Playing With Letters and Landscapes: Interacting with Empire in Early 19th Century Print Learning Aides

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Introduction

Housed in the archives of Princeton University's Cotsen Children's Library, are several series of alphabet cards, which combine the letters of the alphabet with illustrations. These phonically based pictures, poems and subtitles mimic several common discursive formations prevalent in society: Specifically, tropes of nationalism, militarism, geography, labor and play. This essay explores the formal aesthetics of these cards in order to situate them within a historical discourse of learning, ergodic (or interactive) textuality, and colonialism. If scholars of education and games are to have an earnest conversation about how games inform learning practices and shape the childhood experience, we must recognize the discursive importance of these early interactive texts in structuring the way games have been aesthetically developed as tools to help children learn to read. The social and cultural positioning of alphabet cards and puzzles are indicative of a foundational historical threshold, linking both language and play to the largely understated history of print ephemera. As Paulo Freire (2005) has written in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, "The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom" (47). Thus this essay uses these forgotten and ephemeral learning aides to speculate upon the ways that these tools may have latched onto developing and inchoate subjectivities—producing a mental model that internalizes and takes for granted the fundamentals of white supremacy.

In order to accomplish this goal, I will will first explain the circumstances of the collection. Having established the collections place, utility, and circulation I will then focus on explicating three concurrent themes: the historical utility of print ephemera, the institutionalization of education in pre-industrial Europe, and the theoretical distinction between language and play. Finally, I focus on the card set *ABC Myriorama* and draw attention to its positionality as a ludic and pre-linguistic educational aide. By taking these steps, I am building a case that not only were alphabet cards distributed somewhat widely amongst the wealthy classes that might consume them in the 19th century, but also that their use had a clear discursive impact on the institution of education at the time. An impact, that to some extent, continues to be relevant today.

Background

It has only been in the past thirty years that the formal elements of game-like texts have come under scrutiny. Three key trajectories of discourse within the field of game studies inform the discussion that takes place in this essay. First, procedurality (Bogost, 2007) is a useful term for exploring the sequential nature of game processes and likewise the sequenced nature of play that engages with these processes. Second, as I describe in detail below, scholarship on games and learning has had a profound impact on shaping the institutional and discursive shape of both game studies and education more broadly. Finally, research on postcolonial game studies that asserts broadly that games are often vectors of colonization (Mukherjee, 2018; Murray, 2018) is critical to this research. This essay explores all these vectors together by exploring the learning aides available in the Cotsen Children's library. The history I construct here is intended to deepen our contemporary understandings of simulation within computer games (Charsky, 2010, 179-180), thus linking a history of simulation within computer games with earlier historical precedents and contexts. My project acts to set a research precedent for the ways in which archival research on old media can help to better contextualize the discourse of computer games and other new media texts.

Following Mizuko Ito (2010) in recognizing the value of historical research as a tool to inform the development of educational software today, this paper shares a fundamental premise: "By failing to [focus on the historical contexts of development and use], we will continue to overestimate the force of technology in transforming education and to underestimate the role of institutions and existing practices in determining learning outcomes" (10). Here, Ito questions commercial and grant based funding rationales

for game design in the classroom. As game design takes on an ever greater role in the classroom, it is important to recognize the ways that their aesthetics have been structured by institutional politics. And, as I will argue in this essay, influenced by a larger set of discursive politics, such as empire and capitalism, as well.

Serious games, or games which help train or educate players with a set of pragmatic skills are generally designed to strengthen existing institutional frameworks. To take epistemic games as an example, serious games are valued because of the ways in which they are able to help players realize a set of educational goals. Although James Paul Gee (2007) has famously argued that video games might be of some practical learning value (5), David Williamson Shaffer's (2006) construct of "epistemic games," or games which deliberately work to construct practical knowledge, led to a number of widely funded initiatives including GAPS (Games and Professional Simulations). GAPS is a multi-institutional think tank for the production of epistemic games which has participants at University of Wisconsin-Madison, University of Memphis, Danish School of Education, Open Universiteit Nederland, University of Georgia, Mass Audubon, and University of Massachussettes, Dartmouth, and which receives funding from The Walt Disney Company, The MacAurthor Foundation, The National Science Foundation, Wisconsin Alumni Research Foundadtion, The Foundation for Ethics and Technology, The National Academy of Education/ Spencer Foundation, and The Academic Advanced Distributed Learning Co-Laboratory ("GAPS"). Academic, government, and commercial institutions are all spending tremendous resources on the development of serious games. This spending is not without precedent, games have long been seen as tools of discipline and learning.

Part of Shaffer's work was to situate play within the history of educational institutions such as 19th and 20th century public schools. By focusing on the ways that play has been discursively aligned with disciplinary practices, learning, and the educational institution, Shaffer suggests that video games should be developed in a fashion which supports a concrete set of learning goals: specifically, these would be practical goals which are directly in-line with a set of applied, industrial, governmental, and technological socio-technical needs (15).

Shaffer is right to draw on Foucault (1977) in noting the ways in which *dispositifs* of surveillance and control transform bodies into subjects. But, while he concludes from this work that games should be designed to help players better negotiate the institutional politics of today's workforce and world, it is important to bring other lenses to this analysis as well. For this reason, this paper considers Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's (2000) concept of empire. Succinctly, empire is the juridical state of world order and capitalism is immanent to the constitution of this order (8). In other words, capitalism is a social motif that permeates most aspects of our everyday lives, and ultimately reinforces the abilities of a privileged few to decide who lives and who dies. Our present juridical order has deep ties to a history of colonialism which has disproportionately impacted Black and brown people globally. Today its ramifications are most clearly visible in the global south where global economic flows exploit the labor and resources of people and land in less affluent nations for the benefit of a wealthy global elite. How do learning aides play into the machinations of Empire? They prime the mental models of children to naturalize and take for granted militaristic discipline, racism, and the sovereignty of the nation state. This paper will scour a peculiar crime scene: early 19th century print ephemera, for clues relating the deep interconnectivity of learning, labor and play.

The early 19th century was a time of great change in the history of print. David Finkelstein and Alistair McCleery (2005) explain that because of several technological developments, such as steam power, improved transportation and standardization, the spirit of industrialization aided in a technological shift from the hand press to the mechanical press (59-60). These discursive mutations are echoed by Foucault in his discussion of discipline and construction of the school building. (172) While Foucault is keen to point out that the panoptic prison was the ultimate technology of modern discipline, he also describes

alternative architectural spaces, such as the school, and incorporates them in a discussion of discipline as well. Although they may not reflect the efficiency of discipline in the same way that the prison does, they function within the same paradigm, nonetheless. The early nineteenth century can be read as a time rife with change, invention and institutionalization.

The fundamental similarities within an era's technology can be read as a discursive formation, a sort of common thinking and understanding. Liu proposes a framework for connecting the discursive formations surrounding the technology of the 19th century and those of the present. By using Kittler's idea of discourse networks as an analytic, Liu (1999) proposes a present-day moment of stabilized and negotiated interpretation. This moment is a turn away from the romantic authority of the nineteenth century, and the radicalism of the twentieth century post-structuralist movement (81). The discourse network of today is a somewhat-static body of knowledge, negotiated through the varied interpretations and codings of network contributors in an Internet-mediated world. This is move away from decentralized structuralist and poststructuralist constructions of knowledge, which Kittler situates and associates with the rapidly changing technology of the twentieth century.

Where Liu perceives stability in mediating technologies, others perceive flexibility. Bjiker (1995), details a history of the bicycles and other technological platforms that are socially perceived as static. By providing a nuanced reading of their history, Bjiker offers examples of bicycles that have been forgotten and deformalized, leading Bjiker to argue for periods of interpretive flexibility and stabilization when exploring cases within the history of technology (84). What Liu and Bjiker have in common is a focus on trends of both stabilization and change; their methodological frameworks invite readers to examine artifacts, which were not only produced during times of social change, but also exist outside existing frameworks of interpretation. For these reasons, this paper formulates its case study, *ABC Myriorama*, as an early example of an artifact that exists at the crossroads of ergodic print media designed for artists in the early 19th century, learning aides, and empire.

Liminal spaces are those which can be constructed as borders between multiple discourses and print ephemera is one such liminal space. Joseph Monteyne emphasizes the usefulness of print ephemera when constructing counter-narratives, which react against those of the mainstream. In telling the history of the print image in eighteenth century London, he explicitly mentions the state's inability to control ephemeral print objects such as engravings etchings and single sheet images (13). This move toward ephemeral bibliography is shared by sociologist, D. F. McKenzie (1999), who advocates for its preservation based on the notion that "forms effect meaning," accounting additionally for the social aspects of print distribution and dissemination (13). These perspectives present a strong rationale toward the utility of historicizing particular ephemeral objects within the larger body of research in history of the book.

The Cotsen Children's Library

When visiting the Cotsen Children's Library in the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections at Princeton University, the visitor is met with a hallway where ancient and miniature books are encased behind sheets of glass. Next, a decorative arch leads to a courtyard where two ivy coated rabbits tower over visitors. From the courtyard, the view is humbling, intentionally dwarfing most adult pretentions. The collection was a gift from Lloyd E. Cotsen, a Neutrogena executive and Princeton alumnus. It was then passed through The Cotsen Family Foundation, whose mission statement reads: "The Cotsen Family Foundation's mission is to transform experienced and capable educators into gifted teachers. Mentoring is the strategy that successfully promotes gifted teaching in many individuals and high quality teaching in others." True to this mission, the library is host to "rare illustrated children's books, manuscripts, original artwork, prints, and educational toys from the 15th century to the present day in over thirty languages" (Immel, 2012). Although, Andrea Immel, the curator, is responsible for many new additions to

the collection, the bulk of the collection's material was collected by Cotsen who would occasionally use it to tutor his children as they grew. This hobby collection, was eventually donated to the Princeton Libraries.

Critically, upon perusing the holdings of the Cotsen archive, one must question how the Lloyd E. Cotsen had come across the vast array of learning materials in his collection. Cotsen was an alumni of Princeton College and it was there that he developed a keen interest in archeology—often taking summers off from his position at Neutrogena to participate in digs with his former colleagues in Greece (Elster, 2017). His interest in archeology, was undoubtedly built upon many of the colonialist tropes that were unchallenged in anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s. These tropes assumed an orientalist mindset wherein the assumably white European archeologist was travelling to "exotic" countries to bring knowledge of their practices back to Europe. Reflecting on Cotsen's background, it should come as no surprise that a number of the holdings in the Cotsen archive feature prominently these same colonialist tropes.

The historian Jill Shfrin's (2009) work has been particularly helpful in connecting the archives in Princeton to the larger context of material, economic, and bibliographic history of educational aides published in London by the Dartons. Shefrin makes note of the historical scope of educational aids in eighteenth and nineteenth century London, explaining that their distribution was limited not only to the elite, but to broader sectors of middle and lower class education (2). Importantly, Shefrin attributes the lack of scholarly research on these artifacts to the rough and tumble wear and tear of juvenile culture, and repeated use. One can elicit from Shefrin's work, that the learning aides which I examine in this chapter had a relatively wide circulation in their countries of origin.

The Aesthetics of ABC Myriorama

What is a mystery without a hook? For me, the hook which drew me into the Cotsen archive was a set of rectangles entitled *ABC Myriorama* (Figure 1). In these illustrations, the order of everyday nineteenth century life is laid out, and juxtaposed upon both the order of the alphabet (language) and numbers (mathematics). The combination of these three orders detail an educational tool that helps children to understand the alphabet alongside an ideal ordering of society.

Figure 1 ABC Myriorama. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

Waving in cards C and F are horizontally striped flags, red above white, above blue, a Dutch configuration, which is consistent with Benedict Anderson's theories regarding the maintenance of empire through print culture. For Anderson (1994), the nation-state exists, in part, because of the ways that print media constructs and discusses it in publication (4). Therefore symbols of nationalism, such as the Dutch flag, relate to the ways that the nation was imagined by both the media's producer, and the cultural contexts in which the media was consumed. One of these flags is placed atop a house in a city by the sea while the other is mounted atop the highest mast of a midsized Dutch frigate, perhaps representing the nationalist constructions of state, empire and commerce.

Cards F, G, H and T feature military figures, identifiable through their uniforms, mounts, bayonets and batons. These figures patrol the landscape, occasionally interacting with one another, but functioning more as a presence, and providing an ordered, symbolic unity to the set. When the ergodic nature of these cards is emphasized, and their order is shuffled - the narrative unity of the set is jeopardized. The figures on cards F and G (Figure 2) then no longer point at the other, instead they point at whatever they then sit next to. In a sequence beginning with G, on the right, and ending with F, on the left, the soldiers cease to point at anything; the images play spatially in their own world.

Figure 2 ABC Myriorama, Cards 5-8. Note how in cards F and G the soldiers point at one another, establishing a narrative continuity between the frames. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

The images of the *ABC Myriorama* are limited, in form, by the ways they must relate to one another. This meta-structure restricts the images to a discourse of narrative consistency. Arranged sequentially, the scenery is made to connect at nine standardized points along the sides of the image (Figure 3). First is a point that dissects the print text at the bottom from the illustration above. Second is a point that mediates the dark green foliage at the bottom from the light green grass in the foreground. Third is a point mediating the light green grass and the light brown dirt road. Fourth, the road again turns to grass, of a blue-green shade as the near background begins. This background soon becomes blue water at the fifth point of intersection. At point six, the water becomes a green island. Then point seven dissects the island from the water again. After point eight, the far background begins – a panorama of islands and mountains in the distance. This is finally intersected at the ninth and final point, where the mountains meet the sky. Society is depicted within these boundaries, within static images where nothing

ever changes. These systematic common points of landscape link the narrative and contribute a sense of fluidity and congruence between the pictures. Because the landscape flows together well, regardless of order, users of *ABC Myriorama* are allotted a familiar control over which images to visit, minus the agency to change and affect things within the images themselves.

Figure 3 ABC Myriorama, Cards 22-23. Included in this image is a numerical list of the points detailed on pp. 11-12, which illustrate a visual tactic of establishing narrative continuity within the formal confines of ergodic text. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

This interactivity can be read as a form of what Hardt and Negri call *machinic subjectivity*, where "the multitude not only uses machines to produce, but also becomes increasingly machinic itself, as the means of production are increasingly integrated into the minds and bodies of the multitude" (Hardt and Negri, 2000, 406). While rearranging alphabet cards, and/or myrioramas, users produce words, landscapes, and, most crucially, worlds to imagine, share, and cohabitate. Though this is a far cry from the interactivity evinced by today's digital machinery, it is important to note the ways in which there remains a definitive

likeness - these are not chaotic and haphazard worlds; there remains a definitive social order.

Depicting a pastoral landscape, only card S features a site of disturbance. In this image, a man with a rake and a man with a crop wave them in the air at another man who extends his hand while walking away. Judging from the similarities of dress, these men hold a common occupation. While evidence that not all is perfect in this society, there is a clear benefit to conformity. Breaking out of the prescribed order of labor results in discomfort, argument, and possibly even harm. This point is supported in other frames depicting labor, where people have the space to work peacefully with one another, contributing to both their own and societies greater welfare. There are no less than thirteen occupations explored in the images on these cards. Soldier, being the most common, with nine participants accounting for the influence of the state over societal order. Only travelers outnumber soldiers, the jobless or transient; twelve individuals move through or loiter in the cards with light baggage, barely interacting with the landscape and scenery.

The travelers on card W discuss the signpost before them as they depart from an inn on the countryside. The theme of play is particularly poignant as well; the only people not traveling or working are those playing, either with kites (card V), on horses (card C), or on a bridge (card B). Work and play are entangled as binary representations of a society that is both haptic and ordered.

These symbolic constructions hold vast theoretical implications. Gay (2002) constructs the Victorian middle-class as a space of opportunity in a political system traditionally controlled and directed by bourgeois interests (14-16). Print ephemera however, is recast by Monteyne (2007), as a space where unilateral political interests were often challenged by small-run printings distributed in oppositional political networks. Because of the opportunities afforded by ephemeral spaces for resistance, it is interesting to note that *ABC Myriorama* presents such strong symbolic tropes of nationalism, order and empire. By contextualizing it within a larger body of educational ephemera including alternate myrioramas and alphabetical learning aides, *ABC Myriorama* is, in fact, a technological site of stabilization, one that exemplifies the convergence of several ephemeral educational tools within the geographical contexts of nation and the ideological confines of empire.

Comparisons to Other Ephemeral Print

The Myriorama Form

ABC Myriorama is a particularly useful example of a historical space where literacy, play and narrative stabilize and intersect. In order to contextualize *ABC Myriorama* within the circulation of Victorian educational tools, it is important to visit other contemporary aids. Because of the ephemeral nature of Cotsen's holdings, bibliographic information is often incomplete. However, by examining several related pieces of print ephemera, several clues can be identified and then used to provide the socio-historical context for this project. In particular *The Juvenile Myriorama* and *Myriorama* help better round out the historical uses of the myriorama form. Other sets of alphabet cards, and similar alphabetical aids will be visited in order to unify and describe the symbolic tropes identified within *ABC Myriorama*.

The Juvenile Myriorama, published around the 1840s, contained brief descriptive text on the back of its box: "This little work is beautifully adapted for young persons who display a taste for the fine arts; and as it is capable of forming an endless variety of landscape views, will supersede the necessity of a number of drawing books." Although both sets of cards serve different ends, this and the *ABC Myriorama* are compositionally similar

Consisting of thirteen landscape cards and one cover card that contains publishing information, *The Juvenile Myriorama* (Figure 4) holds no particular relationship to the alphabet. The landscape cards again lock together with a consistent gradient of colors, this time with a greater attention to depth in the foreground. There remain only four points of intersection, one between the sky and the clouds, another between the clouds and the mountain, a third between the mountains and the near-background and lastly

one between the near-background and foreground. There is a greater amount of flexibility to the scenery arrangements because of this, although the background still frames a linear and congruent mountain range, the foreground allows for a greater space of emergence within the set. None of the cards are mutually referential, further distancing the symbols in this set from the concrete and linear symbolism exemplified by *ABC Myriorama*. As the reverse of the box mentions, users are encouraged to think about the thousands of combinations this set of cards affords, not the finite and stable logic of alphabetical order.

Figure 4 The Juvenile Myriorama, All cards are shown, except for the publisher's card. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

Another myriorama exists in the Cotsen archives, simply titled *Myriorama: Collection of Many Thousand Landscapes*. Published in London, 1824 by Samuel Leigh. This collection depicts on its cover a framed myriorama, clearly dived along the vertical separations between the cards. At the top of the box there is an image of an easel with a half-painted landscape, and on the bottom, there is a woman painting a landscape at an easel. These depictions correspond with the description on the back of *The Juvenile Myriorama* explaining that these card sets were devised as educational aids for artists, not beginning readers. Artists who were interested in depicting a variety of landscapes, but couldn't afford to travel could purchase myrioramas to practice, mastering their craft, from the domestic space of the home.

Compositionally, *Myriorama* (Figure 5) differs slightly from the other two examples – two grey bars frame it, one atop the image and one below. Within the frame, however, lie four points: before every scene is a layer of lush foliage that intersects at a point with the foreground. The foreground is eventually intersected by a river, which is later intersected by a mountain, which yields again to the sky. The people depicted in the various frames are all formally dressed, except for one man tending a fire in the wilderness. Furthermore, the landscape is even less static than in *The Juvenile Myriorama*, and often there occur unpredictable shifts in the terrain between frames. There is an order to these cards; they are numbered one to sixteen on the lower grey stripe. Even though there is a prescribed order to these cards, they contain no references to one another apart from the continuity establishing frame points. The numeric

order simply establishes an original sequence – an idealized frame of reference for the landscape.

Figure 5 Myriorama, Cards 14-16. Note the small numbers centered in the bottom border. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

ABC Myriorama works to educate its users in the ordering of the alphabet, while *The Juvenile Myriorama* and *Myriorama* intend to provide their audience with a set of landscapes to paint. This framework of linear points helps to couch the formal properties of the myriorama within a narrative context of linearity. The more points of reference offered between images, the greater the rigidity of the narrative hold. The variable structures presented in *The Juvenile Myriorama* and *Myriorama* are game-like in their non-linear positioning of narrative, featuring only four points of continuity. Interpretively, *ABC Myriorama* differs, containing nine points. This more stable construction of narrative is manifest in an ideal linear format, where the order of the alphabet and numbers, is part of the mechanism through which *ABC Myriorama* educates.

Other Alphabet Cards

Shefrin traces a historical precedent to *ABC Myriorama*, "The earliest surviving cards definitely not based on playing cards are those published in 1743 (or possibly earlier) by Benjamin Collins of Salisbury under the title *A Set of Squares, Newly Invented for the Use of Children*" (37). Benjamin Collins was an important figure in eighteenth century London specifically because of how his invention of alphabet cards establishes a frame of reference through which play can be understood as a learning tool. Although Shefrin traces the practice of combining images and letters in learning aids to Erasmus, it is Collins who turned this practice into a game with his set of squares.

Conveniently packaged with this set of cards is a set of instructions, *Directions for Playing with A Set of Squares, Newly invented for the Use of Children.* This rare set of directions, presents a unique link between practices of education and play. Collins' *Set of Squares* marks a concrete trace in the archeology of play, connecting John Locke's treatise *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* to the dissemination and practice of ergodic learning techniques today.

Citing this work on education, Collins describes the utility of presenting the alphabet as a matter of play:

> The Reader will observe, that Mr. Locke all along wou'd persuade Parents, to cheat their

Chilfren, as it were, into learning; and for that Purpose, he says the Child should not know but the Play he is put on is practiced by grown Persons for their Entertainment. Now my Method will answer the Purpose without any Deception at all, it being so contrived as to yield Amusement and Recreation even to the Learned, And if grown Persons, such as Parents and Nurses of Children, would set themselves about some innocent Games on these Squares, instead of playing at Cards, they would find their Children very eager and ready to share in their Diversions; whereby they would not only learn to Spell, Read, Write, cast up Figures, &'c. but likewise get this principal Maxims of Morality and Prudence at the same Time, and think themselves obliged into the Bargain. If this Method were constantly practiced by Parents or Nurses, yet not so as to make their Children weary, or indifferent about it, 'tis inconceivable what Progress might be made by Boys and Girls in their Reading, almost as soon as they gave learnt to speak[1]. (15-17)

Collins posits that his method of education through play is sufficiently exciting, to appeal to people as a form of casual entertainment, as well as to provide an essential learning tool for children learning to read. This is an important point in that it highlights the ways in which these educational aids were intended to serve as diversions for adults and children alike. There is also a theme of morality throughout this quote, recurring in most sets of alphabet cards from the period. Although little is known about Collins as a historical figure, Cotsen houses several of his other publications including *The Royal Primer*, a textbook written in the service of King George II (King of England from 1727-1760), which details several analytic charts which could be mobilized to serve as learning aides for educators. Emphasized in this material history of publishing, the ideas Collins proposed were designed for the royal family. The pamphlet, *Directions for Playing With a Set of Squares*, is archived in its seventh edition, implying a wide scope of distribution. Not only was Collins' set of alphabet cards, published, updated and republished, there are also several other sets marketed as educational ephemera which contained the same visual and organizational characteristics as Collins' original.

On the back of the pamphlet, Collins describes the games to be played with his *Set of Squares*. The idea is fairly simple, a collective sort of *Scrabble*. The deck of cards consists of the alphabet, which is later dealt to the various players. Then, one at a time, the players place letters in sequence until a word is spelled. The player who spells the word, earns a point and collects the letters. After all the players exhaust the contents of their hands, they are encouraged to earn bonus points by spelling words with the various permutations of letters in their collection – much like the *Junior Jumble* in the newspaper. There is also an interactive aspect to the game where the other players are encouraged to criticize the words proposed in this bonus round. Points are deducted when words are spelled incorrectly. (19-24) Although the game-like aspects of Collins' invention would later be forgotten (at least in this form) as alphabet cards passed through many formal mutations, several visual tropes are borrowed from Collin's original formula.

Essential here is the combination of image, letter, and "Maxim of Morality." The images, generally prints, repurposed through woodcut from Comenius', *Orbis Sensualim Pictus*, or The Visible World in Pictures, the first picture book assembled specifically for children. This paper contends that the "Maxims of Morality" articulated in Collins' cards, poached from *Orbis Sensualim Pictus*, are also generally reiterated through the visual signifiers and images that accompany all alphabet cards, even those without text. For example in, *A Set of Squares*, Collins writes that B, "Was a *Bomb*, by which Thousands were slain" (Figure 6). This cautionary tale serves to reaffirm the place of military in society and is revisited in *ABC Myriorama*, on several cards where military is depicted.

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[1] The "f"'s in this passage have been updated to "s"'s in order to make it more accessible for the reader.

Figure 6 A Set of Squares, Card 2, B. The text reads, "Was a Bomb, by which Thousands were slain." Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

Furthermore, the French collection, *Alphabet Militarie*, published in the early nineteenth century, considers this in more detail. The whole set is devoted to the alphabetization of military images, published during the cultural impact of Napoleon. The box art (Figure 7), depicts a soldier seated under a tree, helping a little girl to read with the help of *Alphabet Militarie* cards.

Figure 7 Alphabet Militarie, Close up of the box art. Notice the card in the young girl's hand. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

Alphabet, a set designed for the wealthy, features illustrations accented with gold leaf and also includes several cards that reference the military. On the reverse side of a card (Figure 8) depicting several soldiers marching through snow it reads, "The **soldiers** march on/ Through **snow** and ice,/ And then if one dies --/ Well, then he is gone."[2] Because of this set's cultural position as an aide for the wealthy, a different attitude is adopted toward the military. For the wealthy, a soldiers post was dangerous; the figures on the card are discussed in a distanced tone where soldiers are made to be faceless and their deaths inconsequential.
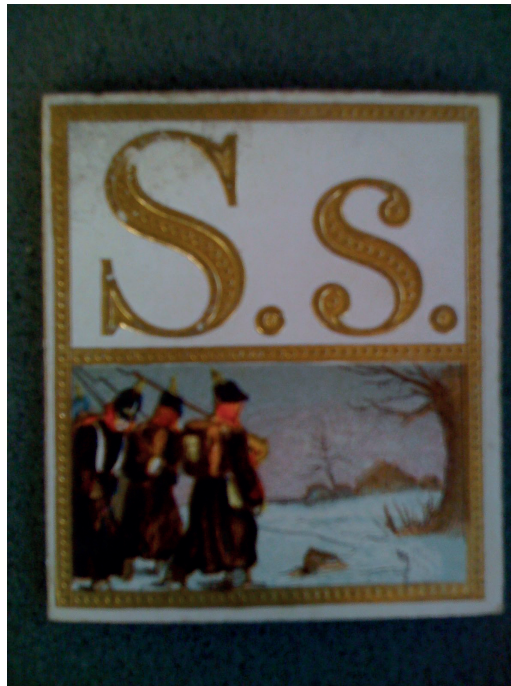

Figure 8 Alphabet, Card S. Notice the gold leaf paint around the borders of this card. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

Other moral tropes are considered across various sets of cards as well. Perhaps, the most clearly political of the cards is K, "Was a *King*, who was honest and good." Collins, who published educational aids for the king, was aware of his audience. Depicting the King's virtue in an alphabet card, surely helped to coax the consistent employ of the monarchy. This maxim is repeated in an alphabetical puzzle, *Inhabitants of the GLOBE displayed in Alphabetical Order*, where the K piece (Figure 9) features King George III seated atop a horse, elevated from the ground. Even when a king is not depicted however, country is always featured. Indicative of the time's political climate, many European nations were then becoming constitutional republics, maintaining the flag and its colors as national signifiers while abandoning the iconography of the king. *Alphabet*, features an E card that begins, "Old **England** is a mighty land . . ."[3]

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[2] Emphases in original

[3] Emphases in original

Figure 9 Inhabitants of the GLOBE displaying in alphabetical order, Close up on K. Reproduced with permission of the Princeton University Library.

Myriorama, also features people dressed in red, white and blue strolling below a similarly colored union jack. The "Maxims and Morals" help to situate all these sets of cards, (including *ABC Myriorama*, with its depictions of nation, military, and travel) within the context of technological change, and showcase how several ideological tropes have become so commonly utilized that they eventually cease to require text within their textual depictions and representations. Part of the argument presented is that although ephemeral, the educational aids examined within this paper are part of a process of educational institutionalization, which holds vast consequences for the social constructions of state and country.

Politics and Literacy in Ergodic Poetics

When the user of *ABC Myriorama* is made to choose between two binary poles of work and play, they enter into a discourse that is presumed to stand forever the same. Fundamentally, the ergodic components of the set seem designed, as Collins explained, to transparently lure children into the practice of play, from which the positive effects of learning would take hold. This is an important point to consider in the context of Foucault's discussion of discipline. The process of discipline is historically paired with observation. It is through the application of surveillance that power is displaced from the body, within the apparatus of the institution (170-171). This displacement of power is constructed as an aptitude, a reward, for mastery of the discipline. Literacy, then, can be constructed in terms of a Foucauldian discipline. When children are taught to read, they become reoriented within the discourse of literacy, which requires that power be constructed in terms of the discipline's mastery. There is a devious Catch-22 here: to become literate means not only to enter into a social order, but also to understand the *play*, innate in writing… configuring…reordering.

Within the discourse of literacy lies another discussion specifically relating to the methods used to teach literacy. In the examples provided, play and work are the binary limits of this discourse, each

holding a productive tension to the other, through which language emerges. This paper argues that in the process of acclimating to language, there is a secondary discussion of empire, play and labor, prescribed simultaneously. This idea is referred to by Shaffer, a leading advocate of computer games as educational tools, in his deconstruction of school as the hidden curriculum, "lessons that students take away from school about how they should act in the world and about what it means to think and to learn" (36). The hidden curriculum of the *ABC Myriorama* is a linear discussion of society and progress. No matter how the cards are reconfigured or interpreted, they posit the same messages about society. People who belong in these frames, either work or play, there is no place in these images for those who do neither.

In *ABC Myriorama*, missing are the letters Q and X. These letters, in the Dutch alphabet, are for borrowed words. By removing them from an educational aide, it is clear exactly how nationality is preserved in these bits of print ephemera, and how secondary cultures are screened out. Collins, having removed j and v from the main set of letters, attributes the difference in learning curve to the difference between the Roman and Italic alphabets, the Italic being secondary to the Roman.

Within *ABC Myriorama* belies a discourse of pre-industrial discipline updated by today's modern electronic educational aids. The child consumer was then, and is still, constructed as a disinterested subject that needs to be tricked into literacy. Within literacy lies socialization; the information tools which aid learning become the formal confines of work and play. The play and labor in *ABC Myriorama* is defined by an ergodic system, which offers the user a limited sense of control over a fixed and finite narrative reiteration of the Dutch alphabet. The technological limitations of computer mediated education delineate a twenty-first century shift in the technology of education. As play and labor become increasingly ambiguous, they run parallel to the increasing necessity of literacy in an information society.

So where do these themes persist? Nick Dyer-Witheford and Greig de Peuter (2009) have detailed in their book *Games of Empire* the many ways that the machinations of empire have crept into often commonplace video games like Grand Theft Auto, America's Army and World of Warcraft. Lost in what often becomes an overly-nihilistic tome, is the first, and primary connection between empire and literacy.

As children play at reading, they become literate subjects accustomed to the play of recreation, labor, transportation and commerce in the written world. Although there may now be a lapse in nationalism amongst these pedagogic tools today, thankfully absent are the offensive images depicting "negros," "Indians" and "Chinese" ("with unsmoothed tail," taken from *Alphabet*), there persist themes of empire which help to sculpt the mental models of children learning how to navigate letters, words objects, and meaning in the world. These children learn to associate play with the politics of empire in a world that still reproduces colonial hierarchies in a way that exploits Black and brown people globally.

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