

We.
(hand)Write.
Words.



*April 20th, 2020,
La Souterraine*

(hand) e.
rite.
ords.

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E. (hand) RITE. ORDS

Research work in design.

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summary

The race for technological progress is sweeping us away and generating a decline, even a disappearance of certain skills. In the age of screens and keyboards, writing by hand is no longer obvious. We are further and further away from interactions with the material world. While handwriting becomes more and more neglected, and leads to the abandonment of paper correspondence, we must encourage a return to manual activity. Write to express yourself, reveal yourself, discover yourself, bond, meet, share, this is what must be highlighted and rehabilitated in our daily lives, in order to bring back singularity and involvement into the act of writing, which has become easy and commonplace in the digital age.

Let's write with our bodies to recreate concrete and lasting links. The materiality of these exchanges can accompany us and constitute our history. This thesis shows the benefits of handwriting and paper correspondence, and explores how product design can play a part in their preservation. But how can design make you want to write?

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Handwriting practice lines on the left page, consisting of 20 horizontal dashed blue lines.

Handwriting practice lines on the right page, consisting of 20 horizontal dashed blue lines.

introduction

Is handwriting doomed to disappear? Is it useless today, in the age of digital technology and technological progress? Here are the questions that represent the starting point of my design research. These questions refer to strong notions like «the disappearance» or «the uselessness» of a practice and may seem too radical. However, if we take a closer look at our habits, we can notice that they are definitely relevant.

Handwriting certainly still has a few years to live, its disappearance is not imminent, but, step by step, it is being gradually abandoned. If we take the example of school, we can see that some countries, like the United States or Finland, have crossed a line and abandoned cursive writing in favor of script writing in printed letters. This choice was made because it seems it would make it easier for children to learn and, therefore, would give them more time to learn how to use a computer keyboard. And today, the use of technology at school is more and more encouraged, even for the younger children. Thereafter, we can also notice that, at work, adults are required to write using increasingly efficient machines.

In this context, should we restore the taste for writing by designating it as essential knowledge and practice for the future?

If we take a closer look at the subject, we realize that giving up handwriting also leads to neglecting other related practices. Among them, we can mention the practice of paper correspondence. Today we can very easily chat with someone on the other side of the world, and this, instantly. Information technology has completely transformed the way we communicate.

This is also why the new means of communication give an «outdated» aspect to handwritten letters and postcards. But is it really the same thing? Do we have the same pleasure when receiving a letter or a text message? Do we pay as much attention to it? Do we get as involved in its writing? In order to show the richness of a letter-writing relationship, we have to understand and highlight what this practice offers that cannot be found through technology.

Should we then reintegrate effort and involvement into communication -which is today facilitated and immediate- with paper correspondence in order to enhance our exchanges? In the era of screens and instantaneousness, is a designer likely to rehabilitate the work of the body and the notion of slowness? Wouldn't this also be an opportunity to offer a new image and impetus to these handwriting and paper correspondence practices? •



© Léa Sabrié

Write
yourself

an evolution of writing tools

Throughout history, an evolution in writing tools and supports has been observed. There were, for example, the calame¹ on a clay tablet or on papyrus, the hammer and chisel to engrave the stone, the metallic styli² on wax tablets, the quill feathers on parchment, the metallic nib on paper. We can notice that the search for mobility, the desire to get out of the office, led to using smaller paper formats and creating mobile tools. It is certainly for this reason that the fountain pen with ink cartridges replaced the pen holder, and that, later, ballpoint pens and felts became widespread.

However, as we can see, the evolution of writing tools and supports has followed the logic of the development of our industrial societies. Today, they are mass produced and not very eco-friendly.

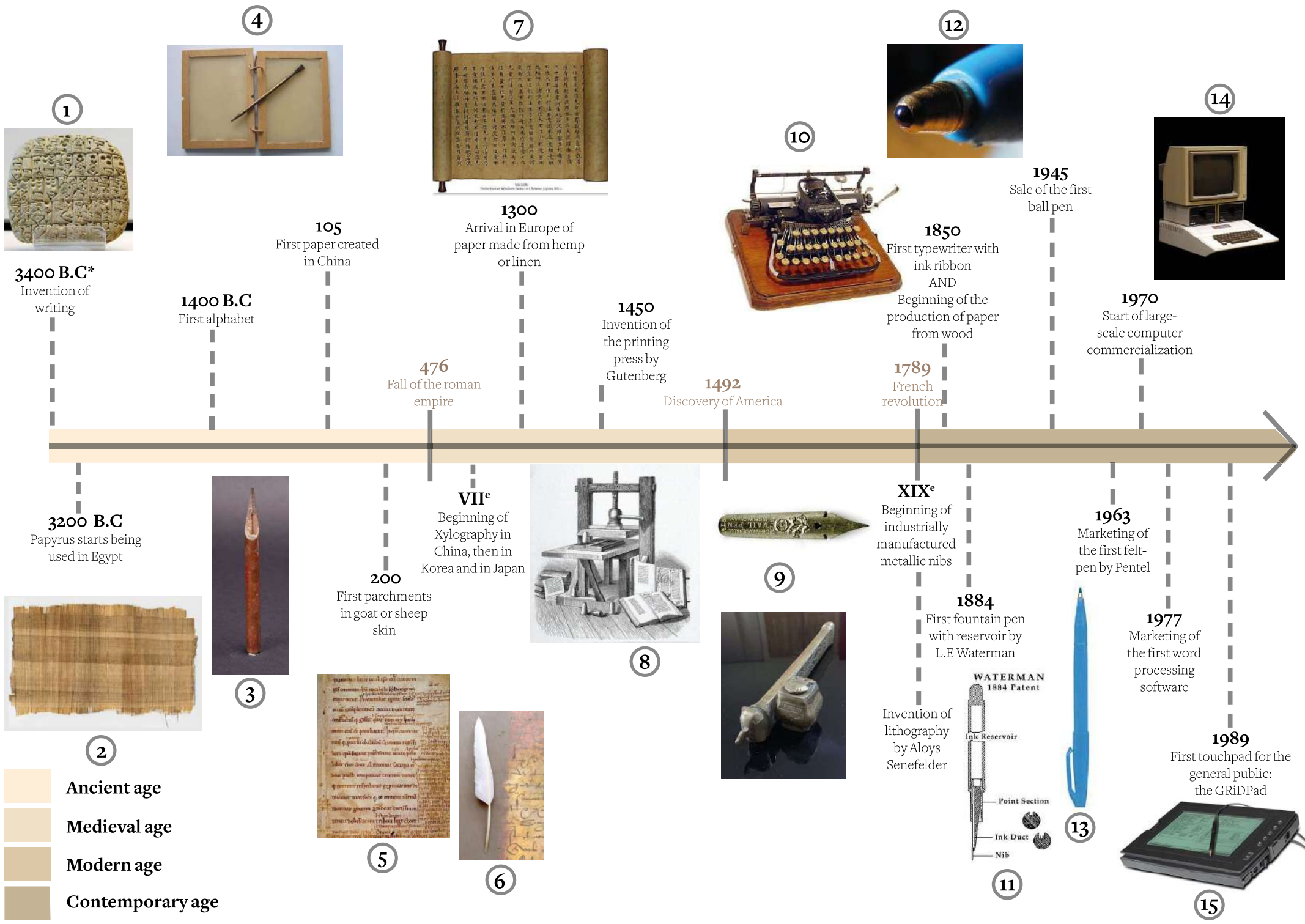
Indeed, pens have become disposable, thus mirroring our consumer society, and consist essentially of plastic and chemical ink. Paper is now full of chemical additives, although it tends to be increasingly recycled and recyclable. A fountain pen is infinitely refillable and, even if the disposable plastic ink cartridges and their composition can be pointed, it has the advantage of having a less limited lifespan. •

The evolution of writing tools and supports testify to a continuity in practice despite technical evolutions. This continuity, particularly in the gesture, lasted until the invention of the typewriter and current digital tools. Indeed these, with the keyboard, brought a new way of writing. In addition to the movement, now concentrated in the fingers, these tools also transform handwriting into typographic writing. Touch pads allow us to keep the gesture of handwriting and translate it digitally. However, our relationship with the writing tool and medium changes. In addition, the feeling when we write is different because the surfaces and materials change. Yet, even with these tablets, we most often use the touch keyboard. With a keyboard, whether a letter is written once or 100 times it will always remain the same.

Until today writing has been the trace of a body. We can then ask ourselves if digital writing is not less personal, and therefore more standardized. •

...

1. Bevel cut reed
2. This tool had two sides. It allowed on one side to trace, and on the other, thanks to a palette, to erase



* B.C : Before Christ

- 1 Mesopotamian clay tablet with cuneiform writing marked with triangular calame
- 2 Piece of papyrus
- 3 Calame bevelled with split point to retain ink
- 4 Wax tablets with metallic styli
- 5 Parchment sheet
- 6 Cut goose feather
- 7 Japanese roll of hemp-based paper
- 8 Printing press of the Medieval Ages
- 9 Ottoman metallic nib and pen holder with inkwell from the 19th century
- 10 Blickensderfer typewriter model created by George Canfield Blickensderfer in 1892. (model 3)
- 11 First fountain pen with reservoir developed by Lewis Edson Waterman and whose patent was deposited on February 12, 1884
- 12 Close-up on the tip of a ball-pen
- 13 Pentel felt-pen
- 14 Personal computer Apple II from Apple, 1977.
- 15 GRiDPad with its stylus, touch pad created by GRiD Systems Corporation.

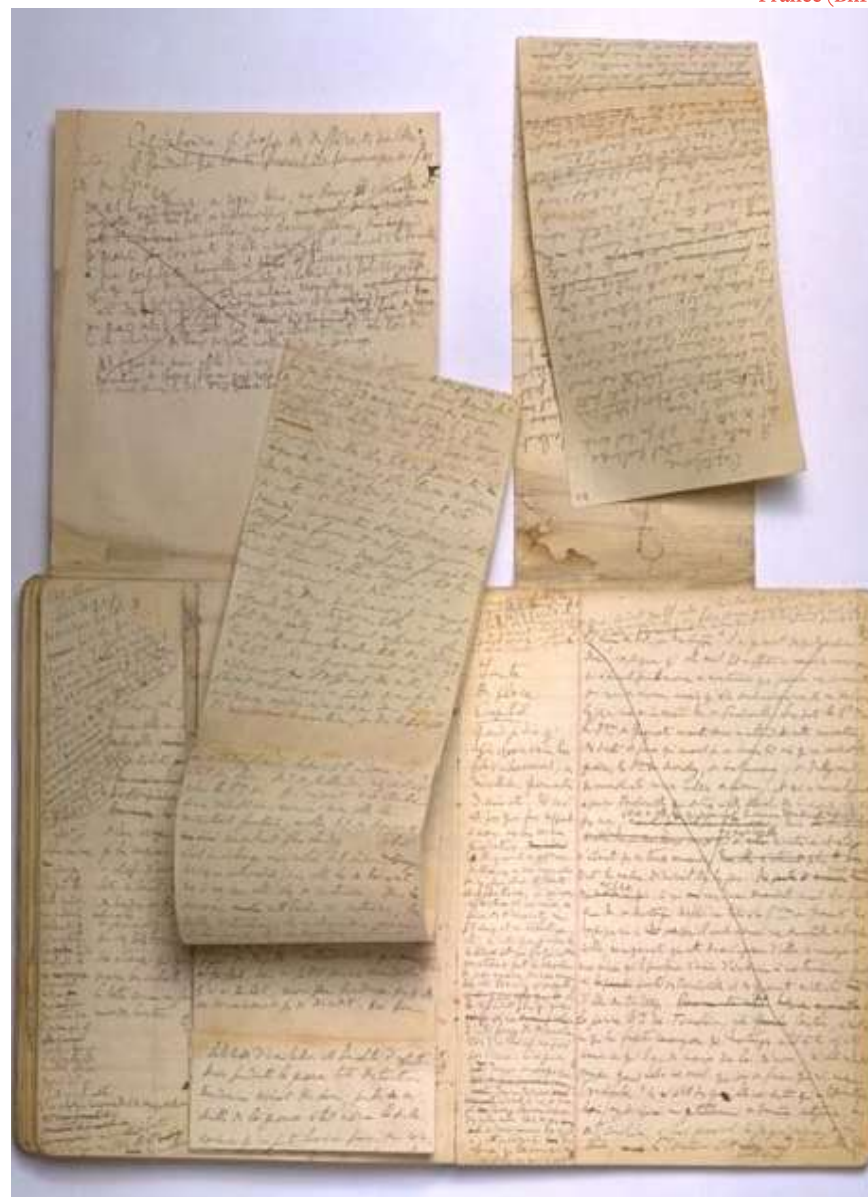
a means of individual expression

A handwriting can be recognized among others and associated with a person. The author's manuscripts could, for example, testify to the writer's psychological and physical states, such as Jean Cocteau's *Opium* written in rehab. It is thus possible to better understand the path of the author's thought, which is not always fluid and linear. Marcel Proust's manuscripts also bear witness to this with their numerous "paperolles", which he stuck on his notebooks to make additions to his stories. We then understand that a personal relationship is developing between the author and the writing space offered to him. The author appropriates it and transforms it according to his needs, while avoiding constraints. These manuscripts are an extension of the authors' bodies and sensitivities.

An author's manuscript is like the sketches of a designer who lets expresses an idea that he may later give up, rework or develop using software, for example. However, the use of software such as CAD (Computer Aided Design) should not replace drawing. The use we make of it should not replace experience, learning and participation. ●

MARCEL PROUST
Le Temps retrouvé (1927)
autograph manuscript
NAF 16691, 16697.

© Bibliothèque nationale de
France (BnF)





The best ways to hold a pen :

1. Dynamic tripod
2. Dynamic quadripod

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Therefore, it seems that writing offers to a writer a form of freedom regarding both the form and content. But writing was born from standardized learning that the body has to comply with. It is a practice whose goal, at school, was to discipline the body and the spirit. As Michel Foucault³ explains, initially the goal of handwriting is to acquire a general attitude. In his book, he highlights that it is a comprehensive highly codified involvement of the body. Today, learning to handwrite is less strict. And, the most important thing in the learning of this practice is how to hold the pen⁴. A tool mishandling can cause cramps, fatigue, slowness, and a loss of handwriting quality.

But, when these bases are acquired, the codes can be reinvented in order to develop a method to suit each individual, and give rise to specific and singular manual writings. But, to achieve this fulfillment in practice, it requires a total commitment of the body and a long training. •

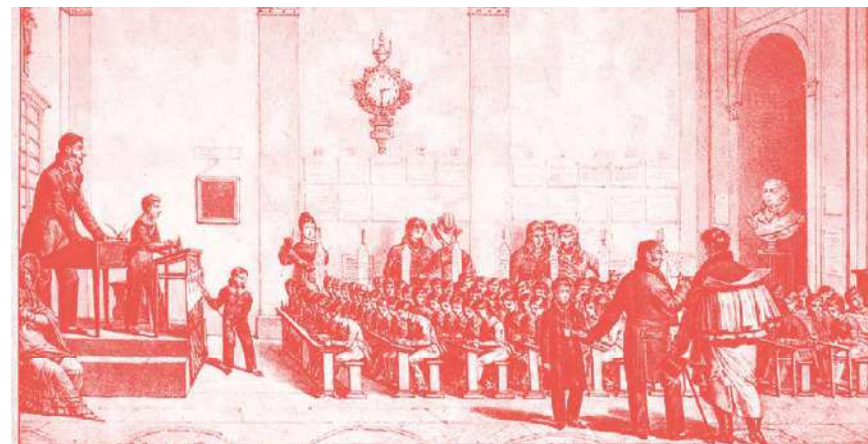
3. Lateral tripod
4. Lateral quadripod

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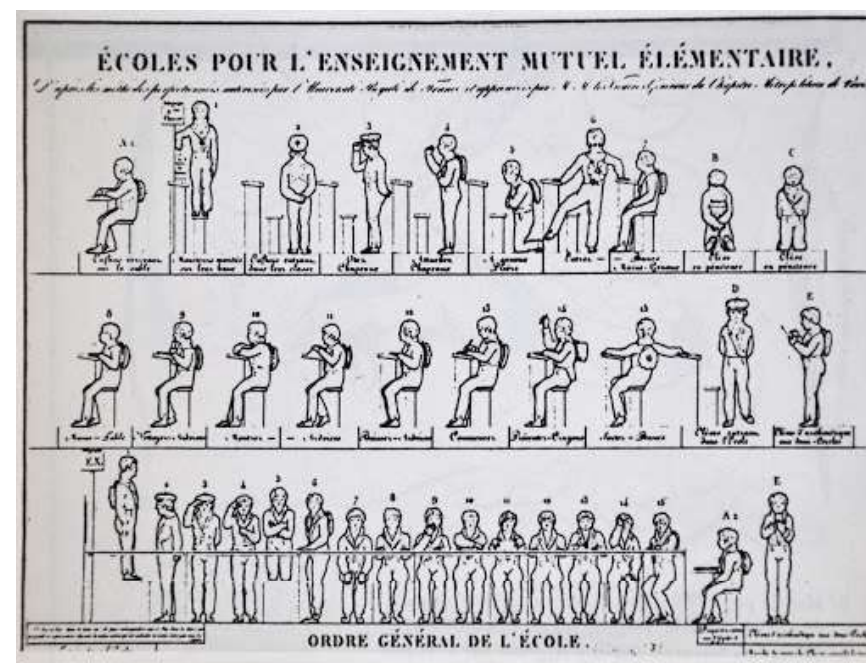
3. Michel Foucault, French philosopher, *Surveiller et Punir* (1975)
4. The three-fingers (tripod) or four-fingers (quadripod) positions are considered the most effective for handling the handwriting tool.



Interior of the School of Mutual Education,
at the time of handwriting lesson.

Lithography

© H. Lecomte,
1818.



handwriting and capacity development

Writing is the result of a movement of the hand, wrist, arm and shoulder. It's not just about writing, but having our body write. Writing is a skill that we acquire through practice. Manual work, indeed, requires a deep commitment and effort. Yet, manual activity nowadays seems devalued compared to intellectual work. However, writing involves both the body and the mind because it is a work of content and form.

Manual activities require mastery of the body by gestures, and development of knowledge and know-how through experience.

And, as Matthew Crawford⁵ says, to acquire this experience, you have to be focused, face the difficulty, try, make mistakes and start again. Both its learning and his practice admits error. For Laurent Degos⁶, error is not something that must absolutely be avoided or dreaded. According to him, it is a wandering that allows us to keep moving forward. Today, with digital tools, error no longer holds the same place because erasing becomes very easy, and our tools correct or underline our mistakes. We can think that we are becoming more and more dependent on these tools. Michel Serres⁷ thinks that computers offer great possibilities. For him, they free our brains to allow us to be creative. And so, according to him, we should accept that certain skills become obsolete. Is this the case of handwriting? Today, we are less involved because we live in a world that tends to

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5. Matthew Crawford American philosopher and repairer of motorcycles, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry Into the Value of Work*, (2009).
6. Laurent Degos, hematology professor at the University of Paris, *L'éloge de l'erreur*, (2013)
7. Michel Serres, French philosopher, *Petite Poucette*, (2012)

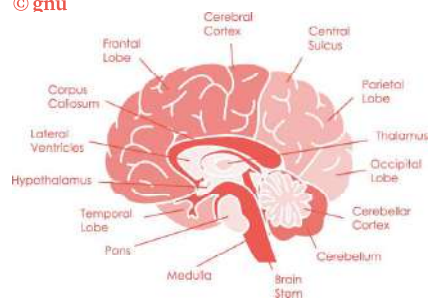
facilitate and accelerate everything. We get us used to instantaneity thanks to new information technology (IT) tools.. Is it a good thing? Do we really have to abandon practices like handwriting because they require time and effort? Yet, writing is a mode of expression that allows us to develop our body and our mind. •

Handwriting puts the body into action. Movement is what links man and tool. His hand is, moreover, man's first tool. And, handwriting increases the hand's precision because it develops the fine motor skills. Psychologist Sandra Sülzenbrück⁸, has shown that those who write often by hand have more dexterity and are faster than those who write on the keyboard. But, if we don't write for a long time, this motor skills vanishes. This is what is happening today with many adults who use exclusively the keyboard in their professional life. When they have to return to handwriting, it can be uncomfortable and they can feel pain after a few minutes. So, giving up handwriting could decrease the motor skills of our hands. Yet, this gesture of writing, in addition to developing our dexterity, also helps to stimulates our kinesthetic memory. Marieke Longcamp⁹ has shown that when we learn a new letter by hand, and we try to remember it, a larger part of our brain activates, because we mentally rewind the movement. The gesture helps to remember.

...

8. Sandra Sülzenbrück is a German psychologist specializing in business, sports, cognitive and experimental psychology
9. Marieke Longcamp is a research professor at the University of Aix-Marseille specializing in psychomotricity and cognitive neuroscience. She studied the cognitive and neural bases of writing and typing in adults and children.

© gnu



Frontal lobes.: They participate in higher mental functions, such as memory. They are related to handwriting, speaking, movement, and reflection, among others.

Parietal lobes: They interpret words and language and are therefore important for handwriting.

Temporal lobes: Writing something by hand activates many cells in these lobes.

Occipital lobes: They receive and process visual information. They therefore help us to read and handwrite by recognizing words, shapes and colors.

Writing by hand has a strong link with memory. Handwriting also activates our working memory. Timothy Smoker¹⁰, a psychology professor, showed in an experiment that when we write by hand, we memorize more information than when we use a keyboard. But it goes further, others pieces of research show that handwriting also stimulates thinking, improves learning, and helps to reading by facilitating the recognition of letters. •

Handwriting is a practice which has developed over time, but which also makes it possible to develop our own human capacities. It has a very personal dimension. But, by its materiality, handwriting can also be a link between different people and become more collective. It is also a medium of exchange.

• • •

10. Timothy Smoker is Psychology professor at the University of Florida in Orlando

Write
to each other

individual and collective history

Correspondence was a means of understanding or learning more about a given period, certain events or even on great figures who marked history, insofar as it can take on a more personal aspect. But, it can also be part of our personal history. The materiality of handwriting makes it able to withstand time. The letters can then, have a historical value. First of all, it's a heritage that can be collective. For example, the combatants' letters during the two world wars, made it impossible to understand the daily life of soldiers. Even today, they allow the generations, who did not experience the war, to realize the impact of this event on those who lived it.

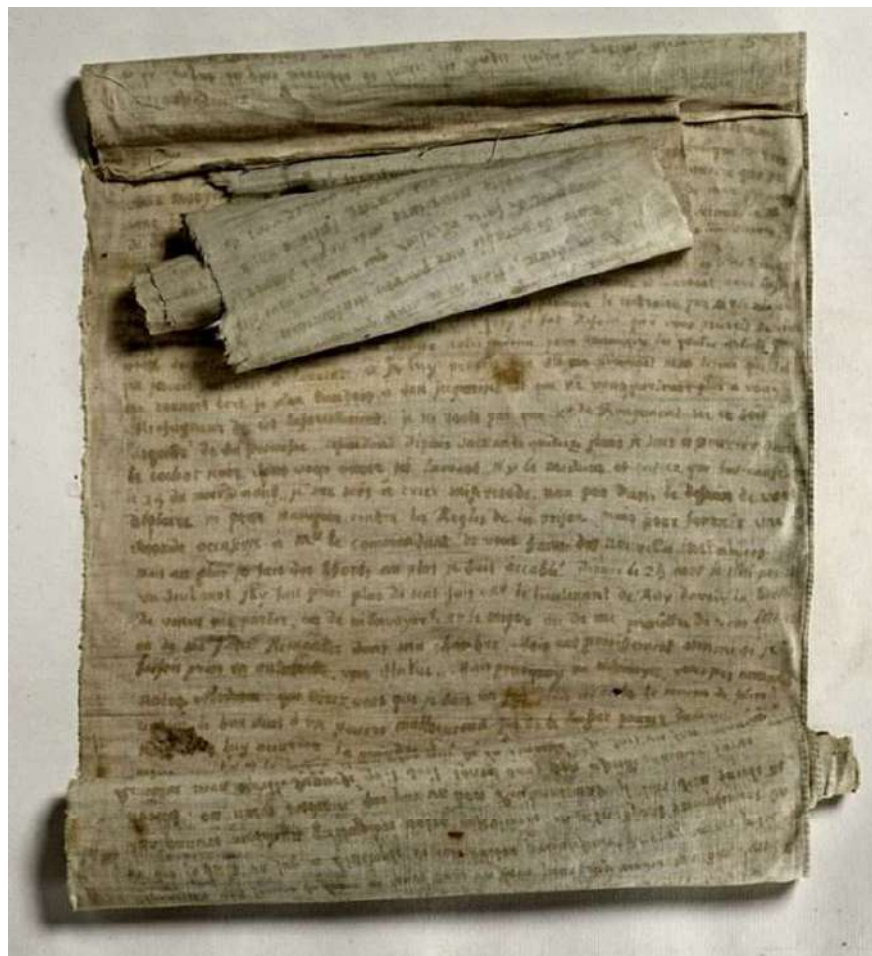
A handwritten letter can testify to a state of mind. It can also convey very strong emotions simply by words.

This is exemplified by letters that were exposed during the exhibition of the Bnf¹¹ (National Library of France) "*Les manuscrits de l'extrême*"¹². As we see in these letters, the author does not always know if his message will be read. Sometimes a letter doesn't have a specific recipient. So, beyond being a means of communication, it can be a sort of outlet, a testimony of a piece of life. •

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11. 11 Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF)

12. "Manuscripts of the extreme"



Latude,
Shirt written on a shirt with his blood, in 1761,
at the Bastille prison before his execution

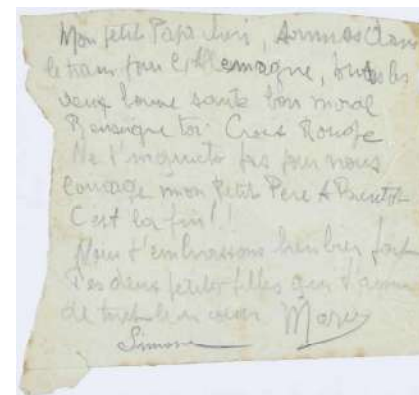
« Monseigneur, je vous écris avec de mon sang
sur du linge, parce que messieurs les officiers me
refusent d'encre et de papier ».

"Monseigneur, I am writing to you with my blood on
linen, because the officers refuse to give me ink and
paper."

© Arsenal, BnF

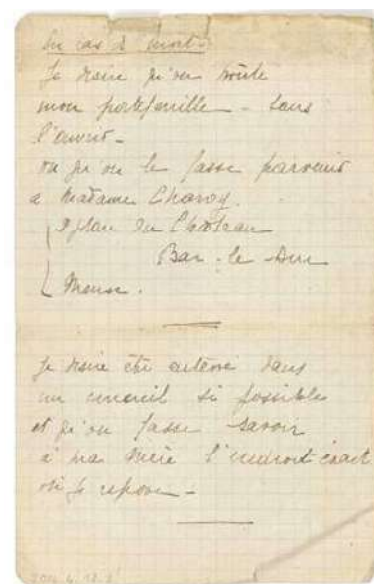
BnF - Manuscrits de l'extrême

© Archives Nationales
BnF - Manuscrits de l'extrême



Maurice, René and Pierre Charoy's wallet
containing the letters addressed to their
mother and their last wishes, found near the
body of Pierre Charoy

July 31, 1914 - July 20, 1917 Army Museum
Paris Photo © Paris - Musée de l'Armée, Dist.
RMN-Grand Palais/Émilie Cambier
BnF - Manuscrits de l'extrême



Message from Mary and Simone Alizon 21 and
18 years old, two sisters engaged in the French
Resistance.

Message addressed to their father and thrown
out of the deportation train.

January 24, 1943

« Mon petit Papa chéri, nous sommes dans le
train pour l'Allemagne toutes les deux, bonne
santé bon moral. Renseigne toi Croix Rouge.
Ne t'inquiète pas pour nous. Courage mon Petit
Père. À bientôt. C'est la fin ! Nous t'embrassons
bien bien fort.. Tes deux petites filles qui
t'aiment de de tout leur cœur. Simone, Marie »

"Dear little Daddy, we are both in the train to
Germany, good health, good morale. Ask the Red
Cross. Don't worry about us. Be brave dear daddy.
See you soon. It is the end ! Hugs and kisses. Your
two little girls who love you with all their heart.
Simone, Marie "



Pierre Charoy's last wishes.

« Je désire qu'on brûle mon portefeuille. Sans
l'ouvrir. Ou qu'on le fasse parvenir à Madame
Charoy 2 place du Château Bar-le-Duc Meuse
Je désire être enterré dans un cercueil si possible
et qu'on fasse savoir à ma mère l'endroit exact
où je repose. »

"I want my wallet to be burnet. Without being
opened. Or send it to Madame Charoy 2 place du
Château Bar-le-Duc Meuse I wish to be buried in a
coffin if possible and let my mother know the exact
place where I lie."

Paris Photo © Paris - Musée de l'Armée, Dist.
RMN-Grand Palais/Émilie Cambier

BnF - Manuscrits de l'extrême

By the emotion generated by a handwritten letter and the mark it represents, it constitutes a precious memory for the recipient. The letter therefore has a sentimental and personal value. It is true that at the beginning of its history, the letter was used for political, administrative or religious purposes. But, when paper correspondence became widespread with literacy, the relationship with handwriting was transformed. Handwriting became a means of communicating and of telling our stories. It is a way of telling someone what we cannot say directly. The letter becomes the only link that unites us to this person. A letter is like a photograph, it reflects a given moment, a period. And like photographs, letters can be preserved.

They become a person's material memories, which allow people who have not known him, to learn more about his personality and life. Letters can constitute a family heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, which may enable us to better understand our personal history.

We may think that it is because letters are the trace, the memory of a person that they have a personal or collective value. However, the efforts we put in writing them are also a characteristic of these objects, which contributes to their value. •



get involved in communication

Creating these memories requires some involvement. Indeed, first of all, a paper correspondence requires time. We have to organize ourselves, to know when we want it to be received, and therefore, when we need to write and post it. Today, this could be a way to slow down at a time when everything is going very fast. In addition, when we handwrite a letter, we must apply ourselves both in the text and in the writing.

The letter reflects the efforts of a person who wishes to please someone. The care that we put in the object is an implicit part. So there are different levels of reading. This gives a deeper dimension to the exchange.

This is why we can also pay special attention to the paper or card we choose. In the case of a card, handwriting makes unique an object that has been printed in thousands of copies. Besides, unlike current means of communication, paper correspondence creates expectation. ●

The exchange is not instantaneous, and may raise the desire to receive the answer. In addition, a letter requires carefully chosen words and language. Unlike most textmessages such as Short Message Service (SMS), a letter is written with care. The stylistic qualities that can be found within a letter, have made some of them literary references. In France, Madame de Sévigné's¹³ letters have made her a great literary figure. The particular character of the letter even gave rise to a literary genre. Thus, stories may be written through fictitious letters, they are epistolary novels. Real correspondences are also published. These works have had some success. But to get near the level of such pieces of writing is not easy. Thus, paper correspondence could be a way for the designer to restore the notions of slowness and effort. But could not this commitment strengthen the link between two people? ●

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13. Madame de Sévigné was a 17th century French marquise and letter writer

get physically reconnected

A letter-writing relationship can enhance a social link and make it special. This may be even more true in our hyper-connected world.

Although sending a card or a letter was commonplace before the use phone and computer, now it is something that makes the message almost extraordinary. Taking the trouble and the time to handwrite a letter is today something rare that makes the exchange remarkable.

Today, as Stéphane Vial¹⁴ points out, our social relationships are digitally created. But is this inevitable? Now, we receive a continuous flow of messages. And if one of these messages is more important, it might be lost in the midst of hundreds of insignificant others. And as Yves Citton¹⁵ says, it is because information is uninterrupted and massive, that the attention of new generations becomes hard to catch. So, could receiving a handwritten letter hold the attention? •

...

14. Stéphane Vial is a French philosopher and teacher-researcher, *L'être et l'écran*, (2013)

15. Yves Citton, literature theorist and literature professor at Paris-VIII University *Pour une écologie de l'attention* (2014)

The important point is the emotional aspect of the object. The letter binds us to a person and shows us a part of their personality through handwriting. This personality also appears in the content, and the choice of words shows a sensitivity. Even if everything is not perfect, imperfections and blunders also characterize the author. A letter is human. Then, these messages can be kept for years and read over and over again, so the link that unites these people also goes through time, even if the relationship evolves. This is also why, over time, sentimental attachment to these objects increases. In addition, the objects themselves are marked by time and feelings. If a letter is important, it can be transported, often handled and therefore the paper may get wrinkled. If we are sad, tears can stain the paper, and if we are angry or hurt, it can be crumpled up, torn or burned. In the latter cases, we act as if we were attacking the author, which shows how meaningful this object is. Over time the paper may also turn yellow and the ink become blurred. Moreover, letters give way to memory. And, we only have one half of the exchange, which really makes this link special, as the two halves complete one another. Paper correspondence could be a way to re-enchant our ordinary lives. •

Paper correspondence is therefore a rich medium both historically and personally. It allows people to be linked through handwriting and a physical support. In addition, it demonstrates a commitment that, today, makes an exchange less ordinary. We can then ask ourselves how design can lead to preserving and fostering this practice.

Write
with design

transmit, preserve

We may notice first of all, that design can accentuate the sustainability of a correspondence. Indeed, by its materiality, it is a form of communication that can be preserved and can withstand time, so many of these characteristics can be exploited by the designer. This could highlight the link between writing and memory.

The point is to enhance written messages in our everyday life, by giving them an aesthetic value in addition to their sentimental value. This is what the German designer Ingo Maurer has done with his series of Zettel'z lights. Zettel'z 5 is a lamp, composed of metal rods, which end in small clips, that the user will come to place as he wishes around a glass tube, which encloses the bulb. The user can also play with the lengths of the rods, which makes it possible to obtain a more or less dense or aerial object. What is interesting is that the object is sold with 39 printed and 49 blank sheets of paper, intended to be placed on the small clips. The blank sheets of paper are meant to receive personal messages or drawings.

Writings, drawings and paper come as an ornament to complete the lamp. So this lamp will be unique both by the arrangement of the rods, and by what the user chooses to hang on it. So, it is taken in and transformed by the user to become personal. The object cannot exist without the contribution of the user, who is obliged to get involved so as to own an object which will have a real aesthetic and emotional value.

There is a real desire to preserve and enhance the written message, which is underlined by the use of light. This project aims to preserve the messages that we write and receive, and to expose them. •

Zettel'z 5
© Ingo Maurer



In a different way, Kirsten Camara an American designer, has created a desk which aims to keep all the small handwritten information of everyday life. With *The Analog Memory Desk*, she wanted to create a piece of furniture that becomes an analog memory, a support, a giant reminder. It is thanks to its large rolls of paper that this table offers a large storage capacity. When the space is full, we wrap it around the first roll and, at the same time we unroll the second one which offers new paper space. We can organize it as we wish, but the conservation will be chronological.

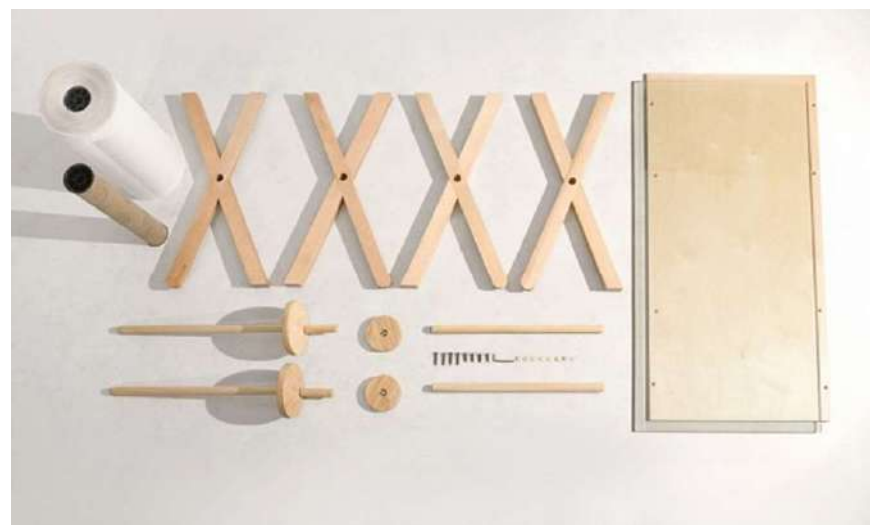
What is interesting in this project, is that the support becomes very large and surpasses the classic page size. In addition, the writing space is directly available.

Handwritings and drawings adorn the furniture, as in the Ingo Maurer project, and make it unique. The user appropriates it. The choice of a desk seems to be interesting because it is a piece of furniture related to handwriting. However, a desk is often a personal space. So, it is not really dedicated to exchange and sharing. Yet here, nothing is hidden, our memory is directly visible. If this piece of furniture were taken out of the private space and placed in a collective place, it could then be shared and could generate exchange through handwriting. •



*The Analog Memory Desk
by Kirsten Camara*

© Kirsten Camara



Preservation is a characteristic of paper correspondence because it is material, and it can also aim at transmitting the writings so that they may travel across time between generations. In this way, we can take the example of time capsules. Their use can be personal or collective, apply to a family, a group, or a city. In addition, the choice of the date when the capsules will be opened varies from a few years to several thousands, like the capsule of Osaka produced on the occasion of the 1970 world exhibition and which is to be opened in 6970. Thus, capsules are used around the world and some are made visible like that of Osaka, while others are completely hidden, often buried. A capsule can take many forms, as long as it is durable. What I find interesting in them is the relationship to memory, the desire to transmit and share, which are also characteristics of correspondence, but which are highlighted here. •

This kind of objects make us wonder how design may enable handwritten messages to go through time, and how it may allow us to keep them and highlight their value. Today, how can we recreate sustainability, in a world of permanent communication where everything goes very quickly and is ephemeral? And, how can we offer devices that make people want to write to others so as to keep the materiality of messages?



Time capsule dating from 1957 which was found in the foundations of Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT).

©MIT



Time capsule of Osaka, Japan.

Produced on the occasion of the 1970 world exhibition and which is to be opened in 6970

© Bzgru

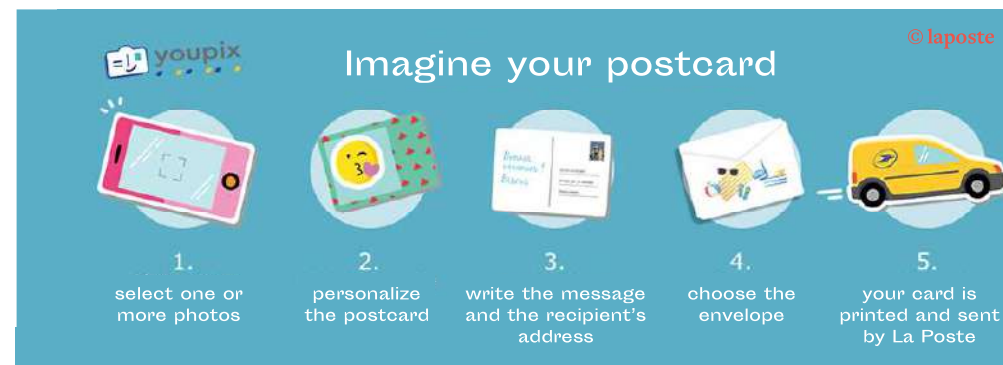
incite, arouse the desire to correspond

To restore the practice of paper correspondence, it is important to take an interest in its most frequent contexts of use, whether they are past or present. In order to identify the possible fields of action for the product designer, it is essential to understand in what situations, and why we send postcards or letters.

Many more or less common correspondence situations can be identified: distance situations such as war, military service, business travel, relocations or even prison terms; special occasions such as end of year celebrations, birthdays, event announcements (weddings, births, funerals, etc.), travel and vacations; learning a foreign language in the school environment; death-related situations such as suicides or death sentences.

Among these contexts, some still exist. However, the most common situation in the use of postcards is special events. Indeed, at Christmas, children continue to send a letter to Santa Claus, we also send New Year greeting cards or birthday cards, announcements and especially cards from our trips. Sending postcards in these particular contexts is generally one-way. When an event of the same kind or a similar occasion arises, the person to whom we had sent a card will certainly send us one in return. But we may wonder if we are not responding simply out of politeness or out of respect for an implicit social convention. In this case, could social conventions foster correspondence? If a person started writing letters to different members of his entourage, wouldn't that generate a chain reaction, a domino effect? •

However, even if these contexts remain commonplace, we must note that the practices and habits have changed considerably with the help of digital tools. This is why quite recently, two years ago, the French post office decided to create the *Youpix* application, which allows you to create your own postcards directly on your smartphones, from your photos, and La Poste ensures their printing and shipping. They were not the first to create such an application. Indeed, they have been multiplying in France and around the world. Already in 2011 the Apple company created *Cards* for iPhones on the same principle, and later Instagram did the same with *Instapost*. But, do we necessarily have to rely on digital practices in order to relaunch paper exchanges? The problem is that with an application, many steps disappear, including handwriting. So this amounts to abandoning one practice to save another, but is this inevitable? Do we really have to choose? In fact, with these applications, we can keep a material memory of the exchange. But, we lose the notions of involvement and effort, which give all its meaning to traditional paper correspondence. •



The integration of digital tools also affects another, previously mentioned, context for correspondence, that is to say learning foreign languages. Indeed, in many schools, at a certain stage, foreign languages teachers set up exchanges with a class in the country of the language taught. Each student is therefore assigned a penfriend to whom he must write regularly. If these exchanges are still done by hand, emails tend to prevail today.

However, this context is interesting because, the new generations born with digital and instant communication methods may never use paper correspondence, so it could be interesting to integrate it into the educational system to encourage an independent use of this.

We may also ask ourselves if, in order to encourage the practice of handwriting, the principles of competition could be stimulating, especially for middle school students. Could this be a way to restore the pleasure of handwriting, for pupils who associate this practice with teaching? Middle school students see handwriting as school work, but using paper correspondence could perhaps give a new image to handwriting. could the context of middle school be adapted to create new and current paper correspondence? ●

reinvent and create new social contacts

School could be the place to create new correspondence contexts. It is a collective place of sociability which is also framed by a form of authority. We could thus create an event within the school to encourage the practice of correspondence. It could be connected to school lessons, as seen above, or during hours of study. But does this practice have to be part of a teaching programme? Couldn't we encourage young people to use handwriting to communicate through a device outside school lessons?

Today to send letters and postcards we must go through the post office. However, it takes time and money. Besides, this is not suitable for local exchanges, between different people living in the same city, village or within a school for example. Indeed, it takes too long and the carbon footprint would be too high for such a small distance. So, what if new devices for exchanging written messages allowed us to reinvent correspondence? Wouldn't they be more suited, especially to the younger generations? We can imagine objects that would allow pupils to communicate with each other, without technology. It could be an internal school system, dedicated to written messages. This practice could be done at different times and across different places of the school. ●

*The Writable*© Tianyu
Xiao

The *Writable* project by Tianyu Xiao is an interesting example of new ways of communicating. The Writable is a coffee table with 3 pivoting panels which reveal a slate surface on which it is possible to write. This table can thus have different functions: around it, the members of the family can play and share activities, the children can do their homework on it, and messages, schedules or lists can be made and left there. As a coffee table, it was designed to be used in a home, however, why not move this object to another collective place, in order to create new exchanges and new practices? Could this foster more social exchanges in places where, sometimes, technology is taking up more and more space? Could that be a way of creating new writing contexts that would allow people, who don't know each other, to meet through correspondence? •

In this spirit, we could also be interested in free bookcases, which are objects placed in a public place and in which passers-by can place or take a book. The object only operates with the participation of people. •

*Dead Drop*
Aram
Bartholl

© Autopilot

The *Dead Drop* project imagined by Aram Bartholl is worth mentioning too. This project, launched in 2010, is a modern version of the mailboxes used by spies to exchange information. This takes the form of a simple USB key, sealed in a wall in a public space. City dwellers can place and retrieve data in different forms: music, images, documentation ... etc. What is interesting in this project, like in the principle of free bookcases, is this idea that people, who do not necessarily have to communicate, might share or exchange within an urban space. In the case of *Dead Drop*, as a USB key is small, one has to look for it, which might be playful and attractive. So the designer could try and transform different devices, in order to generate the act of writing. Thus, if these were modified to initiate written exchanges, the fact that the messages would be handwritten and the IR materiality would make them more particular, personal and impacting, even if they came from strangers. We can then wonder if these types of participatory projects, within a collective space, could make passers-by want to participate. These devices are, indeed, accessible and free, but are only relevant if people participate. •



Conclusion

This design research tends to prove that handwriting constitutes a real richness. Keeping handwriting as a personal practice, allows us to memorize and remember, to develop thoughts and express ourselves in our own way. It allows us to act as much on the content as on the form, by a singular writing, which reflects who we are. It gives us freedom. In addition to words and writing, we can appropriate the tools and supports. And if, unlike digital tools, our handwriting is not perfect nor constant, it shows an action, a movement of the body, a thought. So, it is more « alive » and human.

The use of handwriting to correspond, makes it possible to transmit and keep a part of a person's personality and experience. It leaves a mark. By paper correspondence, we reveal ourselves to the other. It offers a very special kind of message that no current means of communication can replace. With letters, we maintain and develop the link that unites us to someone, because it shows an involvement, an effort, and a particular attention. A letter now represents more interest and significance than a text message, because it is more emotional and less ordinary.

However, technological progress keeps creating new tools and means of communication, which are leading to new behaviors. These new tools tend to suggest that practices like handwriting and paper correspondence are obsolete and useless. But, as this thesis shows, it is wrong. So the designer must find ways to rehabilitate these practices. Shouldn't we have moments dedicated to virtual exchanges, and others dedicated to handwritten exchanges? Can't we create moments away from technology, to materially reconnect to others?

Thus, it seems interesting to carry out a project aimed at new generations who are used to communicating with digital tools, and who are not necessarily aware of the benefits of such practices. Handwriting is, for children and adolescents, linked to school work. This is why it could be beneficial to place this design project in the school context. Adolescents use a lot the current means of communication, but the school could be a collective place which encourages handwritten correspondence. This would show them a different, more social and personal use of handwriting. Creating a form of correspondence within a school could allow students to develop a taste for it, appropriate it, and perhaps later, use it outside school. So, the designer must think this project in stages. First of all, she must think about how the school setting can encourage the practice of handwritten correspondence, and how this correspondence will be organized within the school. It is a new context of correspondence that must be entirely imagined and analysed. Then, the designer must ask herself how to reinvent and adapt these practices for younger generations, and for the school environment, in order to create or reinvent social ties. This could, for example, go through a distribution of messages that could be free and fast. She must also think about how design can make students want to write, and how it may allow them to enjoy it. And finally, the designer should be interested in the conservation of messages, which is a remarkable and important characteristic of correspondence, at a time when everything tends to be ephemeral. These exchanges could accompany them throughout their lives, and constitute memories of that time.

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