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Volume 9: “Parts and Pieces, or Tidbits: Things that are Reused or Recycled”

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Introduction to Volume 9

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Our theme and title for volume 9 is “Parts and Pieces, or Tidbits: Things that are Reused or Recycled,” as we and our contributors wanted to think about the things on the edges, in the cracks, small things that are salvaged for a second or third life, details that might be overlooked but when we observe closely enough, they are significant. Perhaps the perfect example of this notion is the early modern “spot sampler,” which is a type of embroidery that practices different stitches and motifs, a pedagogical tradition of stitchery meant for teaching and learning the art of needlework. The cloth used for the spot sampler might also have been a scrap or a recycled piece of linen from a shirt or bedding, yet the very fact that most are stitched on linen would have meant that the object was valued, given that linen was expensive.

Popularized in the sixteenth century, spot samplers are in conversation with household receipt or recipe manuscripts (see Volume 8), as both are repositories of domestic memory and familial records, such as genealogical information and familial knowledge. Derived from the Latin root, *exemplaris*, the spot sampler displayed examples of stitch patterns and designs that a woman used as a memory devise for herself and her descendants, since the spot samplers were often handed down from one generation to the next. In the 1631 poetic preface to the pattern

book, *The Needle's Excellency*, John Taylor mentions how needlework was passed down from generation to generation: both the work itself and the knowledge of production:

Thus is a Needle prou'd an Instrument

Of profit, pleasure, and of ornament:

Which mighty Queenes haue grac'd in hand to take,

And high-borne Ladies such esteeme did make,

That as their Daughters Daughters vp did grow,

The Needles Art, they to their children show. (F2r, Sig. A2–F2v)[1]



Figure 1. Frontispiece to John Taylor's, *The Needle's Excellency*, 1597

Not only the knowledge of needlework but also the works themselves were bestowed to family members. The practice of making samplers was in vogue from 1502 onwards, and these valued pieces were often itemized in wills and inventories; for example, Margaret Thomson bequeathed her sample to her niece in 1542. As Susan Frye writes, “Only a few early modern spot samplers survive from the British Isles, but these ubiquitous objects were once the principles means to remember not only the most practical elements of embroidery but also the tiny stiches and larger patterns that located girls and women within extended networks of affiliation”[2].

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The oldest known extant English spot sampler was created by [Jane Bostocke](#), dated 1598, and is now housed in the Victoria and Albert Museum.



Figure 2 Jane Bostocke, Sampler, 1598, Victoria and Albert Museum

Bostocke's sampler is intensely personal, given that it commemorates the birth of Alice Lee, her distant cousin, in its inscription. Alice Lee was aged two when the sample was completed, as her birth is noted as 1586. Stitched with colored silks and seed pearls, Bostocke included an alphabet (another common practice in samplers) and depictions of several animals, including a chained dog, a chained bear, a reclining deer, a small talbot lion, and a small dog, Juno, likely a family pet. Also included were an elephant with a castle on its back and a squirrel cracking a nut and a raven, the stitches of which have been unpicked, but the ghosts of the needlework are still visible through the needle pricks. All the animals in the sampler are crests or badges of the Lee and Corbet families, as both Jane and Alice Lee were descendants of Robert Corbet and Elizabeth Vernon of Moreton Corbet in Shropshire, as Pamela Clabburn has pointed out.^[3] The unpicked badges are from Jane's branch of the family, whereas the extract emblems are from Alice's. Rather than eradicating these crest animals, it is possible that Jane removed the stitches, leaving the pattern for Alice or others in the family to learn by restitching them. Here is another way in which the samplers exemplify the fashion of reusing or recycling, as the holes left in the fabric are meant to be used again as younger female kin learn the art of stitching. This spot sampler was clearly bequeathed to Alice or other family members who valued Bostocke's legacy, passing it to their descendants who kept the sampler secure for ages.

Bostocke's spot sampler catalogues stitches that were common at the end of the sixteenth century, including buttonhole, detached buttonhole, chain, satin, ladder, back stitch, cross stitch,

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and French knots. Below the animals, the sample provides a myriad of designs, including blackwork and intricate patterning. Similar patterns are printed in *A Booke of Curious and Strange Inventions called the first part of Needleworkers*, which was published in England in 1596 but was a translation of the 1591 Italian book, *Prima parte de' fiori, e disegni di varie sorti di ricami moderni*, by Giovanni Battista Ciotti.^[4] Even as pattern books would influence embroiders, the samplers themselves were likely proceeded and initially inspired the publication of pattern books. David Goldstein explains that samplers “functioned as the stitched equivalent of commonplace books, a storehouse of designs and techniques.”^[5]

Spot samplers document early modern women’s art inspired by nature and how they understood their surroundings relationally, as they juxtapose various elements together on one piece of linen. As Taylor comments,

The Needles workes hath still bin in regard.

For it doth ART, so like to NATVRE frame,

As if IT were HER Sister, or *the* SAME.

Flowers, Plants, and Fishes, Beasts, Birds, Flyes, & Bees,

Hils, Dales, Plaines, Pastures, Skies, Seas, Riuers, Trees:

There's nothing neere at hand, or farthest sought,

But *with the Needle*, may be shap'd and wrought.^[6] (F3r, Sig. A3)

Our volume mirrors this incorporation of the spot sampler’s disparate images and themes, stitching together essays that themselves build large arguments from smaller elements. The four pieces that together make up this volume each dwell on the power of parts, showing how bits and pieces exercise often unacknowledged influence over the whole.

The Volume

Considering nature, specifically, the bits and pieces of plants, Jason Hogue argues in his essay “‘Seeds and Roots’: Hiddenness and Hendiadys” that “The vegetal goes against – or at least presents an alternative to – the tendency of botanical writers to pin down and name, taking textual “samples” in an attempt to “know” the identity and purview of a plant by making its parts legible as an ingredient or an encyclopedic entry, ready for consumption or application.”

Alternatively, Jason Hogue considers how the rhetorical figure of hendiadys, a single idea expressed with two words connected with an “and”, goes beyond language when applied to the nouns “seeds and roots” to enter the living realm of plants. “Seeds and roots” could be a synecdoche for a tree, yet these separate entities are indeed quite different from each other, both in form and function. Mostly invisible underground, roots moor the tree to the earth and provide the necessary water and nutrients that sustain the tree, while seeds grow from the branches and only realize their potential once they have departed from the mother plant by landing on the soil

or by taken some animal and buried in the ground. Viewing through a new materialist lens, Hogue catalogues and anatomizes “roots and seeds” for their discursive and material meanings, revealing their entangled and hidden potential, both separate from and essential to human and nonhuman life alike.

The recycled woodcut image of a seventeenth-century woman with a distinctive hat that appeared on numerous ballad sheets is the focus of Elizabeth Mazzola’s article, “The Hatted Woman the Her Unhurried History in Early Modern Ballads.” Mazzola explains how publishers had “an inventory of stock stories with stock images, including among them our hatted female” in order “to meet the extraordinary demand for these cheaply printed texts.” Mazzola argues that the very ubiquity of the image confers meaning as it morphs from one context of the early modern female body to the next: “a female figure denoting old age in one ballad could signal beauty and youth in another.” The figure’s stance in the image is one that is unhurried and uncontrolled by any male actor giving the image a kind of self-determination and freedom of movement that Mazzola suggests mirrors the myriads of unchaperoned women that wandered the streets and alleyways of London. Mazzola conjectures that perhaps the image became the hatted figures of Mother Goose, that doyenne of literacy and learning, who likely taught us all as children. Is the hatted woman also connected to the eighteenth-century Mother Hubbard or, turning back, to Chaucer’s Wife of Bath that appears in the Ellesmere manuscript? All of these images suggest women of independence and autonomy in movement, sexuality, and appetites, “the hat seems to insist on this figure’s inviolability, her tranquility and safety.” Mazzola proposes, “Maybe a good wife is ultimately also a loose woman, this ballad [“?[c]onstance of Cleveland”] ironically, emphatically suggests.” Mazzola then connects the workings of the various ballads with Shakespeare’s character from *The Taming of the Shrew*, Katherine Minola, who must throw away her hat, finally finding a kind of freedom through compliance with her husband.

Margaret Maurer addresses the reassembly of small parts as science, religion, and play in “Reviving Drowned Flies and Burnt Plants in the Early Modern Household: Alchemical Recipes and Domestic Experiments in Peter Temple and Hester Pulter.” By examining the two authors’ very different manuscripts, Maurer explores the link between experiments and science as demonstrated in alchemical instructions, particularly those that deal with bringing life back into seemingly dead bodies. She notes that Temple’s manuscript offers a recipe entitled “Drowned Flies Revived” in a section labeled “Experiments”, illustrating how the “language of play, jokes, and tricks pervaded natural philosophical discourse.” The recipe, she argues, is more than a party trick; it provides a new register through which natural philosophy could be not just illustrated by experienced. Similarly, Pulter’s poem “View But This Tulip” calls on palingenesis – “an experimental, alchemical practice that sought to regenerate organisms from ashes or decaying matter, foretelling God’s reconstitution of human bodies at the end of the world” – through its consideration of a flower’s ashes. The result, Maurer concludes, is “an emblematic meditation on the relationship between experience and faith,” one that parallels Temple’s experiment in demonstrating the overlap between what can be witnessed in the household and the alchemical knowledge increasingly discussed in learned books.

In conversation with Jason Hogue’s article but with a concentration less on the earth-bound material, Susan Rojas’s essay explores power of oceans in “Shipwreck, Immersion, and a Great

Sea of Joys: Watery Tropes, the Blue Humanities, and Affective Ecologies in *Pericles*.” Rojas investigates the power of water as a literary trope, one with the power to amalgamate the range of emotions that circulate within the plot. “The play incorporates the physicality of water, traditions associated with the sea, and its importance for travel, exploration, and existence,” she points out. “Beyond these aspects, marine tropes help advance the plot, impart emotion, and make the characters’ experience more accessible to actor and audience.” Beginning with an exploration of the expression “sea of joys,” the essay explores the role water plays not only in bringing far-flung characters together, but in creating the drama’s emotional power. “Reading *Pericles* with attention to sea imagery,” she argues, “underscores the usefulness of aqueous tropes in the creation and expansion of affective ecologies.”

We hope you enjoy this volume with its wide-ranging topics that nonetheless comes together as a discussion of recycling and reusing the flotsam and jetsam of nature, images, materials, and metaphors. Have a good read!

Amy L. Tigner and Hillary M. Nunn, editors

Notes

[1] Taylor, John. *The Needles Excellency A New Booke wherin are diuers Admirable Workes wrought with the Needle: Newly inuented and cut in Copper for the pleasure and profit of the Industrious*. London: Printed for Iames Baler, 1631, F2r, Sig. A2–F2v.

[2] Frye, Susan. *Pens and Needles: Women’s Textualities in Early Modern England*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, 122-23.

[3] Clabburn, Pamela. *Samplers*. Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire: Shire Publications, Ltd, 1998, 8.

[4] Ciotti, Giovanni Battista. *A Booke of Curious and Strange*. London: William Barley, 1597.

[5] Goldstein, David. “Woolley’s Mouse: Early Modern Recipe Books and the Uses of Nature” in *Ecofeminist Approaches to Early Modernity*, ed. Jennifer Munroe and Rebecca Laroche (New York and London: Palgrave, 2011) 105-107, 114.

[6] Taylor, F3r, Sig. A3.