minor variants, Horniman's more pristine version underlines the contrast between it and the original prompt, which has clearly worked for its living, with all the theatrical

DNA of thumb-prints and dog-earedness that is part of the history of the object.

Conservation measures

Conservative measures are taken for preservation purposes in order to stabilise items for display or handling by researchers in the Blythe House Reading Room. Attempting to return a prompt book to its original condition (were this possible) is to deny its previous existence as a working document. Twentieth-century prompts tend to be housed in plastic ring binders, which are unsuitable for long-term housing, while over time metal rings rust and eat into paper. As prompts are catalogued and processed, they are assessed for potential re-housing, based on condition, format, and the nature of their existing housing. The advent of adhesive tape and post-it notes may have been a boon to stressed stage managers needing a quick fix to insert extra text or instructions, but it is a headache for conservators, as they degrade over time, losing stickiness and, in the case of tape, discolouring and leaving an unsightly residue.

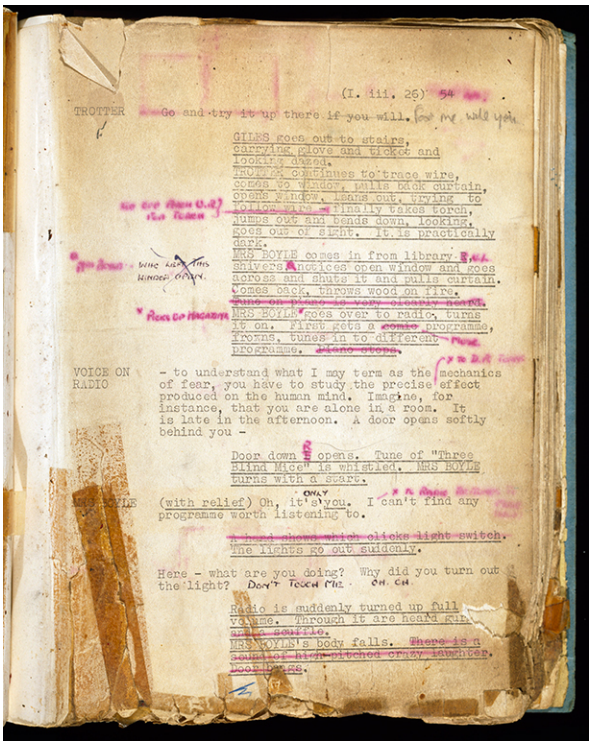


Figure 4 – The Mousetrap, prompt book, Agatha Christie, 1952. Museum no. S.1017-1995 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London / Mathew Pritchard

Unstable housing (such as a synthetic ring-binder) is replaced by acid-free conservation boxes with brass (i.e. non-rusting) clamshell-shaped rings. This arguably detracts from the original appearance of the

prompt-as-working-document but ensures that the content is preserved for future generations. Not everything is necessarily discarded however. Jottings or diagrams on binders with paper linings are photocopied on to acid-free paper and can be encapsulated in Secol (transparent archival-standard polyester), along with any other awkward enclosures that have broken free of their moorings from sticky tape-fatigue. Occasionally the theatrical graffiti scrawled on a binder is considered sufficiently important to preserve the whole entity, but stored separately from the paper contents to arrest further deterioration.

The prompt book used for the first twelve years of *The Mousetrap* (1952) is a case in point. Its conservation was funded by Mathew Prichard – who was given the rights of the play as a ninth birthday present by his grandmother Agatha Christie (1890–1976) – in time for its display in the former Theatre Museum in Covent Garden, to mark the 50th anniversary of the world's longest-running production. The battered leaves (battered, that is, in the prompt corner in the service of the play) have been stabilised and painstakingly restored to a displayable standard by the V&A's book conservators, without depriving it of its essential character as a retired theatrical artefact. The much-thumbed typescript, whose cover reveals that it was originally entitled *Three Blind Mice*, a recurring motif in the play and in the doodles which regularly punctuate the pages facing the text, illustrates the longeurs of the backstage functions in a long run. (Fig. 4). In

between the conventional lighting and sound cues, calls and moves are interspersed with page after page of caricatures and visual jokes, telling us not only what is happening on stage, but a little of life backstage.

Picturing the stage

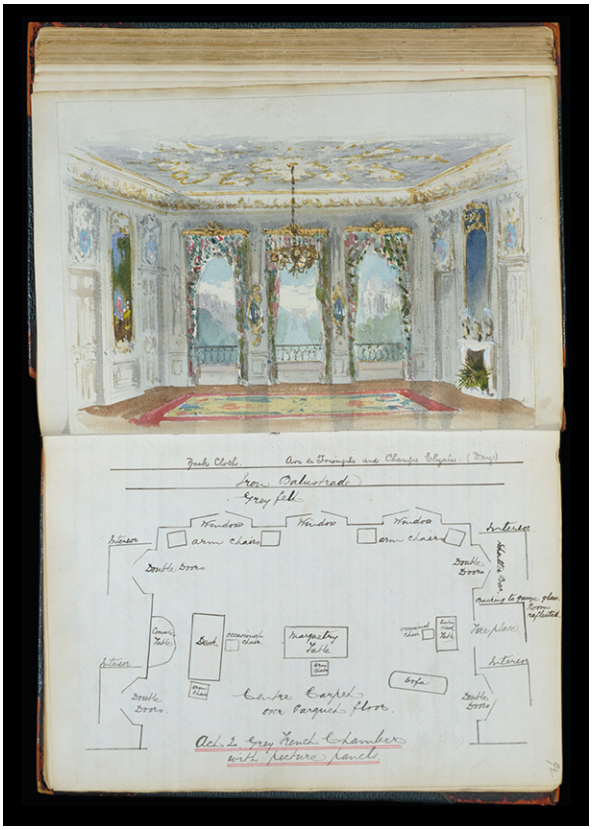


Figure 5 – Diplomacy, prompt book, Victorien Sardou / William Harford, 1893, pencil and watercolour designs and plans bound with manuscript. [No Museum no.] © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

The artwork occasionally included in prompts is usually of a higher order. Bound with the prompt book for *Diplomacy*, an English adaptation of Victorien Sardou's Dora (1877) by Clement Scott (1841–1904) and B. C. Stephenson (1839–1908), are several watercolours of the ornate sets: sumptuous interiors befitting a drama of international political intrigue. (Fig. 5) Attributed to William Harford, who designed the production for Squire (1841–1926)

and Marie Bancroft (1839–1921), they illustrate the way in which the Bancroft management popularised the realistic set: a box furnished like an actual room. Although the designs depict the sets as largely unfurnished, the accompanying stage plans indicate the precise placing of the furniture. The French panelled Chamber (Act I) is comfortably appointed with sofas, easy chairs, a gilt table, an inlaid chair, a palm on a stand, with a triptych of orange trees visible in front of the stone balustrade with sea view of Monte Carlo. A bamboo table and iron chair are specified beneath the red-striped awning. The Grey French Chamber (Act II) has a trio of tall windows overlooking an iron balustrade beyond which is a back-cloth 'view' of the Champs-Elysées sweeping up to the Arc de Triomphe. The Oak Chamber (Act IV) includes a 'marquetry table', 'bust of the Queen' and 'turkey carpet over parquet floor', detail that feels more like interior than stage design, no doubt imperceptible from the cheap seats but indicative of the opulent standards lavished on such a production. *Diplomacy* was first produced by the Bancrofts in 1878-9 at the Prince of Wales Theatre and revived in 1884-5 at the Theatre Royal Haymarket in their farewell

season (as managers), and again in 1893 at the Garrick Theatre.

In the case of the costume and scenery plot for the 1918 production of *The Lilac Domino* at the Empire Theatre, London, not only are there watercolour set designs for each act, facing black and white photographs of the sets as realised onstage, but row upon row of cigarette-card-sized costume designs. These are exquisite miniatures of the principals, chorus girls, pierrots, pierrettes and male dancers in the fashions of the period between the First World War and the flapper era. Lacking a text, this is not strictly-speaking a prompt book, but the detail it yields up about a lavish and spectacular production set in a transitional historical period earn it a place in this collection.

The production was an adaptation of *Der Lila Domino*, a three-act German operetta, with music by Charles Cuvillier (1877–1955), rendered into English by librettist Harry B. Smith (1860–1936), with lyrics by Robert B. Smith (1875–1951), and additional songs by Howard Carr (1880–1960), premièred in the United States in 1914. For its arrival in London, it was revised with additional dialogue by S. J. Adair Fitzgerald (b. 1859) and the inclusion of Carr's songs. The setting is a masquerade ball, with the domino a hooded cloak worn with an eye mask, hence the rainbow of domino-clad figures on its first pages, and the need for multiple intricate costumes, which reveal much about contemporary fashion as they do about the production.

Detailing development

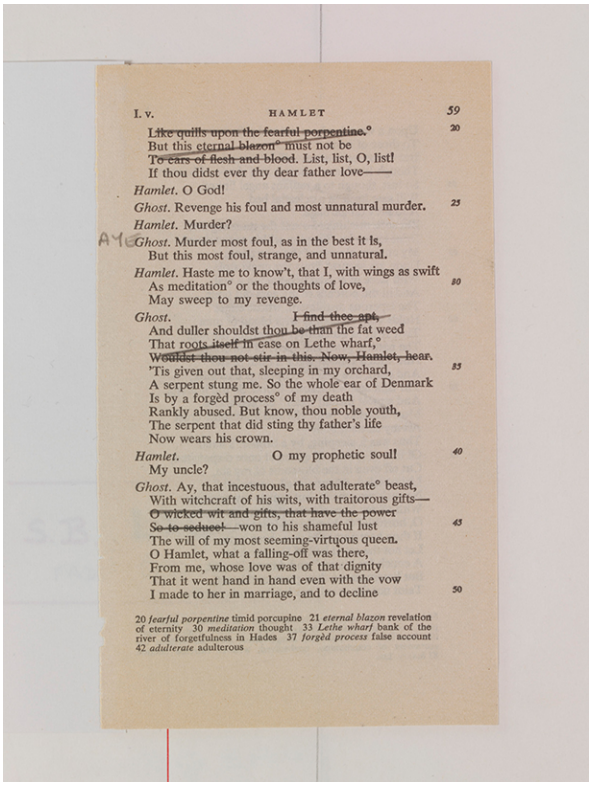
The Department of Theatre & Performance at the V&A holds the archive of the English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, including prompts from key productions such as John Osborne's (1929–94) *Look Back In Anger* (1956), when the social realism of

‘kitchen sink’ drama threatened the well-made play, to more recent offerings. Arnold Wesker’s (b. 1932) *The Kitchen* belongs to this grittier strain, based on the playwright’s experience of working in hotel kitchens in Norwich and Paris.

The Kitchen first appeared on stage in a production by the English Stage Company at the Royal Court in a Sunday-night performance without décor in 1959. In 1961 it was produced again at the Court in an expanded version. It is instructive to compare the two prompt books held for these differing versions and to compare them with the text published by Jonathan Cape in 1961. The later prompt is fuller in respect of its notes to the producer, which find their way into the published version, including detailed character sketches of the cooks who must mime their cooking, because to cook live is ‘just not practical’ (p.2). This reflects the more conventional ‘proper’ staging of the 1961 production. Between these three scripts, stage business is lost or reinvented, words pruned, embellished or moved in order to adapt to a full staging in which dialogue must accommodate the movement of actors across the performance space. Between 1959 and 1961, the ‘Hefty Woman’ of the opening scene has acquired the name Bertha from the start, moves are truncated or substituted, and the timings of characters’ entrances are altered.

Which is the most ‘canonical’? A published text has the authority of widely-disseminated copy, an imprimatur with the widest possible distribution, to be read, studied, anthologised, perhaps put on the curriculum, staged, revived and quoted from, but this is all it has. Alert readers of Royal Court programme/playtexts will spot their customary disclaimer that the published version may well differ from what an audience has just seen and heard, given the time lag between going to press and the

opening night. During this period, a play may still be fluid in the rehearsal room. None of this can be corrected until another edition appears – if it appears at all. Relatively few people have access to the manuscript, but those that do will find the tiny but telling detail that fixes at what approximate point in the evolution of a script edits were made, reflecting what was effective and what (presumably) was not. There are far fewer variants between the 1961 prompt and the 1961 Cape edition than there are between the Sunday-night version and the second prompt. The pencilled notes in the 1961 version are mostly incorporated into the published playtext. All three versions show the evolution of ideas and practical solutions to staging problems that occur before a production opens to the public. They also illustrate how naïve it is to assume that a script is a finished article or a published text, providing a wholly reliable account of the theatrical experience. Plays are the only literary genre requiring a reception other than a reader to complete them. While it is perfectly possible to read a play, the act of reading it does not fulfil the intention for which the text was written.



I. v. HAMLET 59

Like quills upon the fearful porpentine.° 20
But this eternal blazon° must not be
To ears of flesh and blood. List, list, O, list!
If thou didst ever thy dear father love——
Hamlet. O God!
Ghost. Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder. 25
Hamlet. Murder?
Ghost. Murder most foul, as in the best it is,
But this most foul, strange, and unnatural.
Hamlet. Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift
As meditation° or the thoughts of love, 30
May sweep to my revenge.
Ghost. I find thee apt,
And duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
That roots itself in ease on Lethe wharf,°
Wouldst thou not stir in this. Now, Hamlet, hear. 35
'Tis given out that, sleeping in my orchard,
A serpent stung me. So the whole ear of Denmark
Is by a forgèd process° of my death
Rankly abused. But know, thou noble youth,
The serpent that did sting thy father's life
Now wears his crown.
Hamlet. O my prophetic soul! 40
My uncle?
Ghost. Ay, that incestuous, that adulterate° beast,
With witchcraft of his wits, with traitorous gifts—
O wicked wit and gifts, that have the power
So to seduce!—won to his shameful lust 45
The will of my most seeming-virtuous queen.
O Hamlet, what a falling-off was there,
From me, whose love was of that dignity
That it went hand in hand even with the vow
I made to her in marriage, and to decline 50

20 *fearful porpentine* timid porcupine 21 *eternal blazon* revelation of eternity 30 *meditation* thought 33 *Lethe wharf* bank of the river of forgetfulness in Hades 37 *forgèd process* false account 42 *adulterate* adulterous

Figure 6 – *Hamlet*, William Shakespeare / English Stage Company at the Royal Court Theatre, England, 1980. [No Museum no.] © Victoria and Albert Museum, London

Another Royal Court prompt, for the English Stage Company's production of *Hamlet* (1980), is lacking its first few leaves. This loss of text merely reflects the director Richard Eyre's (b. 1943) desire to make Jonathan Pryce's (b. 1947) Hamlet, possessed by his father's spirit, ventriloquise the speeches of Old Hamlet, thus dispensing with the need for Act I Scene 1, which would invalidate this interpretation. (Fig. 6)

An earlier, some would say definitive, Hamlet, in the person of David Warner (b. 1941), returned to the stage after a long break from the theatre in an Icelandic play *The Feast of Snails* by Olaf Olafsson (b. 1962), which ran at the Lyric Theatre, Shaftesbury Avenue in 2002. Naturally this event captured the imagination of the press – more so than the production itself, which garnered tepid reviews. The prompt book, prepared by Deputy Stage Manager Anna Hill, is an impeccably neat and full document of the production. In addition to the familiar marked-up typescript, filed in crisply divided sections are performance reports – mainly recording appreciative audiences – rehearsal notes, props and settings lists, the sound plot, cue sheet, photocopies of set model photographs, ground plan, rehearsal call sheets, rehearsal and technical schedules and cast biographies.

What works and what does not is scrupulously recorded, from the prosaic placing of props, 'the poker has now been re-instated (it may now be pre-set sticking out of the

coalscuttle)', to the practical popping of corks (or not), 'we need to find out whether the cognac bottle has a screw top or a cork… it will need to be pre-set so that Mr Warner can open it quickly and easily during the action.'

The waspish review by Mark Shenton remarks, 'quite what the poor actors are eating when they do is another question that need not detain us here, but contemplating the answer is about as exciting as the evening gets.'[13] The answer to this is also provided by the prompt. Indeed, the food running list comprises a considerable shopping basket of consumables in the service of mocking up a banquet of international molluscs, from lime cordial – 'should last ages' – to six packets of Rowntree's blackcurrant jelly per week (why the brand is important isn't specified). The snails are impersonated by a troupe of empty shells, filled with black olives and a full supporting cast of dried apricots, mushrooms, apricot jam, figs, Parma ham, black squid ink pasta, sliced sweet potato and chunky chicken in white sauce. Full colour snaps attest to how surprisingly effective this looked on stage.

This level of preserved detail is unusually inclusive, containing everything from the marketing aimed at the 16 Icelandic consuls based in the UK, to the application for planning consent to use a real flame on stage. In spite of this heroic degree of preparation the show reports reveal that the taper occasionally blew out between the wings and the candelabra.

Actors' copies and part scripts

A more elastic definition of a 'prompt' includes actors' copies,

part scripts and manuscripts, or printed editions, in some way marked by creatives or crew, offering clues or conundrums about the productions for which they were made. The V&A's collection of prompt books has been expanded to encompass this analogous material. Actors' copies belong to individual performers, who may annotate their parts with information about how they played them. There is seldom much technical annotation.

Mrs Patrick Campbell (1865-1940) created the role of Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion*, which received its London première in 1914. She passed herself off as a Covent Garden flower girl at the age of 49, in a part written for her by George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), who is ineffectually disguised as 'A Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature' on the title page of the typescript.

The opening scene reveals how 'Mrs Pat' produced an accent similar to that uncharitably described as RADA Cockney. Shaw's lines for Eliza are spelt as intended to be spoken, as they are in the published text, 'There's menners f'yere! Te-oo banches o' voylets trod into the mad', until the frustrated dramatist throws in the towel, 'here, with apologies the attempt to represent her dialect without a phonetic alphabet must be abandoned as unintelligible outside London'. Her part from this point is adjusted for sound in the actress's hand, 'Thank you kindly, lady' is rendered as 'Thenk you koindly, laidy', as diligently as ever Henry Higgins recorded dipthong and glottal stop. This clearly diminishes in quantity and importance as Eliza gets closer to Higgins's aim to pass her off as a duchess within months.

Mrs Patrick Campbell's annotated script for Hedda Gabler, in which she played the title role for the Vedrenne/Barker management at the Royal Court in 1907, boasts a provenance which is in itself fascinating: Dame Peggy Ashcroft (1907–91) has inscribed it 'Given to me by John G[ielgud]' (1904–2000) when she played Hedda in 1954. Dame Peggy gave it to Janet Suzman (b. 1939) when she was preparing to play the role herself. It was donated by Dame Janet to the former Theatre Museum. The transmission of iconic marked texts from star performer to star performer may provide valuable clues to how a new pretender to the role chooses to approach it, and also act as a talisman, reassuring the challenger that portraying a famous role is survivable.

The typescript is peppered with pencilled notes. 'More vitality' is scribbled across the title page of Act I, perhaps suggesting the dynamism Campbell proposes to inject into Hedda's desiccated world of aristocratic ancestry coupled with an obtuse academic husband. Thanks to the actress's notes we know when she portrayed Hedda as 'nervous', when she sat or stood, how she used and negotiated the stage furnishings (with a useful small sketch facing the text in Act III of a table, chairs and sofa – perhaps the couch to whose further end she has shifted in a note to Act II?). In the final scene we know how her dialogue is increasingly punctuated by laughter in ways that contemporary accounts and reviews cannot reproduce in such detail.

Mrs Patrick Campbell is at the starry end of the spectrum, but texts annotated by lesser or medium-rung performers can be useful and are comparatively rarer, for the same reason that fine editions often survive more completely than ephemera: the work of a well-known person is likely to be revered and preserved more readily for posterity. William Cuthbert, 'character actor and low comedian' according to the personal stamp with which each of his play-texts is marked, left nearly 150 largely printed scripts. While not all these are copiously marked, the aggregation of plays and his roles (which he marked with at least an underlining) can shed light on the repertoire and range of a lower-ranking character actor in the 19th century. This is information that can be surprisingly scarce, especially if a performer worked on the regional circuits.

The reputation of Ellen Terry (1847–1928) as grande dame of the British stage preceded Mrs Campbell's. In July 1921 at the age of 74, a few years before she was created a Dame of the British Empire, Terry performed excerpts from her repertoire at the Gaiety Theatre, Manchester, assisted by Marguerite Steen (1894–1975), friend and later biographer of the Terrys. Steen's notebook recording these performances, while not a conventional prompt book as such, is kept with this collection. Only four extracts feature: some dialogue from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, a speech

from *Henry IV*, Christina Rossetti's poem 'The Round Tower at Jhansi' – a dramatic poem of the Indian Mutiny – and Portia's 'quality of mercy' speech from *The Merchant of Venice*.

Half-way through it descends into a to-do list concerned with the preoccupations of being factotum to a great actress: letters to write, money to pay in, expenses to deal with, a list of make-up required and paraphernalia to take to the theatre:

Lace scarf
Fan
Safety pins
Hairpins
Rougecloth
Cushion
Something to read to her
Macgregor
Gum [underlined 4 times]
Powder puff
Big gloves
Cloth
Flask

We also know the clothes that Terry wore for each excerpt: an interesting corollary to an illustrious but fading career.

Part scripts are essentially cut-down versions of the prompt, tailored to a specific role, containing only the lines which that actor will need to speak, topped and tailed by their cues. A set of ten part scripts for *The Lady's Not For Burning* (produced 1949) was donated by Denis Colvil to the Theatre Museum, both complementing and anticipating the later acquisition of the playwright Christopher Fry's archive following his death in 2005. The production starred John Gielgud as Thomas Mendip, as well as a youthful Richard Burton (1925–84) and Claire Bloom (b. 1931); the Globe Theatre, where it ran, was later renamed the Gielgud.

Managements putting on shows with meta-theatrical content sometimes contact the Theatre & Performance Department with enquiries about the appearance of historical prompts. For the modern show-within-the-show it is easy enough to

mock up a prompt-script, but what did they look like in the time of Garrick, Sheridan or Shaw? By referring to contemporary examples from the collection we can ensure that the prop prompt is as authentic as it can be; whether the audience appreciates such fidelity to theatre history is debatable.

The prompt book collection, as it continues to be fully catalogued electronically and made more readily accessible, adds to the forensic investigation of theatre history. Although Prospero puts it so much more eloquently, we do not need to accept the judgement of a 17th-century Duke of Milan as the last word on intangible heritage.

Endnotes

1. William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, IV, 1, 156.

2. The prompt collection is only one element of re-imagining performance, alongside such 2-D materials as photographs, prints, paintings, designs, playbills, programmes, press-cuttings and cloths. In addition, the collection holds 3-D materials such as costume, set-models, stage props, and machinery, plus extensive bibliographical 'evidence' in the form of books, memoirs, manuscripts, diaries and other first-hand accounts of performance. The Theatre & Performance Department at the V&A has also pioneered the recording of live performance as documentation, in the shape of the National Video Archive of Performance, started in 1992.

3. The National Art Library at the V&A holds two manuscripts in the Dyce Collection: Nathan Field, John Fletcher, and Philip Massinger's *The Honest Man's Fortune* (Dyce MS 9), licensed 8 February 1624/5, and Philip Massinger's *The Parliament of Love* (Dyce MS 39), licensed 3 November 1624. Both are considered to have some theatrical provenance, but are outside the scope of this article.

4. Charles H. Shattuck, *The Shakespeare Promptbooks: A Descriptive*

Catalogue (Urbana and London: University of Illinois Press, 1965), 3.

5. Although the *Oxford English Dictionary* dates the first use of 'prompter' to 1585, the term 'prompt book' is not recorded until 1768.

6. Judith Milhous and Robert D. Hume, 'A Prompt Copy of Handel's *'Radamisto'*, *The Musical Times*, Vol. 127, No. 1719 (June 1986): 316–19, 321.

7. 'Recitative(s)' has been incorrectly transcribed as 'recitations' in the original catalogue description of this item.

8. Edward A. Langhans, *Eighteenth Century British and Irish Promptbooks: A Descriptive Bibliography* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), xxxiii-xxxiv.

9. William Shakespeare, *King Richard III: Edmund Kean's Performance as Recorded by James H. Hackett* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1958), xii.

10. Ibid., xiii.

11. Henry N. Coleridge, *Specimens of the Table Talk of the late Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, 2 vols (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1835), vol. 1, 44.

12. Shakespeare, *King Richard III: Edmund Kean's Performance*, [6].

13. Mark Shenton, 'Feast of Snails', *WhatsOnStage*

Are You Being Insured?

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Figure 1 – Trade card of Hope Insurance Company, Ludgate Hill, John Girtin, first quarter of 19th century. Museum no. E.269-1967 © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

As is intrinsic to ephemera, the materials of this object – paper and ink – have no value and had only a little more at the time of its making. Once made, it was given away for free. It bears the figure of Hope, one of the three theological virtues with Faith and Charity. She and the insurance company advertised evidently correspond. The object's combination of image and text, its shape and size, and its not-obvious purpose (it is not a form or a ticket or a receipt) mark it out as a trade card. Trade cards can fruitfully be approached on two fronts: shopping and printing. Commissioned by traders to promote their presence and to represent their goods, their success correlates to the emergence of fixed shops from the

17th century. They self-consciously celebrate a fantasy land of the joys of shopping: the displays in the glass windows, the abundance of things, the framing of things in mirrors. The modest batches in which they were produced suggest that they were given away at sale; they were a mark of exclusivity.[1]

On the other hand, trade cards are an example of product innovation by the printing industry. They were one of a range of everyday jobs that made a living for a small-scale business, including reams of commercial ephemera such as printed rates of exchange, contracts and insurance policies.[2]

The trade card for the Hope Insurance Company knowingly fits itself into the conventions of its genre. It uses the long-standing practice of different typefaces.

There is a relationship between the illustration and the business, in this case by its name rather than its wares. The address is given visual prominence, and the products of fire insurance, however immaterial, are listed.

Yet a trade card for insurance sits uncomfortably with trade cards as a celebration of the joy of things. There is no thing to insure; rather, you take home peace of mind and a piece of paper to attest to it. Trade cards were used by other services, for example lawyers and libraries, but those businesses, like others, tended to be named after their owners. This insurance company is named after an abstract idea and after the personification and imagery of that idea.

In fact the allegory of Hope was widely disseminated by the early 19th century. She appears across a network of paper. This network tended to the secular, the de-political, low art and, often, forms of notional value: watchpapers, banknotes, lottery tickets and trade cards for all sorts of businesses.

Like many other kinds of organisation of the time, then, this company used imagery of Hope, identifiable by her anchor. Unlike other organisations, it adopted the figure's very name. This is instructive of the relationship between text and image. The image takes on new meaning when it is associated with a company. It assumes even greater power from a direct affirmation of the abstract notion behind it.

But it is not ridiculous to interject that one takes out insurance when one has given up on hope or Hope. Hope runs contrary to something one pays for. Yet, by using Hope, the company tapped into common, comfortable imagery, and a ready-made narrative. In the absence of a material product, this was especially important. Moreover, Hope is future-looking as, of course, is insurance. She has attributes of security. She aligns hope for the future with the systematic security that insurance brings. Hope is also close to aspiration. Already in this period fire insurance had huge appeal, across regional, class and gender boundaries.[3]

The company's adoption of Hope was within the grand naming conventions of its rivals. The decade 1799–1809, which saw the establishment of the Hope Insurance Company in 1807, witnessed the greatest ever number of new insurance offices. With names like Eagle, Globe, Hercules and British – and emblems to match – all of them were selecting their names with an eye to imagery. Clearly insurance felt a need to appropriate popular but weighty ideas and construct a language that implied strength and trust.

From its beginnings at the end of the 17th century the fire insurance industry nurtured objects to compensate for its lack of a material product and, thereby, enliven its

business. It showed innovation in marketing. Evocative company names such as Sun and Phoenix were often taken from their firemarks, the cast objects placed on buildings to identify those that were protected. To these names and emblems were matched silver badges, buckets, uniforms and office furniture, medals for directors, parades and promotional paper. From the early 18th century it was not unusual for insurance policies to depict scenes that displayed these branded objects. These practices continued into the 19th century. It is known that Hope's emblem of an anchor appeared on the firemark, on the company seal, and on firemen's buttons and badges. Over the entrance to the office stood a stone figure of Hope.[4]

Thus the combination of text and image was germane equally to the insurance industry as to trade cards. Interestingly, collections of trade cards indicate that they were not used by fire insurance offices until the last quarter of the 18th century.[5] This corresponds to a period of acceleration in the number of fire insurance policyholders and intense competition between companies. The fact that insurance companies adopted the use of trade cards during this time suggests that they were perceived to serve a purpose as weapons in the battle for customers. It is my contention that the Hope's use of the form marked an advance on the potential of text and image. In this it was in line with the new practices of its industry: the embracing of notions rather than

just objects in the selling of an object-less product.

Endnotes

1. Maxine Berg and Helen Clifford, ‘Selling Consumption in the Eighteenth Century: Advertising and the Trade Card in Britain and France’, *Cultural and Social History*, 4:2 (2007): 149.

2. Margaret R. Hunt, *The Middling Sort: Commerce, Gender, and the Family in England 1680–1780* (University of California Press, 1996), 183.

3. David T. Hawkings, *Fire Insurance Records for Family and Local historians 1696 to 1920* (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2003), 18–42.

4. John Wilkes, ed., *Encyclopaedia Londinensis, or, Universal dictionary of arts, sciences, and literature*, vol. 13 (London, 1815), 52.

5. The trade card for Robert Furnass, Broker, is the earliest insurance-related card that I can identify in the collections of the British Museum, the V&A, London Metropolitan Archives (formerly of the Guildhall Library) and John Johnson Collection. I date it to c.1770, based on its rococo style, a note of 1775 ‘in his favor’ and a trade directory entry for the engraver at the address supplied. British Museum, Prints & Drawings, Trade cards Heal 3.13.

Contributors

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- Contradicting Prospero: the prompt book collection in the V&A Department of Theatre & Performance

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