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## A Marketplace in Miniature: Norwich Pattern Books as Cultural Agency

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An eighteenth-century book of woven samples can be considered as a seminal link between the production of raw materials in one cultural context and clothing or furnishing in another. In bringing images of such samples from Norwich to Hawaii for a twenty-first century conference on *Textiles as Cultural Expressions* I am also conscious of mapping an open-ended dialogue which engages the historical and the contemporary. This perspective is recognized by anthropologist Arjun Appadurai when he says that ‘from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context’.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, although consideration of books and cards of samples from late eighteenth century Norwich (UK) form the *material* evidence informing this account, it is the notion of ‘textile-in-motion’ that most appropriately highlights textile as cultural agency, enabling a fuller understanding of ways in which textile systems and visual semantics intersect with economic, social, political, technical, linguistic and personal interests. Cultural expression is as pertinent to the historian as it is to the material traces of the history that is studied, and as Appadurai and others demonstrate in *The Social Life of Things*, textiles are particularly potent as agents and signifiers of cultural formation. Perhaps it is as an agency of formation rather than as ‘expression’ that textile holds greatest sway.

In eighteenth-century Norwich the technical ingenuity of deeply-rooted textile traditions together with inventive responses to the changing demands of the market for material goods enabled textile production and related activity to flourish. Success owed much to the production of variations of worsted, long-stapled, finely-spun woollen yarn often combined with silk or other fibres and woven on 2 or 4 shaft foot-operated handlooms by outworkers in their garrets, to create an effect which one visitor to the city had described as ‘so fine and thin and glossy’.<sup>2</sup> The evidence from the books of samples suggests that this ‘golden age’ was managed and organized with considerable attention to detail. Each penny, each inch, every division of time and labour, each shift in tone or variation in pattern or number of warp threads was accounted for, and it is in articulating this precision that the evidence of the sample books is particularly invaluable. In a labour-intensive textile industry in which margins were tight and consumers often fickle in their tastes, samples function as a ‘transitional’ focal point of selection, choice, trust, measure and accounting. Together with supporting documentation, an elaborate and intricate operation can be mapped which in turn provides crucial evidence in identifying transactions between manufacture and economics, one of the most dynamic aspects of cultural formation.

At least since the beginning of the thirteenth century worsted and other woven textiles played a significant role in shaping the social, political, economic and architectural fabric of the city

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<sup>1</sup> Arjun Appadurai *The Social Life of Things* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1986), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Celia Fiennes, in C. Morris (ed.) *The Illustrated Journeys of Celia Fiennes, c.1682-1712*, (London, 1933), quoted in Ursula Priestley, *The Fabric of Stuffs, the Norwich Textile Industry from 1565*, Norwich, The Centre for East Anglian Studies, 1990, 17.

and the surrounding region.<sup>3</sup> As late as 1730 records show that Norwich had been the largest conurbation in England outside London since at least the 15<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier. At the heart of its growth and its wealth lay involvement both in textile manufacturing, especially in dyeing, weaving and finishing, and in the merchant activities associated with distribution. Norwich is unusual in that the functions of master-weaver, manufacturer and merchant were closely integrated, so that particular individuals, or families, could embrace all three roles.<sup>4</sup> In addition, there was a close relationship between the textile industry and local politics, with many assuming the position of Mayor alongside their other interests. Such aspirations also extended to include European and international trade, often combined with social networking and cultural interests (as afforded, for example, by the 'Grand Tour').

Through the combined agency of textile manufacture and marketing, cultural and economic links were (despite occasional and significant setbacks) established with increasing effect, not only with London, and within the UK, but also with Europe and further afield, culminating in a 'golden age' for textile production in the mid-eighteenth century when an estimated 12,000 weavers were at work in and around the city.<sup>5</sup> During this significant proto-industrial era, the trade in Norwich stuffs was concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer master-weavers or merchant-manufacturers. By some accounts, the second half of the eighteenth century saw the beginnings of a slow decline in the pre-eminence of Norwich particularly in the context of increasing competition from the north of England, the beginnings of industrial development and the importation of Indian cotton. It was, nevertheless, an era of significant expansion in terms of export trade, with considerable quantities of manufactures reaching as far afield as Russia, China and South America in final decades of the century.<sup>6</sup> Pattern samples and worsted products were on the move like never before. It is also the period for which the most accurate record of the stuffs produced in the city is available, in the form of sample pattern cards, pattern books and record books. The late eighteenth century might be heralded at least as the golden era for Norwich of books of samples.

Although the long history of textiles in Norwich has received serious attention from scholars, the books and patterns themselves have rarely been the focus of sustained study. They are arguably better known to an American audience than to a European one, figuring as they do in (and on the book jacket of) *Textiles in America* by Florence Montgomery.<sup>7</sup> Parallels with the use of books of samples in other eighteenth century contexts is an important starting point of such study, in particular following work done by Lesley Miller investigating the use of samples in the silk industry of Lyons in France.<sup>8</sup> Recent and notable studies by Philip Sykas of books relating to the industrial era in northern England offer further valuable insight into the activity of 'reading' a book of textile samples.<sup>9</sup> The terms sample and pattern are

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<sup>3</sup> For the early history of Norwich textiles, see for example John James, *The History of the Worsted Manufacture in England*, London 1857; reprinted London, Frank Cass, 1968. Also Eric Kerridge *Textile Manufactures in Early Modern England* Manchester University Press, 1985, also Priestley (op.cit).

<sup>4</sup> For a full analysis of the structure of the industry see Ursula Priestley: 'The Fabric of Stuffs': The Norwich Textile Industry, c. 1650-1750' in *Textile History*, 16 (2), 1995, 183-210.

<sup>5</sup> Richard Wilson, 'The Textile Industry' in *Norwich Since 1550*, (ed. Carole Rawcliffe and Richard Wilson, London and New York, Hambledon and London, 2004, 219-241, 228.

<sup>6</sup> For a thorough account see Trevor Fawcett, 'Argonauts and Commercial Travellers: the Foreign Marketing of Norwich Stuffs in the Later Eighteenth Century', *Textile History*, 16 (2), 1985, 151-82.

<sup>7</sup> Florence Montgomery, *Textiles in America (1650-1870)*, New York, London, W.W.Norton & Company, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> Lesley Ellis Miller, 'Innovation and Industrial Espionage in Eighteenth-Century France: An Investigation of the Selling of Silks through Samples' *Journal of Design History*, Vol.12, No.3, 1999, 271-292

<sup>9</sup> Philip Anthony Sykas, *The Secret Life of Textiles: Six Pattern Book Archives in North West England*, Bolton, U.K., Bolton Museums; also, 'Abundant images and scant text: reading textile pattern books' in Maria Hayward and Elizabeth Kramer (eds.) *Textile and Text*, London, Archetype Publications, 2007, 23-29.

sometimes, but not always, used to mean the same thing. A sample can be described as a 'pattern' in the sense of exemplar rather than decoration; thus the frequent description 'pattern book' may refer to books of samples rather than books of designed patterns (although of course the samples may be aesthetically designed).<sup>10</sup> It is interesting to note that it is precisely in the period in question (the late eighteenth century) that the term pattern comes to be used to mean a decorative or artistic design. Perhaps this was one effect of the books.

Books and cards of samples served a variety of functions. What they all have in common is that they document specimens of cloth with reference to a specific context, often accompanied by (or supported by) additional data. In addition to the samples intended for marketing purposes, books of samples were also used by manufacturers at home in Norwich for recording detailed aspects of production, for example how much cloth was woven by which weaver, who was responsible for dyeing the cloth, when it was woven and dyed, and for whom the cloth was initially intended.<sup>11</sup> From the 1790's there are several order books particularly from one firm, Ives and Basely, recording which cloth was sent to which merchant on which date. One example of 134 pages and over 8000 samples covers the period from 10<sup>th</sup> of January to the 20<sup>th</sup> of August 1792.<sup>12</sup>

Whether intended for the purposes of record-keeping or marketing the eighteenth-century books from Norwich invariably display an almost obsessive attention to detail and precision, with narrow strips of vibrantly dyed and woven samples meticulously assembled to fit the pages, often orchestrated as if to convey an aesthetic effect. Unlike many of the examples discussed by Miller, the Norwich samples are rarely large enough to show the whole pattern repeat. It is as if a template for the page, card or book is decided upon, and the sample is then cut to fit. The dimensions of the pattern might be given however, and each sample was numbered, and often priced. Safely pressed between the pages of books, these samples are well preserved and still fresh in colour today, allowing a direct material engagement with the original. The writer W. G. Sebald (1944 - 2001) described them as 'catalogues of samples, the pages of which seem to me to be leaves from the only true book which none of our textual and pictorial works can even begin to rival'.<sup>13</sup>

How and why samples were collected on cards and in books is complex. In her investigation of eighteenth-century samples from Lyons, Miller identifies professionally produced sample cards or *cartes d'échantillons* as complementing and extending the use of samples traditionally attached in haphazard fashion to business letters within the marketing and distribution network for textiles. Such letters and cards can be linked to the production of specific workshops, whereas larger 'order books' associated with textile manufacture in Lyons functioned as a collection which drew together examples from several manufacturers from the same region or town. The example of Lyons, and in particular Miller's investigation, provides an important comparative springboard for understanding the Norwich examples. Thus from the evidence of late 18<sup>th</sup> C. Norwich we find that not only cards but also whole books were produced under the auspices of single manufacturers.

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<sup>10</sup> In this paper, to avoid confusion, I have aimed to use the word 'pattern' to denote design, and 'books of samples' to denote the books.

<sup>11</sup> Of particular note in respect of such complex information is one book, dated 1794, in the collection of Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service (Bridewell Museum, Norwich, U.K., accession number 659.966).

<sup>12</sup> An image of this book can be found at

<http://norwichtextiles.org.uk/history/fabrics-fashions/norwich-pattern-books>.

<sup>13</sup> W. G. Sebald, *The Rings of Saturn*, London, Vintage, 2007, 286.

In Norwich much of the weaving was organized by master-weavers or manufacturers but the work was carried out by journeymen or out-workers in the attics and weaving lofts that formed part of their homes. The considerable scale of such enterprises, and the diversity of output associated with each, enabled an extensive array of patterns and cloths, justifying the production of pattern books for each manufacturer. Competition between Norwich textile producers was not unknown and this is perhaps signalled by the independence of each manufacturer as expressed through the ‘branding’ of some of the books with the name of the manufacture as well as through what we know about the competitive ‘marketplace’ contexts in which they were used.

More than one copy of some books was made, one to be carried by an agent and one to remain at source as a record. To what extent two such copies are comparable can be judged from a comparison between near identical pages from two books of 1794, one of which is in the Winterthur Museum, Delaware, and one in Norwich.<sup>14</sup> In some instances there may have been several copies of the same book made, going to different parts of the world, as was the case in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in pattern books from the North of England, but it is more likely that the books were produced with a specific nation in mind, even to the extent of naming fabrics to appeal to a particular national language. Norwich was particularly inventive in its naming of products, sometimes to the confusion of the consumer.

In a climate of risk and the unknown (as in distant ‘global’ markets), samples are on the one hand precarious ‘tokens’ in a fluctuating process, but on the other hand they are also relatively reliable as evidence of the product to which they refer, thus providing stability in the context of the complex negotiation that accompanies business transaction. Initially intended to seduce the buyer, some books and cards of numbered and named samples were carried by agents to markets or fairs at home and abroad. Some never made it back to Norwich, such as those now in the Winterthur Museum. One reason that some of the books and samples strayed from the agents that initially carried them is that they enabled manufacturers to gain knowledge of the ‘competition’; for manufacturers the sample is the *real* thing rather than an example, it is evidence from which production can be replicated to advantage. This was a key intention in the case of Anders Berch’s acquisition of such pattern cards in Sweden.<sup>15</sup>

A comparison between two books associated with an agent employed by the Norwich firm of Stannard and Taylor demonstrates quite precisely the complex relationship between production, accounting and marketing that is evidenced by samples.<sup>16</sup> One of these, a small notebook of 1767, provides an economic breakdown of each sample, one to a page. The costs given include those for the warp and shoot, twisting, dyeing, fulling and warping, weaving, picking, singeing, dressing and packing. Some of the samples included, such as the ‘common brocade’, are almost identical to samples found in the second, more substantial, book, ‘Mr John Kelly’s counterpart of patterns sent to Spain and Portugal, Norwich 1763’.

We are fortunate to have documentation linking this book (which is one of the earliest dated of all English textile sample books) to a specific journey undertaken by Kelly to Spain on behalf of Stannard and Taylor. A junior partner in the firm, John Taxtor, sent Kelly a letter

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<sup>14</sup> The Winterthur example bears the name ‘Booth and Theobald’.

<sup>15</sup> Elisabet Stavenow-Hidemark, (ed.) *18th Century Textiles, the Anders Berch Collection at the Nordiska Museet*. Stockholm, Nordiska museets förlag, 1990.

<sup>16</sup> Both books are in the collections of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

with some remarks about the way the book was to be used.<sup>17</sup> The first subject concerns the visual impact, thus

*In the first place, please to observe that if anybody should find fault at the lustre of some of the patterns in the book, you may tell them that they have been carried and handled about so often that they lost all the lustre; the few patterns that you show them serve only to observe the quality and the figures. Of the latter we have great variety and as we have such great consumption, we have it in our power to send them now other figures of the newest and most modern taste.*

The bulk of the letter concerns cost – including commission, packing, shipping and portage but also analysing the competitive prices and requesting that if Kelly comes across cheaper prices for equivalent goods, he should find out the exact details for comparison

*...then we shall know directly whether we are able to do the same, as we know perfectly the management of almost every manufacturer here in town..... We shall always be able to tell them precisely whenever any order may be executed...they shall find us very exact to our word and promise....*

Finally, the letter discussed the orders themselves, that

*if anyone should say that none of these stripes, colours, or figures in the pattern book does suit their place, you may reply, you come on purpose to suit their taste, or as we are the manufacturers ourselves we can imitate any stripe, colour or figure, likewise to accommodate them to any length or breadth, the price then will be calculated in proportion.*

In a condensed form Taxtor's letter of advice indicates the encyclopaedic array of knowledge that had to be managed in order to sustain production. We are led to picture the haggling and discussing, persuasion, questions, letters, and orders, which in turn would feed back into the warping of looms, the negotiations of prices for yarn, for dyeing, finishing and other matters in Norwich. Each sample is at the centre of a chain of transactions.

Matters concerning translation accompanied or were never far behind the more globally accessible language of pattern itself, an example of the intimacy between textile and text. Thus Kelly could speak Spanish but no-one back in Norwich could translate the letters that were sent. Taxtor, the junior partner, was able to write in Dutch and Italian, and was corresponding with clients in Holland, Germany, Russia, Poland and Italy during the period Kelly was in Spain, sometimes through his own knowledge of the language, but also in English, and perhaps also with the help of translators.<sup>18</sup> But as barriers of language were broken, so too the marketplace became more competitive, with agents such as Kelly having to provide the necessary trust (related to issues of risk, credit, security, insurance) *and* be able to offer the desired product at competitive rates. Together with the on-the-spot negotiation of agents such as Kelly, the token sample from the pattern book offered the customer the opportunity to purchase a particular look at a particular price, to be delivered on a named date. Letters or promissory notes served to support and ratify the orders. Thus the pattern book sits at the cusp not only of production and consumption but also is also strategically

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<sup>17</sup> Ursula Priestley (ed.) *The Letters of Philip Stannard, Norwich Textile Manufacturer (1751-1763)*. Norwich, Norfolk Record Society, Vol. 57, 1994, 117. The letter is undated but Priestley suggests a date of 1763.

<sup>18</sup> Priestley (1994) op.cit. 17

positioned within the network of negotiation as expressed through handshakes, conversations, letters and financial agreements. In an effort to *secure* the demand it was even possible to negotiate variations on the sample as seen and by the same token buyers were quick to complain if the cloth they received was not exactly as expected.

A pattern book of woven samples, transported across national borders from one merchant to another, is thus a seminal object in a process which links the production of the material fabric to the 'fabric of materialism'. Matters of exchange are always intensified for textiles through the particular nature of cloth as portable, transportable and versatile. In addition (to inherent mobility and stated economic value), the ability to contribute to the semantics of social communication is also a familiar textile attribute. Technical refinement, economic acuity and judicious expansion enabled the *development* of mercantile practice, but increasingly it was the merchant in negotiation with the social and cultural distinctions of the consumer that set the pace, restraining or igniting production according to the demand. In the eighteenth century when the buying of ready-made garments was still the exception rather than the rule and when home-spun weaving was frequently considered a time-consuming chore, cloth was a socially strategic commodity, the agency of complex communication, echoing Georg Simmel's notion that value is never an inherent property of objects in themselves, but is a judgement made about them by subjects, hence 'we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them'.<sup>19</sup> The use-value (largely economic) as appreciated by the producer is 'carried' by the sample in the marketplace where it is recognized and valued both for its use (as functional cloth) and for its evocation of desire (it will look beautiful).

Historian Carole Shammas notes that textiles were of particular significance in the advancement of consumerism in the eighteenth century, and that the diversity of textile goods was in part responsible for such advancement. The buying of textiles is neither short-term, like food, nor long term, like furniture, rather, they are 'semi-durable', the implication being that each time we buy we can exercise the opportunity to choose something different in a way that we can't with food or furniture. English manufactures flooded the American markets in the 1860's and Shammas notes that

*'each year the market presented people with more possibilities. Individuals were encouraged to select from among different grades and colours. The language of consumption became increasingly complex, forcing everyone to distinguish with greater precision what they wanted.'*<sup>20</sup>

A letter from Philip Stannard to one of his customers in which he asserts that 'the stripes shall be in the newest taste', is typical of the evidence from Norwich in support of the broader evaluation of consumerism in the eighteenth century. It is interesting to consider further the particular semantic of the stripe in this context. Striped cloth, similar to that which was evidently fashionable in the American colonies in the 1760s, was also popular within cultures in which 'tradition' may have been more highly valued than 'fashion'. I would speculate that the particular patterns produced by Norwich, especially the striped calamancoes, were such as to appeal as fashionable dress in some contexts and as traditional costume in others. A rare export account of Ives, Basely and Robberds of 1791 indicates graphically the considerable exports in the later eighteenth century to China, Russia, the Baltic States, Eastern Europe and even South America (fig. 1).

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<sup>19</sup> Georg Simmel *The Philosophy of Money* (translated by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982, 67

<sup>20</sup> Carole Shammas 'Changes in English and Anglo-American Consumption', in John Brewer and Roy Porter (eds), *Consumption and the World of Goods*, London, Routledge, 1993. 177-206.

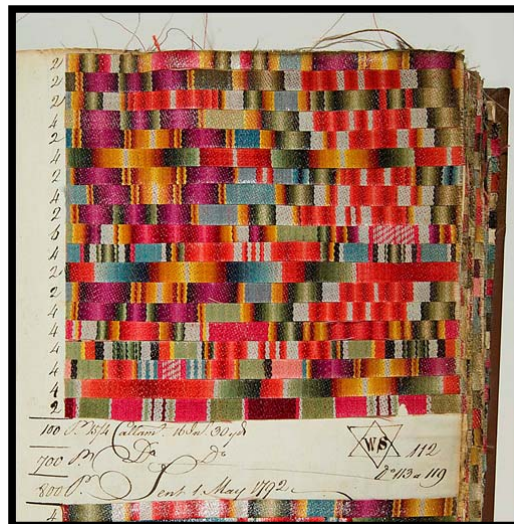


	Total	Italy	Spain/ America	Germany	Russia	Norway/ Sweden	Holland	Madeira	China
Camlets	65468	9544	12816	5972	7986	8193	—	987	19970
Camletees	4423	256	—	1725	—	252	2190	—	—
Callimancoes	17693	—	742	388	15508	51	1004	—	—
Sattins	11036	123	1402	6751	1457	601	702	—	—
Bombazines	1063	—	910	—	—	—	—	153	—
Lastings	4739	98	1378	245	790	1494	734	—	—
Figured stuffs	4860	463	2425	1397	—	180	275	120	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>109282</b>	<b>10484</b>	<b>19673</b>	<b>16478</b>	<b>25741</b>	<b>10771</b>	<b>4905</b>	<b>1260</b>	<b>19970</b>

*Figure 1. Export figures for Ives, Basely and Robberds, 1791, Trevor Fawcett Textile History 16 (2) 1985.*

Although little is currently known about the relationship between traditional costume and fashionable dress in this period for these markets, there is a suggestion in an account of 1798 that what is sometimes called ‘folk’ costume can be linked to the acquisition of Norwich cloth:

*...travellers penetrated through Europe, and their pattern cards were exhibited in every principal town, from the frozen plains of Moscow to the milder climes of Lisbon, Seville, and Naples. The Russian peasant decorated himself with his sash of gaudy callimanco, and the Spanish Hidalgo was sheltered under his light coat of Norwich Camblet. The introduction of their articles into Spain, Italy, Poland and Russia soon made the manufacturers ample amends for the capriciousness of fashion in their own country....and the most garish assemblage of colours of every dye, satisfied the vanity of the Suabian and Bohemian female. The great fairs of Frankfort, Leipsic, and of Salerno were thronged with purchasers of these commodities.<sup>21</sup>*



*Figure 2. Striped Calimancoes. Detail, order book of Ives, Basely and Robberds, 1792, Norfolk Museums and Archaeology Service, Bridewell Museum, Norwich*

<sup>21</sup> Attributed to William Taylor, first published in *Monthly Magazine*, VI (1798), but here taken from Fawcett, op.cit, 154.



The arrangement of parallel 'strips' of fabric in the sample books obtain the effect of stripes, and on the pages that are filled with strips of multicoloured and striped calamancoes, there is a 'doubling' of vibrant effect (Fig.2). In his account of the history of stripes and striped fabric, the historian Michel Pastoreau suggests that the stripe is simultaneously both a motif of elegance and refinement and a motif which signals the 'outsider'. These positions may be conflated through the audacity of the stripe which can 'make waves....accentuate, mark'.<sup>22</sup> It demands to be seen and is vibrant and optical, effecting perpetual motion through a continuously ambiguous figure-ground relationship. It is a vehicle for the display of the complex effects of colours in combination. The semiotic virtuosity of the simple stripe motif lies in its potentially infinite permutation, a basic alternation of elements which lends itself to combining tradition and innovation, simplicity and decoration, routine and celebration, safeness and difference, plainness and richness. Often dazzling and infinitely playful, the stripe carries the potential to express identity and emotion, but it is also so ubiquitous as to be non-judgemental, non gender-specific, and decorative without the loaded associations of class or decadence which distinguish, for example the classicizing floral motifs of much fabric production.

Pastoreau notes the way in which the stripe is adapted and adopted by different classes and social contexts in the late eighteenth century.<sup>23</sup> 'In the stripe', he writes, 'there is something that resists enclosure within systems'.<sup>24</sup> However, it is also true that the logic of the loom and of weaving is intimately attuned to the stripe as a form. The stripe follows and even expresses the function and process of the loom, and is as consequence a pattern which is economical to produce as well as lending itself to the inventiveness of the weaver and dyer.

Immersed in the possible interpretations of these patterns I am reminded of my teenage years, forever buying cloth from a particularly well-stocked store, to make dresses for parties. Having deliberated over the pattern, the hang, the fabric, the price and the suitability of the cloth to mark out my identity in a social context, the shop assistant would take a great pair of scissors and cut through the cloth at the appointed and measured place. Money and cloth changed hands and each went their separate ways. It is this crossing point, this measured exchange between myself as the tailor and the tally of the retail assistant that takes us to the concept of *detail*, upon which so much negotiation depend, and which is figured so precisely through the evidence of the samples. There is an interesting corroboration of this in the way that the English word tailor relates etymologically to a range of words relating to cutting, thus:

tailor: OF *tailleur*, OF *taillier* (cut), LL *taliare*, (to cut)

tally: L *talea* (wood, notch to keep account); OF *taille* (cut, tax)

detail: F *detailler* (to cut into pieces, to sell in pieces); *de-tailler* (cut)

retail: OF *retaille* (piece cut off), *re-taille* (cut)

Cutting, in its Latin root forms, has resulted in a close network of words linking the cutting of cloth to the retailing of cloth, with detail, at least in its French connections, indicating the kind of relationship that marks the link between the cutting and retailing. The tally is the chit, the receipt or record of the transaction, indicating the economic system which is entered into at so many stages in the biography of these textiles. The sample functions in a similar way, detailing a series of transactions. In Yorkshire a swatch of cloth was also known as a tally.

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<sup>22</sup> Michel Pastoreau *The Devil's Cloth, a history of stripes and striped fabric*, New York, Columbia University Press, 1991.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 48.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

In considering the reasons behind and the effects of consumption in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Joyce Appleby explores the conclusion that ‘ordinary people ....consume because they have been infected with artificial wants dreamed up by the international league of producers’.<sup>25</sup> I would argue that the pattern book was an agency of such an infection.

The almost infinite variations of colour and pattern, accentuated in their intensity in the context of a book or card, create an eye-catching and infectious spectacle. Variations of weave structure, finish, cloth and weight are also factors to haggle over, to choose from and to negotiate, and this ability to negotiate may be a factor in drawing consumers into the marketplace where they can exercise choice. This is not luxury stuff, but it has wide appeal with reference to personal and cultural identity. Manufacturers and buyers communicated through the pattern book sample as non-verbal text. Certainly, the variety of striped cloth being produced in Norwich in the 1790’s indicates that visual discrimination is a serious business.

The presentation of choice in the books of samples from Norwich is literally fascinating, with some pages so stunning and dazzling in their effect and we might argue that it could be the effect of the whole page that seduces the buyer, rather than the individual sample. Choosing from the considerable array of examples enabled the consumer to actively participate in the negotiation of personal, social and cultural identity. The textile system revealed through these books of samples articulates the intricacy of such decision making. The concept of ‘a little more of this and a little less of that’ may be apposite here, mirroring in practice Appadurai’s theoretical assertion that ‘from a *methodological* point of view it is the things-in-motion that illuminate their human and social context’. In the relationship between production and consumption, negotiation between precise calculation and considered risk is constantly in fluctuation, both from the perspective of the weaver-manufacturer-merchant and from the perspective of ownership. It is in articulating these positions that the books of samples from eighteenth century Norwich serve as a potentially lucid if not dazzling example of a market-place in miniature.

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<sup>25</sup> Joyce Appleby ‘Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought’ in J Brewer and Porter (eds) op.cit., 172.