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Religion and Literacy, Parliaments and Business: Shorthand Writing in Great Britain and France, from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century

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Abstract: From religion to literacy, from parliaments to business, the aim of this paper is to revive the worlds of shorthand from the sixteenth century onwards, highlighting the many issues at play in the formal and social characteristics of this art (or technology). Comparing Britain and France, the aim is to consider the plasticity of shorthand systems, how their meanings and uses varied over time and place, and how they could shape cultural and political forms. Shorthand was successively (and sometimes simultaneously) knowledge and art, language and science, and educational and commercial technology. This paper begins with the uniqueness of an art that was initially only British (for two centuries) before developing on the European continent. It analyses in detail specific features of a culture that combined proto-phonetics, the study of the English language, and the lived and textual experience of Puritanism. It then focuses on the use of shorthand in Britain and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it became a legal and parliamentary technology. It reveals two different national traditions and ways of using and promoting journalism and *in extenso* reporting based on shorthand to ensure the publicity of debates and the regime of opinion. Finally, it examines the educational and commercial actualisations of shorthand – its growing popularity in Britain (with Isaac Pitman) and France (with Émile Duployé) as an educational technology for the people in the mid nineteenth century, and as a tool for business in the late nineteenth century. All this points to shorthand as a technology that contributed to the achievement of completeness, truth, and accuracy in the legal, political, and, subsequently, economic spheres.

1 Introduction

The history of shorthand has been forgotten twice. Interest in shorthand treatises and manuscripts seems to have died out between the two World Wars, along with the last generation of professional shorthand writers who practised their art in the noble branches of the profession – court, parliamentary and conference ste-

nography. As for the commercial shorthand typist,[1] a position invented at the end of the nineteenth century which became predominantly a woman's profession,[2] his/her art fell into oblivion in the late twentieth century, when stenography began to disappear both from the administrative and commercial enterprises of capitalist economies and within the state apparatus of communist regimes.[3] The aim of this contribution is to resurrect this whole world, from the sixteenth century onwards, underlining the many issues that were at play in the formal and social characteristics of this art (or technique) of the past.

This paper first invites us to reconsider what technologies are and to reassess their potential to stand as legitimate and interesting objects for historical analysis.[4] Shorthand systems interest cultural, social, and economic historians as intellectual technologies; technologies that do not directly fall within the order of production, but have an impact on ways of intervening and acting in the world. The idea here, rather, is to focus on 'arts of doing'[5] and to provide new stories about cognitive and material changes that shaped European societies and economies over the last five centuries.[6] Shorthand plays an important role in this story, both as a scripturalisation technology in the Early Modern Period and also as a 'sound technology' – shorthand being the first speech-recording technology of the modern world. This paper tries to account for how these ordinary activities – and their associated values – both shaped and were shaped by religion, politics, and the economy.

The objective is also to enrich the history of technology with these 'little tools of knowledge'[7] and to revisit established theses on literacy. For most historians, the development of literacy is what characterises modern and contemporary Western societies. Literacy relates both to writing and printing, and encompasses the processes by which people within a population learn how to read and write. It is often argued that the written form developed in early modern and modern Europe to the detriment of the oral form (i.e. the 'art of memory'), while political and economic modernisation has increasingly relied upon writing, which was considered a favourable instrument for the development of rational and abstract

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1 Gardey 2001b.
2 Anderson 1989; Davies 1982; Gardey 2001a; Gardey 2006.
3 On the birth of the Soviet stenographic profession and its use in the public sphere before and after the October Revolution see Lovell 2015.
4 Veyne 1971.
5 De Certeau 1980.
6 This is the perspective in Gardey 2008, which traces the history of cognitive and technical 'arts of doing' before computing (up to the era of the punched card system).
7 Becker 2001.

thinking.[8] Shorthand, which stands at the intersection of the oral and the written, is a perfect candidate to examine and qualify these changes. A study of stenography allows us to complexify our picture of the relationship between the oral and the written, manuscript and print culture, literacy and politics, and literacy and the economy.

From the perspective of the social studies of technology, the objective is to account for the plasticity of shorthand systems, their interpretative flexibility,[9] how their meanings and uses vary, and how they could shape social and political forms. The objective is to 'denaturalise' technologies,[10] that is, to pay attention to their contextualised definition and associated community of practices. Historically, shorthand methods and systems have aesthetic, scientific, social, religious, and political dimensions. Shorthand is successively (and sometimes concurrently) a knowledge and an art, a language, and an educational and commercial technology. The objective is to finally show how the theoretical and practical plasticity of abbreviated writing systems plays in favour of their longevity – personal appropriations (the improvements and additions of the individual user) shifting both the formal qualities and the uses of stenography over the long term.

Lastly, this paper questions the singularity of an art that – for its first two centuries of use – was exclusively British, only later developing on the European continent. This makes the comparison between Great Britain and France asymmetrical. Shorthand should first be considered as specifically British (a 'singular culture').[11] This will be the subject of Section 2, analysing in detail specific traits of a culture that mixed proto-phonetics, research on the English language, the lived and textual experience of Puritanism, and the specificities of a literate culture that extended beyond print culture.

Introduced in France at the end of the eighteenth century, shorthand was 're-invented' during the French Revolution, when novel uses were imagined, giving rise to new formal meanings. Section 3 focuses on shorthand uses in Great Britain and France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when this 'technological and cultural transfer' occurred. Far from duplicating the British uses of a 'smart' technology, the French Revolution, eager to develop universal and rational languages and to promote freedom and circulation of speech and writing, proposed a novel cognitive, social, and political interpretation of shorthand. This had long-lasting consequences, as shorthand's development in France during the first two-

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8 On orality and literacy see Ong 1982; Goody 1986; Goody 1987; Finnegan 1988; Olson 1994.

9 Akrich 1992; MacKenzie and Wajcman 1985; Bijker, Hughes and Pinch 2012.

10 Grint and Woolgar 1995.

11 Gardey 2010a.

thirds of the nineteenth century was essentially supervised by judicial and parliamentary institutions. This was notably different from the development of parliamentary shorthand in Great Britain, where it was hindered by limitations linked to traditions and parliamentary privileges.

Section 4 of this contribution will account for the role of shorthand in popular education initiatives that developed with the support of intensive and novel commercial practices in the second half of the nineteenth century. Twenty years apart, two main figures – Isaac Pitman (1813–1887) in Great Britain and Émile Duployé (1833–1912) in France – dramatically changed the meaning and uses of shorthand, articulating the simplification of systems with large-scale public education programs and commercial initiatives. This reconfiguration, coming about at the time of shorthand popularisation and development, is the basis of the eventual usefulness of this art in its commercial definition. After the religious, scientific, and political spheres, it was education and the economy in which this decidedly flexible technology was redeployed.

2 A singular culture of the written word and faith: Great Britain in the Early Modern Period

2.1 Some brief preliminary technical remarks

As time went on, the authors of shorthand treatises made different formal and technical decisions that were inextricably linked to social practices. Technically speaking, abbreviated systems (initially alphabet-based) gave way to 'proto-phonetic' systems (sounds or syllables transcribed into short 'signs') – an option that was considered by inventors and early historians to be characteristic of 'modern' shorthand. Doing so, authors tended to distinguish themselves from previous quests and uses which they qualified as 'medieval', 'cryptographic' and/or 'secret' writing practices. The intensification of invention that characterises modern shorthand took place within British culture and must therefore be considered as part of it. It should be noted that early modern stenography took place in a period of stabilisation of written English and of the establishment of English as a written language competing with Latin. Later, for instance, in the mid nineteenth century Pitman's system emerged as a phonetically-based 'new' shorthand that was simplified along technical, educational, and commercial lines – at a period when reflection proliferated on the social and political benefits of reforming the English language and its spelling.

Ultimately, stenographic activity also meant producing artificial scripts based on a series of articulated rules. This contribution does not go into technical details, but it is important to keep in mind that stenography in its modern definition consists of translating a sound into a sign. Shorthand systems are thus meta-languages. And considering that stenographic systems explore the sound aspect of language, they should also be recognised as part of the history of phonetics and linguistics – which, to my knowledge, they still are not.

2.2 Inventors, motives, and uses

Often following in the footsteps of the prestigious techniques and practices of the *notae* of antiquity (the Tironian notes ascribed to Cicero's scribe), inventors flourished in England during the Early Modern Period, forming a strong and lasting movement in favour of the stenographic abbreviation of writing. Shorthand historians have generally agreed that the modern history of English shorthand started in 1588, with the treatise of Timothy Bright (1551?–1615): *Characterie: an arte of shorte, swifte and secrete writing by character*. Considered to be the first shorthand treatise, Bright's *Characterie* also had the first monopoly obtained by an author over a method of abbreviated writing.[12] *The art of stenographie*, by John Willis, was first published in 1602 and republished some sixteen times between then and 1648; this was followed by the first edition of Thomas Shelton's *Tachygraphie* (now lost, dated 1626 according to evidence from the Stationers' Register) which was republished no fewer than fifty-seven times between 1630 and 1710.[13]

From the late sixteenth to the late eighteenth centuries, shorthand treatises and systems flourished in England. Between 1588 and 1800, over three hundred manuals (originals or subsequent imprints/editions) were published by approximately one hundred authors. A large corpus – unprecedented and unmatched on the continent – took shape: methods, authors, and practitioners progressively established a theoretical field and shaped social uses of this art. A tradition was invented, as shown by the practice of forming collections of manuals, and also by the convergence in vocabulary. Two terms ('shorthand' and 'stenography') tended to prevail, bringing together the diversity of quests and proposals for the abbreviation of writing.[14]

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12 Davidson 1996.

13 Alston 1966, 8–12.

14 *Shorthand* is a contraction of *shorthand writing* (as opposed to so-called *longhand writing*). Introduced in 1621, this expression was in time to become the common naming of abbreviation

The intensification of publications and the diversification of authors and users tended to constitute shorthand as a field in its own right, subject to lively discussion. As with other branches of science, controversies over priority of invention, competition between different systems, and establishment of 'schools' through the creation of theoretical lineages or dynasties, became common. Major seventeenth-century authors of shorthand manuals included Theophilus Metcalfe (1610–1645), whose manuals remained in print from as early as 1635 to 1727; Jeremiah Rich (1630?–1667?), whose manuals circulated from 1642 to 1792; and William Mason (1672–1709), whose various systems were widely used in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for taking down sermons, trials, and debates.[15] The poet John Byrom (1692–1763) was another famous shorthand writer who is known to have established his system in the 1720s.[16] Byrom used to take notes in Parliament and was appointed a Fellow of the Royal Society. His main rival at the time in the field of shorthand writing was James Weston, with his manual *Stenography completed* (1727).

As of the late seventeenth century, the value and potential of practical aspects of shorthand were increasingly recognised. Many people became interested in shorthand writing, which was practised by scholars, clergymen, scientists, and lawyers to take down personal notes, prepare sermons, and note down pleas, speeches, or court decisions. Treatises and authors captured the attention of the Royal Society, while great minds such as John Locke or Isaac Newton became enthusiasts and practitioners of shorthand. The prestige of shorthand writing in the eighteenth century is embodied in the creativity and virtuosity of the Gurney family. The initiator of this dynasty was Thomas Gurney (1705–1770), the author of *Brachygraphy,* first published in 1750, of which each edition had a circulation of between four and five hundred copies.[17] In 1803, 6,900 copies of the Gurney method were sold.[18] Recognised for his skills, Gurney was appointed as official shorthand writer to the first court of justice of the City of London (the Old Bailey) in 1737, where he held his position until his death. His sons published new editions and, when shorthand writing was officially introduced in the British Parliament, it was a member of the Gurney family who was appointed as first official short-

systems for writing, while the word *brachygraphy* was progressively abandoned by the mid eighteenth century: Carlton 1911, 77n–78n.

15 Alston 1966, 14–17 (Metcalfe); 13–14, 17, 20, 22–24 (Rich); 24–25, 28–29, 31–33 (Mason).

16 Byrom's system was published only after his death, in 1767 (Byrom 1767). See also Byrom et al. 1739; Butler 1951, 44–55; Underhill 2008; Underhill 2013; Underhill 2015.

17 Gurney 1750.

18 On the Gurneys see Navarre 1909, 111–113.

hand writer. Descendants of this family held official positions until the beginning of the twentieth century.[19] Gurney shorthand was widely used in the nineteenth century, for example by Charles Dickens.[20] In 1786, another highly influential system was published: Samuel Taylor's. His essay established a standard for an universal system of stenography, upon which most of the French shorthand movement is based, and which more generally marked the beginning of shorthand writing in Europe.

After this brief introduction to the quest for abbreviation and the role it played in modern British society, I would like to focus on a few specific characteristics that outline various patterns and uses of this art, particularly in the Early Modern Period.[21]

2.3 Truth, characters, and sound

A quick glance at the titles of the first shorthand treatises shows that authors pursued diverse, yet comparable, objectives: 'swift', 'short', and 'secret' are among the most frequently used adjectives to describe the methods. This was the case with Bright's *Characterie* (1588), and many thereafter. These expressions sketch a first scope of possible meanings and uses. Other motives emerged with the 'brachygraphic' method proposed in 1590 by Peter Bales (1547–1610). The system was articulated around three objectives: 'Swift writing' ('to write as fast as a man speaketh treatably'), 'True writing' ('to write true Orthographie in our English tongue as it is now generaly printed, used'), and 'Faire writing' ('readie waie to write faire in verie short time').[22] Bales's *Brachygraphie* aimed at a sort of new 'truth' or 'sincerity' of language: truth that was now possible via the transcription of speech; sincerity in the way sound was represented in printed English.

John Willis (1572?–1625) was the first to use the word 'stenography', and to imagine a simple geometric system (and not the usual letters of the alphabet) to represent the existing words of the English language, which has been defined a posteriori as 'proto-phonetics'.[23] As Willis declared, 'in this Art, not the Orthographie, but the sound of the word is respected'.[24] This writing was also subsequently

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19 Navarre 1909, 114.

20 See the contribution by Hugo Bowles and Clare Wood in this volume.

21 For recent and forthcoming contributions to the history of early modern British shorthand, see McCay 2021 and McCay 2024.

22 Bales 1597, title page.

23 Mounin 1967, 198.

24 Willis 1602, sig. B6ʳ; quoted in Carlton 1940, 19.

identified as 'geometric'. Its objective was the exact representation of sounds using signs. Willis's system, like those of Bright and Bales, did have an English 'character', in the sense that it participated in the reform of the English language and fitted within the larger context of transformations of the culture of the written word. Even though Willis's work consisted of researching the English language itself, he was the first to propose a sort of 'metalanguage', the principles of which could be applied to all languages: 'this Booke discouerth a true and constant forme of Art, applyable not to one Language alone, but generally to all'.[25] Willis's formal proposal ('the first system to provide for the expression of consonants, vowels and diphthongs by simple geometrical forms')[26] thus served as a blueprint for developments in shorthand writing for two centuries. It is in fact considered, more than Bright's or Bales's systems, to be the method that paved the way for modern shorthand writing.

2.4 Sermons, Englishness, and Calvinism

The history of the early days of modern stenography could be written differently. Let us return to Bright, and the description of Characterie in 1586: 'A matter of rare noveltie and effected a great use and commoditie, to couch much matter in so short compasse and to take a speech from any man's mouth as he delivereth it'.[27] Despite the difficulty of the method, Characterie may have been used as a technique to take down sermons, as mentioned by a certain John Lewys who claimed in a 1589 manuscript to have 'taken in *charactery*' a lecture by Stephen Egerton.[28] This would make it the first known speech in early modern England to have been taken down in shorthand. According to Adele Davidson, the sermons of the famous Puritan preacher Henry Smith were also taken down by users of the same method.[29] Several printed sermons by Stephen Egerton and Henry Smith, two active members of the Puritan movement, indicate that they were transcribed by the use of Characterie, but the interpretation of those claims is a living controversy within the scholarship. Some take the printed sources at their word, while others await manuscript evidence. Be that as it may, with Bright's Characterie and Willis's Stenographie, the history of early modern stenography is thus closely

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25 Willis 1602, sig. A2ᵛ.

26 Carlton 1940, 19. Linguists and historians of linguistics mostly ignore these systems and formalisms.

27 Vincent Skinner to Michaell Hicks, 30 March 1586, quoted in Carlton 1940, 4.

28 London, Senate House Library, Carlton Shorthand Collection, Box 11/3.

29 Davidson 1998, 302–303.

linked to that of Calvinism and Puritanism. Abbreviation as a recording technology opened the possibility of perpetuating, passing on, and distributing sermons given in front of limited audiences.[30]

Work by Damian Nussbaum and Lori Ferrell provides another account of the link between Bright and Puritanism. In 1589, Bright published an abridged version of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* – a key book of the late sixteenth century important for the rise of Anglicanism (and denigration of Catholicism) which had a significant influence in England and served as an inspiration for many sermons. Abbreviating the English language contributed to a nationalist actualisation of Foxe's text and to a new interpretation of the text.[31] For Lori Ferrell, Characterie represents the emergence of a distinct Calvinist or Puritan culture:

> The art of shorthand as 'invented' by Timothy Bright represents (even if poorly) certain important elements, both visual and ideological, that identified Calvinist style at the end of the sixteenth century: it was designed to be graphically distinctive, demonstrably organized, and mnemonically oriented. These characteristics were necessary to the theological and cultural phenomenon known as 'experimental predestinarianism', which required believers meticulously to examine daily experience, remembering and sorting through sensory and psychological data in order to ascertain the temporal state of their eternal souls.[32]

The cognitive aspects of these shorthand methods as techniques of decomposition and recomposition of the English language are thus associated with certain traits of a spiritual ethos, or culture. Even if Bright's Characterie wasn't taken up to the extent that published works claim, it represented an opportunity – and thus a desire – for certain religious movements in the late sixteenth century to acquire new accurate knowledge, whose cognitive aspects were related to a new theology. This material culture (a new writing technology) was also a new intellectual and spiritual culture, which contributed to the establishment of a specific community within a larger community.[33] As Meredith Neuman has said of Puritan New England,

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30 Thanks to Kelly Minot McCay for her essential comments and insights on the transcription of sermons.

31 Nussbaum 2018.

32 Ferrell 2007, 76.

33 Loades 1999.

the lived experience of Puritanism was simultaneously communal (centered both spiritually and politically on gathered churches) and individualistic (emphasizing the work of ceaseless self-examination in light of strong Calvinist doctrine).[34]

2.5 Orality, literacy, and printing culture

I would like to quickly stress two points. The first is the paradoxical aspects – secrecy and publicity – associated with the use of shorthand writing in a religious context. Using coded language is a particularly clever way to publicise seditious speech. Coded, and yet decodable by a group of insiders, shorthand writing can circulate within a restricted community, functioning as a 'language' or a 'writing' accessible only to a few. Learning and mastering a complex linguistic system serves to build and strengthen a specific culture[35] and define the contours of that community – what Timothy Underhill calls a 'textual community'.[36]

This leads us to focus on the complex relationships that existed between authors, stationers, and stenographers during the early days of stenography, in a context where the status of authors was itself vague.[37] Shorthand had a double function of translating oral language into written language and acting as a technology for duplicating sermons of which shorthand writers sometimes claimed to be the authors.[38] The existence and use of shorthand as a technology of scripturalisation, duplication, and circulation added to the complexity of the generally admitted regime of ownership between authors, texts, and publications.[39] From the beginnings of stenography, abbreviated writing was put forward as allowing the making of multiple copies (for example, by Peter Bales (1547–1610) who insisted on the fact that 'by this Arte, you may with speede write out any excellent written Booke or Copie (neuer yet imprinted) to your priuate vse and benefite')[40]. Shorthand copies as a reduction and duplication technique appeared as a less costly way to access, provide, and circulate texts, at a time when printed books were still rare and expensive. Roger Chartier has shown that handwritten copies of books

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34 Neuman 2017, 6–7.

35 Characterie was explicitly presented as a secret script. This claim tended to disappear among authors of the Modern Period.

36 Underhill 2013, 231.

37 Chartier 2004. See also Biagioli 2006.

38 Davidson 1998 states that in the absence of copyright regulation during this period, stationers who obtained copies of sermons could pre-empt copyright from the speakers.

39 For an approach to note-taking as an intellectual and scientific technology that unfortunately doesn't take into consideration the invention and use of shorthand see Blair 2004.

40 Bales 1597, sig. B1ᵛ.

were in circulation even as book publishing developed.[41] Shorthand copy of books – whose importance can only be guessed at – might have contributed to these practices. This advantage of the art of abbreviation (copying in shorthand gets around the need to buy an expensive book and saves paper) still acted as a motive for Isaac Pitman in the 1830s, when he invented a new system and new uses for this technology.[42]

2.6 Shorthand as a method: Meditating, learning, inventing (up to the eighteenth century)

By the eighteenth century, books were mainly copied 'for oneself'. Shorthand was first and foremost a personal method for taking notes, used by scientists, scholars, and clergymen in their intellectual activities. The Bible exerted a strong influence on the form of the treatises, as well as in the modes of transmission and learning of the art of shorthand. From the start, shorthand treatises illustrated abbreviation rules using excerpts from biblical material, which played an illustrative and pedagogical role. As a cultural reference, excerpts of the Bible were useful for practicing the method. As a moral reference, it gave credence to the project and the intention of its inventor. For learners of a method, abbreviating the Bible was a test of the method's formal qualities; transcribing the Bible was a way to verify that contraction rules as much as abbreviated signs were understood and helped them to acquire automatic reflexes. Conversely, reading the Bible from shorthand excerpts was akin to translation, verifying the value of a system and one's own capacity to decipher it. Translating the Bible into a method of shorthand brought recognition to the author of the shorthand system as well as to the apprentice. Shorthand collections include evidence of these scriptural and spiritual practices, of this biblical and stenographic intertextuality, with small decorated leather-bound books, small personal notebooks, which are copies of the New Testament in shorthand and constitute 'Bibles of one's own', that could be carried close to the heart.
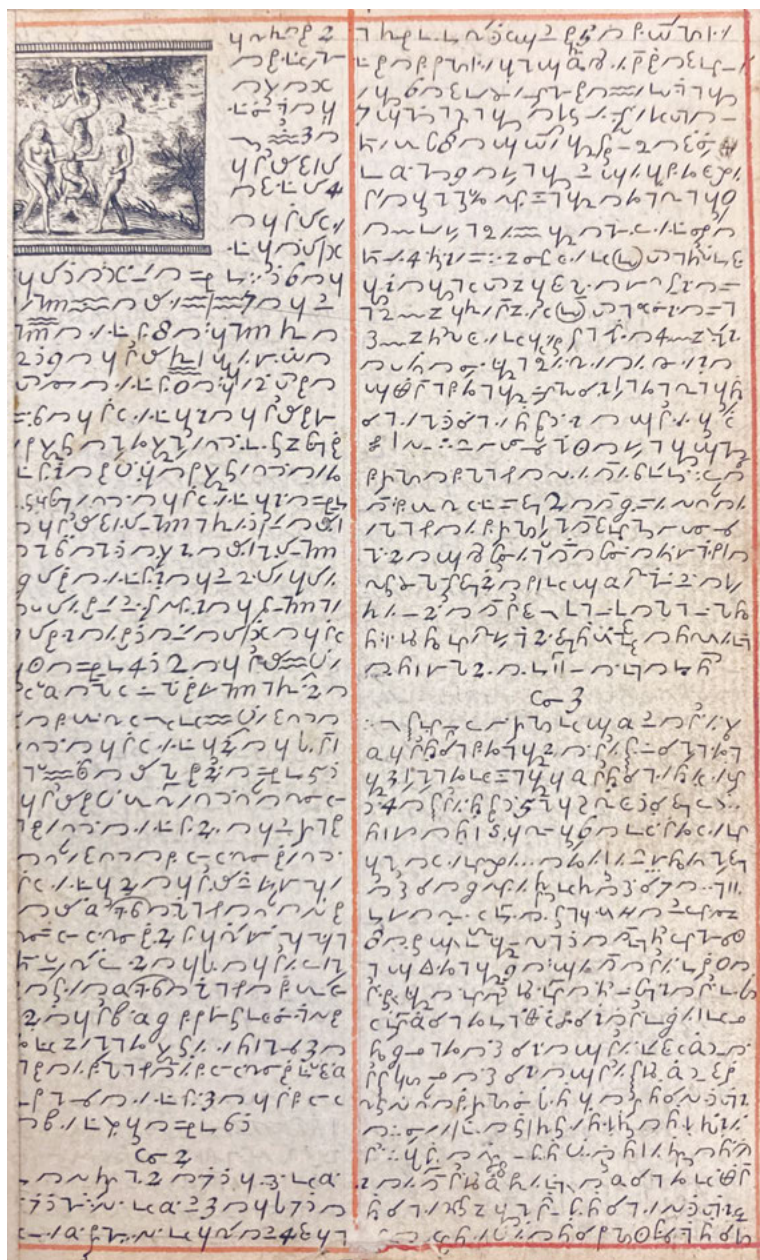
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41 Chartier 2004, 141; Chartier 2001; Eisenstein 1979.
42 Gardey 2008, 54–55; Pitman 1894.

Fig. 1: The title page of William Addy's Holy Bible (1687). New York Public Library, *KC 1687 (Bible. English. Shorthand. 1687. [Holy Bible, containing Old and New Testaments with Singing Psalms) Copy 1. Photo by Kelly Minot McCay].

Fig. 2: First page of William Addy's Holy Bible (1687). New York Public Library, *KC 1687 (Bible. English. Shorthand. 1687. [Holy Bible, containing Old and New Testaments with Singing Psalms) Copy 1. Photos by Kelly Minot McCay].

In many respects, shorthand appears as a cognitive and spiritual technology mainly driven by self-learning and personalisation. Each learner, studying one method or another, was both reader and writer, but also a potential inventor. Each had the opportunity to tailor, amend, improve, and modify the proposed system, both practically and formally. This constitutes an essential feature that has driven the culture of shorthand writing over the long term. The practice of shorthand writing is both an application of and a derogation from the codified system, as stenographers are always free to improve or tailor the system with new signs or tricks of their own.

Writing, symbolising, translating, compressing, writing for oneself, meditating, remembering. Shorthand is both an intellectual and scholarly technology in its own right and an instrument to practice other intellectual and scientific activities. In eighteenth-century Great Britain, it was used to take personal notes, to collect quotes or excerpts of a reading, to take notes in conferences, to remember experiments or journeys, and so on. The interest of scholars and scientists in this art made it as much an exercise to test the 'rules of grammar and geometry'[43] (a space for experimentation), as a knowledge instrument and tool for scientific practices. Yet these well-tried uses were not passed on to France. The 'technological transfer' was limited to the transmission of a method (a language) that was in turn translated and retranslated, and, in doing so, deeply reinterpreted in its uses.[44]

3 Shorthand as a scientific and political technology: Great Britain and France, late eighteenth to late nineteenth centuries

3.1 The demand for verbatim reports in the judicial and parliamentary spheres in Great Britain

As well as a technology in and of itself, shorthand was also, as we have seen, a technology of circulation and publicisation. The early modern tradition of verbatim note-taking – the culture of transcribing preachers' sermons and the scaffold speeches of the condemned – soon expanded to other types of speeches, serving the judicial and parliamentary spheres. Shorthand note-taking was introduced in courts and Parliament in an unprecedented drive for exhaustive accountability,

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43 Gardey 2008, 29.
44 For the central notion of 'translation' as socially embedded see Latour 2005.

contributing to the cultivation of a regime of public opinion and publicity. More precisely, it contributed to the socio-technical shaping of two institutions essential to democracy, though it did so differently in Great Britain and in France.

In eighteenth-century Britain, shorthand writing had become an auxiliary for note-taking in the legal domain. Note-taking and verbatim transcription were initially used during legal procedures to speed up the recording of discussions, but they were less commonly used for the purposes of publicity – to provide the public with accurate (or exhaustive) information about the trial and court decisions.[45] While there is evidence that some seventeenth-century trials were taken down in shorthand, it did not necessarily follow that the content of the trial transcription was made public.[46] However, reporting on judicial affairs became more reliable over time, as can be seen in newspapers of the late eighteenth century. This is evidence of the gradual establishment of a public sphere and the emergence of a regime of opinion – a development that shorthand both reflected and supported, even as its use was monitored and restricted.

In the British Parliament, there were in fact restrictions in place that limited the publication of debates and even the note-taking practices permitted during a session. Summary-style reports were allowed, but not extensive, fully-transcribed proceedings. William Woodfall (1739–1803), for example, who founded the *Morning Chronicle* in 1769 and served as the sole publisher, printer, and reporter for the paper, was apparently not allowed to take notes in the House of Commons and wrote his columns from memory.[47] In a study of politics and print culture, Christopher Reid emphasises the restrictions formulated by the House of Commons in order to control and limit the production and publication of detailed accounts of the debates.[48] The Chambers considered it one of their essential prerogatives to report on their deliberations and to choose what they would make public:

> that is a breach of the privilege of this house, for any person whatsoever to print, or publish in print, anything relating to the proceedings of the house without the leave of this house.[49]

Until 1832, a member of Parliament could formally prevent the publication of proceedings based on this Chamber privilege.

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45 Scharf 1989; Ibbetson 1995.

46 Havette 1917b, 3.

47 See also Aspinall 1956; Thomas 1959; Woodall 1973; Oldham 1987; Ferris 1992; House of Commons 2010.

48 Reid 2000. Preventing publication of unofficial parliamentary reports was formally reiterated by the Commons between 1732 and 1771.

49 May 1851, 77.

In such a prohibitive context, an exceptional and revealing case is worth mentioning. As members of the House of Commons could not be forbidden from taking notes, Sir Henry Cavendish (1732–1804), a user of Gurney's shorthand, transcribed several years of debates, both in London (1776) and Ireland (1783–1789).[50] Even though Cavendish's intent seems to have been to ensure verbatim coverage of the discussions, he appears not to have wanted (or been authorised) to make it public. The English transcriptions were published only after his death, while the Irish transcriptions were deciphered and published only at the end of the twentieth century.

Thus, from the late eighteenth century, British Parliament was an institution open to the presence of reporters and the public, but in a paradoxical way. There was a long tradition of published accounts of parliamentary debates, which were of varying reliability and accuracy but tended to improve as a result of the competition between newspapers. The plurality of press organs guaranteed a pluralist presentation of facts and debates – in short, a regime of opinion existed. Until 1872, regulatory restrictions could limit reporters' presence to public sittings. Even if Parliament formally acknowledged the presence of newspaper reporters in 1803, they had to queue with the public to find a seat. In 1828, some floor space was arranged for their exclusive use in the Commons, and in 1831 in the Lords. After the Great Fire of 1834 destroyed both houses of Parliament, more room was set aside for journalists, but up to the 1870s, reporters continued to complain about their seating, acoustics, and limited freedom to report on members' words and debates.

This situation changed in the 1860s and 1870s. First, a 'lobby list' was drawn up, which listed the reporters who were authorised to access the Members' Lobby in order to obtain quotes. Second, was Hansard, named after Thomas Hansard, who had been granted a contract for parliamentary debates as printer of the House of Parliament in 1812 (before then, the position had been held since 1800 by William Cobbett (1763–1835)). Hansard was given funds to hire stenographers to cover other aspects of parliamentary work such as committee debates. It is probably in this context that William Gurney Salter (1837–1928), who came from a long dynasty of stenographers, was appointed as assistant stenographer to the House of Commons in 1863 and to the House of Lords in 1864. In 1872, he obtained the title of 'stenographer to the Houses', whose responsibility was to lead a group of stenographers whose main task was to record committee discussions and the verbatim transcripts of public sittings.[51] By this time, Hansard was relying on stenographers in its pay. In 1888, a committee made up of members of both Houses decided against the creation of an 'official' report, concluding that newspapers and Hansard were sufficient. Only in 1909 did the Commons

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50 Malcomson 2001.

51 On the Gurney dynasty see Navarre 1909, 111–113.

finally decide to take on the responsibility of producing Hansard (now called the 'official report'), recruiting eleven shorthand writers and reversing two centuries of 'liberal' production of parliamentary debates.[52]

3.2 Shorthand as a technology of the French Revolution

In France, parliament and the justice system were directly involved with the practice of note-taking, and shorthand came to play an essential role in the development of a regime of reporting-based opinion.[53] As a new art that was imported, translated, socialised, and redefined in the 1780s and 1790s, shorthand developed in France rapidly during the revolutionary era. This was a time when the development of spaces for discussion gave those who asserted their ability to record speeches and debates recognition and an audience.

One such stenographer was Jean-Félicité Coulon de Thévenot (1754–1813), who associated his 'art of writing' with freedom and the spirit of the Revolution: 'the art of writing as fast as you can talk seems to have preceded the age of freedom, the better to preserve its earliest monuments'.[54] Coulon's definitively French stenographical treatise was published in 1787 after years of training. According to his biographer, he hoped that the Revolution would ensure the success of his shorthand. He was seen at all the assemblies, especially those of the Jacobins, whose sessions he collected and sold to several newspapers. 'He travelled through public places, stopping behind groups with a pencil in his hand' and 'worked for the national guard general La Fayette, to whom he gave daily reports on what he was hearing'.[55] Coulon covered a few parliamentary sessions in 1795.[56] In 1797, he proposed that a newspaper be founded to provide an official account of legislative debates.[57] The newspaper was established on a trial basis and reported on two months of council debates before being rejected.[58]

**52** House of Commons 2010.

53 Gardey 2013.

54 Coulon de Thévenot 1787a, 7. Another version was dedicated to the French king: Coulon de Thévenot 1787b.

55 Havette 1906, 43, 46. This and subsequent translations from the French are the author's. See also Havette 1913; Havette 1917a.

56 Coulon de Thévenot 1796; Havette 1913, 19.

57 *Le Tachygraphe* 1797–1798.

58 Havette 1906, 46. Coulon's proposal approved by the Council of Five Hundred (the lower chamber legislative assembly during the Directory) was finally rejected by the Council of Elders (the upper house).
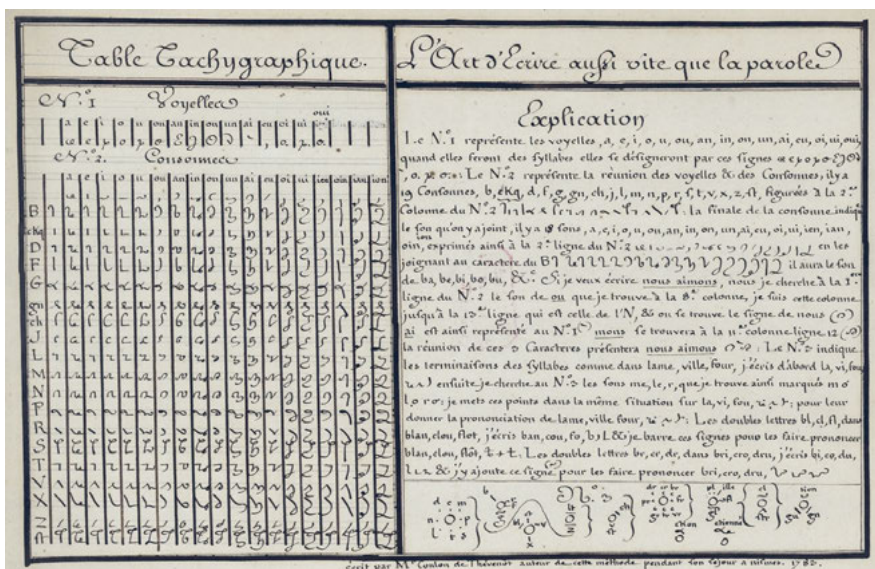
Fig. 3: 'Table Tachygraphique' from Jean Fèlicitè Coulon de Thévenot, 1783, Ville de Nîmes, Bibliothèque Carré d'Art, Ms_160_4.

We must also mention Coulon's competitor, Théodore Pierre Bertin's (1751–1819) translation of Samuel Taylor's method and adaptation to French (first translation 1790–1792; revised in 1794 and 1796).[59] This shorthand system was used for the revolutionary educational enterprise, the *Cours de l'école Normale de l'An III* (1795) – lectures given by eminent scientists, which were recorded, transcribed, and circulated in order to 'educate' new citizens and propagate 'universal knowledge'.

With parliamentary debates, shorthand authors and practitioners claimed to produce an exact 'copy' of debates, their goal being to propagate 'truth', enable judgment, serve posterity, and enable, through transcription and dissemination of the written word, publicity as the necessary companion to the new 'spirit of freedom'. This ideal of transparency, the desire to publicise and reproduce debates, was occasionally tested under the Constituent National Assembly (1789–1791) and the Convention (1792–1795) through various shorthand methods and other processes.[60] What characterised this period was the idea that a new, written language,

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59 Bertin 1792. For further relevant materials see London, Senate House Library, Carlton Shorthand Collection, Théodore Pierre Bertin, manuscripts, printed papers and treatises.
60 One of them was the 'Logograph', a non-phonetic note-taking method relying on a strict physical organisation. Twelve to fourteen people sat around a round table, each with a series of long,

could encapsulate and enable free speech; that the formal qualities of shorthand bore the 'virtues' needed to achieve transparency and truth.[61]

The figure of Jean-Baptiste Breton de La Martinière (1777–1852), who was among the first effective stenographers in France,[62] provides insight into the relationship between these different objectives. A writer of the Taylor-Bertin shorthand, this young, bourgeois Parisian used shorthand to take notes of courses at the *École normale de l'An III* and contributed to their publication.[63] He is also credited for his shorthand notes of the Babeuf trial.[64] A traveller, translator, and writer, he published many works. Under the Empire and the Restoration, he was an active stenographer of legal proceedings and published a series of trials.[65] His stated objective was to produce a 'faithful representation', the 'physiognomy' of the procedure: 'Nothing was added, nothing was omitted'.[66] Breton's activity as a legal stenographer, however, was associated with the regime of freedom of the press and submitted to censorship. Still, the ideal was there and was soon expressed for the benefit of parliamentary proceedings. As one of the first parliamentary shorthand writers, Breton was indeed one of the doyens of journalism. A column written after his death summarises his role in the formation of an opinion-based regime in France:

> M. Breton was a faithful and constant companion of the tribune. He rose with it, and he fell with it [...] one could say that he produced the 'proceedings of the century [...] He knew the words of history, he knew them how they were told and not how they had been made.[67]

In short, he is remembered as the man who served the liberal art of judicial and parliamentary speech.

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narrow strips of paper in front of him. The first few words of a speaker's speech were taken by the first writer, who immediately nudged the next to continue the task, and so on. The completed strips were passed to copyists and were corrected before being delivered for printing. Navarre 1909, 398–400; Gardey 2008, 35–47.

61 Ozouf 1993; Chartier and Corsi 1996; Rosenfeld 2001; Gardey 2008, 29–44.

62 Authors, such as Coulon de Thévenot, did not convince many of the practical implementation of their methods.

63 *Séances des Écoles normales* 1800, vol. 1.

64 Loyer 1904.

65 For instance Breton de la Martinière 1800. For references to published transcriptions of French trials see Gardey 2008, 296.

66 Igonel and Breton 1801, 3.

67 Navarre 1909, 215.

3.3 Shorthand, publicity and parliamentarianism in France

Breton contributed to the emergence of the first public sphere in France through the development of parliamentary reports in the press.[68] After the 1814 Charter, the publicity of parliamentary debates was performed by newspapers that sent shorthand journalists to the Chamber of Deputies (which was open to the ordinary public) and the Chamber of Peers (which was not).[69] Transcriptions of the debates were recorded by a few men who were practitioners of shorthand systems that they themselves improved. The Chambers could be considered a space for experimentation and validation of shorthand methods during this period in France, marked by theoretical and dynastic rivalries between the masters and disciples of different systems.[70] The expansion of reports and interest in them developed more seriously under the July Monarchy. The liberal regime was directly interested in publicising debates.[71] Article 27 of the 1830 Charter stated that sessions of the Chamber of Peers should be open to the public, as in the Chamber of Deputies. Several newspapers applied and were allowed to report. The Chamber bolstered the importance of shorthand and the publicity of debates, announcing in 1834 a deal with the *Moniteur*, which was given the exclusivity of *in extenso* proceedings and publication.[72]

This marked a shift from newspaper publication to an official, monopolistic publication sponsored by the parliament itself, which was given the means to employ stenographers to accurately report the debates.[73] There are parallels between this organisation and the role played contemporaneously by Hansard in Great Britain, but three points differentiate between them: the non-formal official status of Hansard; the non-involvement of the Chamber in the organisation of Hansard's service; and the lack of focus on *in extenso* reporting. Moreover, towards the end of the July Monarchy, the French regime was clearly pursuing the

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68 This section is based on the study of parliamentary archives as well as a sociological survey (fieldwork carried out at the department of the full proceedings of the French parliament, Service du Compte rendu intégral de l'Assemblée Nationale) between January and June 2003 and January and June 2008.

69 Parliament had to regulate presence of non-members among them. Journalists have gradually acquired a different status from the rest of the 'public'.

70 Gardey 2008, 48.

71 On the development and use of shorthand in German parliaments (Stenographischer Dienst) since the beginning of the nineteenth century, see Boeddeker 2023.

72 Paris, Service des Archives et de la Recherche Historique Parlementaire (SARHP), CRI – Historique.

73 Paris, Service des Archives et de la Recherche Historique Parlementaire (SARHP), Assemblée Nationale, Paris, séries 17 AN10; 16 AN70; Gougeon 1995.

idea of proceedings internally certified by the Chambers. The Senate was first to organise its own shorthand service in 1846, under Hippolyte Prévost (1898–1873). This initiative convinced the deputies under the July Monarchy, but it was only after the 1848 Revolution that two Chambers were merged (*Assemblée Nationale Constituante*) and their administrations were unified.[74]

The service implemented in France in 1848 was extremely long lasting in its organisation and principles. It was re-established with the reinstatement of the republic in 1871 and remained active until the beginning of the twenty-first century, resisting all forms of technological or organisational competition.[75] A list of what remains to the present includes: the central role of the presence of shorthand writers in the benches; shorthand virtuosity as a reporting technology of parliamentary discussions and 'movements' during sessions; the fragmentation of shorthand note-taking; translation by shorthand writers of the notes they have taken; rapid shifts between shorthand writers during sessions; division of labour between shorthand writers who 'roll' (*rouleurs*) and 'proofreaders' (*réviseurs*) who produce the text in written form;[76] the highly hierarchised organisation of tasks; the work chain on which texts circulate in their different states between persons; rapid transfer for typographical composition of the text to the *Journal officiel* by pneumatic tubes; and the certification of the words by the chief of the service of the proceedings under delegation of authority of the president of the assembly.[77] This organisation of a public service to publicise debates clearly differs from the British parliamentary tradition.[78]

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74 Gardey 2008, 53–54; Gardey 2010b, 138–141.

75 Gardey 2005; Gardey 2010b.

76 On the left of the president's chair the *rouleur* (a chamber stenographer) listens to the 'interruptions' from the political and physical left, while on the right, the *réviseur* (a chamber stenographer of higher rank) picks up all the remarks and injunctions. This geographic distribution of the recording system is also a hierarchical distribution of the listening and editing process. The role of the *rouleurs* is to reconstitute the *raw* words of what is said (the *rouleur*'s job is to note four minutes of the session before being relieved by a colleague and do a first and immediate transcription known as the *brut* or *raw text*). The more qualified *réviseurs* (who remain in session for twenty minutes before being relieved) listen and reconstitute the global meaning based on the five *rouleur*'s notes and transcriptions and his own notes and/or transcription, while at a third level, the director of the service (or his adjunct), present for the whole length of the session, certifies what happened. It is the director who is ultimately responsible for the minutes being published in the *Journal officiel de la République Française*. See Gardey 2005.

77 Poudra and Pierre 1902.

78 For a historical and gendered reading of French parliamentary rituals and culture since the French Revolution see Gardey 2015 and Gardey 2022.

Comparing the British and French uses of parliamentary shorthand reveals a paradox. Whereas shorthand had been an integral part of the culture of the written word in Great Britain since the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, its use (like any other form of note-taking) was strictly restricted in Parliament. Note-taking during sessions, as well as the circulation of speech and parliamentary debates outside the space of freedom of the Chambers, were persistently seen as a possible breach of parliamentary liberties and traditions.[79] Conversely, in France, where these technologies were barely used even in the late eighteenth century, the Revolution was a powerful driver for the development and (re)definition of shorthand. The revolutionary stage, the ideal of transparency, and the opening of the parliament to the people, provided deep and durable orientations for the formal and practical significance of a technology that developed mainly in the political and judicial spheres in the early nineteenth century.

4 Educative utopia and new commercial culture: Shorthand in Great Britain and France after the mid nineteenth century

4.1 From educative utopia to commercial empire: Pitman's phonography

While French shorthand was essentially limited to the judicial and parliamentary spheres from the 1830s to 1850s, the situation changed in England with the impact of a single figure: Isaac Pitman, who worked as much to build his empire as he did to establish his legacy.[80] Inventor, publicist and proselyte, Pitman represents a really important change in the history of shorthand, between the old world of shorthand and the new, whose character and advantages he actively redefined. With his 'phonography', Pitman opened shorthand to new audiences and uses, spreading intense propaganda to establish the foundations of a new economy in which the written word would come to play an unprecedented role.

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79 Gardey 2005.

80 In addition to the printed works cited, this section is based on research in the archives and printed works collection, Bath, University of Bath Library, Pitman's private collection and archives of Pitman and Sons, sections A, B, C and D.

Isaac Pitman (1813–1897) has been the subject of many autobiographical and hagiographical publications initiated by Pitman and his entourage, which contributed to the development of the Pitman legend. Born into a rigorist and devout family of eleven children, Pitman received his primary education in Bath, where he worked in a factory with his father from a young age. He was introduced to shorthand by a cousin, and soon developed a passion for the art and a commitment to publishing an easier and less costly system of his own design. His 'phonography' represented a new, simplified method, first published in 1837.

Pitman was essentially a self-taught man, and his shorthand allowed others to be the same. A man of great religious knowledge, he led an ascetic lifestyle that was counterbalanced by great intellectual curiosity, which helped him overcome the material and social obstacles he faced early in his life. His desire for knowledge included a commitment to educate others, one shared by his family at large (five of Pitman's siblings were teachers). Pitman first conceived of shorthand as a way to save time and money – by making personal copies of books that were too expensive to buy. Not long after publishing his *Phonography*, Pitman became overtly involved in the English language reform movement as a vehicle for popular education, encapsulated in his later work, *A Plea for Spelling Reform* (1878). His objective with both his Phonography[81] and his reformed spelling was to establish a simplified language that every English speaker could use, which would make it possible to educate children faster and more efficiently.

But how to diffuse a new shorthand method in a landscape in which several shorthand systems were already used by a large number of hardened amateurs and professionals? Pitman's idea was to promote his system not in the form of a treatise, as his competitors did, but as a simple printed page at the modest cost of one penny (the *Penny Plate*). As a budding publicist, Pitman waited for the implementation of the postal reform that drastically reduced postage fees, allowing him to distribute his *Penny Plate* by the Penny Post at the cost of a single penny, regardless of its destination within the United Kingdom. He also offered free correspondence lessons, which made his system the most accessible on the market.

Pitman mailed in subsequent years the *Penny Plate* to schoolteachers all over England. In the meantime, with the help of his brothers, Pitman toured Great Britain to promote his system, initiating a vast campaign of propaganda for phonography. Between 1842 and 1852, Pitman delivered a constant stream of lectures, conferences, and lessons, all the while continuing to publish. While he first distributed his shorthand system in primary schools among teachers and students, it also interested people with greater means and education, who paid to attend con-

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81 Pitman 1840.

ferences and thus provided financing for his activities. During the 1860s, Pitman endeavoured to distribute his method among journalists, and inaugurated the (eventual) commercial definition of shorthand by proposing his system to the railway administration in 1869. The proselytising aspect of this movement must be emphasised. In England, Phonography soon mobilised a strong enough audience of young, educated people to ensure the propagation of the method through their educational and philanthropic devotion. In 1852, Ben Pitman, one of his brothers, travelled to the United States and successfully circulated Pitman's system in America, as well.

By the early 1840s, the success of Pitman's shorthand was clear: 50,000 copies of the *Penny Plate* were printed in 1841; twelve successive editions were published up until 1867; 130,000 copies were sold by 1852; 230,000 by 1870; 500,000 by 1887.[82] As the method was distributed, new treatises, manuals and exercises were published for teachers and students, as well as books printed in shorthand characters. The first Institute of Phonetics, established in Bath in 1839, moved and expanded four times during the nineteenth century, showing the extraordinary expansion of this initiative of education and information.

Despite the seniority and variety of shorthand systems already in circulation, Pitman managed to eradicate all prior alternatives, as well as any real subsequent competition (which he did in part by taking his rivals to court). In the mid 1890s, control of Pitman's publication empire and colossal commercial education business passed to his sons. The Pitman family oversaw the publication of technical manuals, a large number of commercial training institutes, and controlled the shorthand system that studied by more than 95% of shorthand students. The corporation developed in parallel with the rise of a 'new' technology for the business world: shorthand note-taking in association with transcription on a typewriter. This promised to achieve – and indeed did achieve – an accelerated production of administrative and commercial writing,[83] one of the technological and professional factors that facilitated the 'administrative revolution' of the late nineteenth century.

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82 Baker 1908, 355–360.
83 Gardey 2001a; Gardey 2001b; Lowe 1987.

4.2 Simplifying, promoting literacy, and educating: The successes of Émile Duployé

There is no clear evidence that Émile Duployé (1833–1912), one of the main popularisers of shorthand in France, knew about Isaac Pitman. Nevertheless, Duployé and Pitman shared a series of motivations, including that of using shorthand to provide education to the lower classes.

Duployé was twenty years younger than Pitman and not, strictly speaking, an inventor of his own form of stenography. His first introduction to shorthand was in a seminar at his diocese led by a travelling scholar, who taught Duployé a variant of Conen de Prépéan's shorthand (modified by Aimé Paris).[84] Duployé was committed to simplifying the method[85] with his brother, in hopes of making it accessible to all and – more precisely – enabling children to learn how to read using phonics. Duployé's inventions and intentions are encompassed in the motto of the Two Worlds Shorthand Institute (Institut sténographique des Deux Mondes) that he founded in 1872:

> popularizing shorthand to make basic education and intellectual work easier [...] Our proposal is first and foremost to provide the illiterate with a writing system that is not only faster than ordinary writing, but also a lot easier to learn and to read.[86]

Duployé began to distribute his method in the late 1860s, two decades after the invention of phonography, and did so not by establishing the same kind of commercial and publishing empire as Pitman, but by forming a constellation of circles and organisations that brought together users of a method that was distributed in primary, commercial and philotechnical associations and schools. These eventually propelled his own system to a place of precedence over other existing French methods in the late nineteenth century, when the commercial aspects of shorthand were beginning to develop in France.

As a Catholic clergyman (he was ordained as a priest at twenty-six) who had help from his brothers, Duployé brought to his work a similar proselytising and educational spirit as Pitman, though it did not lead to an actual 'business'. Like Pitman, Duployé disseminated his shorthand through popularisation and propa-

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84 Conen de Prépéan (1777–1837) adopted the method of Taylor-Bertin (1813). Aimé Paris (1798–1866) proposed an adaptation of this adaptation in 1827, and worked as a legal and parliamentary shorthand writer for newspapers in the 1830s. Aimé Paris's method constituted one of the branches of French shorthand in the nineteenth century.

85 Duployé 1860.

86 Quoted in Gérardin 1931, 10.

ganda, which his detractors called 'senseless publicity' and a 'storehouse mess of stenographic objects'.[87] Duployé acknowledged having distributed an average of 300,000 to 400,000 leaflets in his first years of activity, and he published many advertisements in newspapers, displayed many posters in train stations, and promoted his method on envelopes, stationery, and other advertising materials.[88]

Duployé began by focusing on teachers, advocating for shorthand writing as a pedagogical tool for early literacy. The first advocates of Duployan included many schoolteachers and directors. Public school played an essential role in spreading shorthand both locally and nationally. Many associations, journals and local bulletins were set up. Duployan groups were largely responsible for the development of shorthand from the 1870s onwards in France, and by the late nineteenth century the Duployan movement had a considerable number of followers. Even though other remote branches of French shorthand (Aimé Paris; Prévost-Delaunay) underwent renewal during this period, they could not rival the Duployan movement.

As with Pitman's Phonography, the main driver behind Duployan was popular education. Duployé sought to democratise literacy and identified shorthand as an instrument to develop a culture of the written word. More so than Pitman, who organised courses and schools dedicated to his method, Duployé first targeted teachers already active in the existing republican institutions, and afterwards mobilised amateurs, curious people, and educators in philotechnic circles and in municipal teaching programs. The socialisation of adults and the development and structuring of a federation of circles of practitioners, who in turn trained new users, played a decisive role in the dissemination of the method and its rise as a commercial and professional technology.

In the late nineteenth century, Duployan shorthand transformed a literacy technology into a commercial technology in the Francophone world,[89] thus following the example of the Anglophone model. The dynamics of capitalistic development – the 'administrative' or 'business' revolution that first occurred in the United States in the late nineteenth century – redefined the uses and the value of shorthand, which became a defining instrument of a new commercial spirit and helped to give a special role to the written word in the world of business.

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87 Guénin 1880, 92.

88 Taken from an unspecified oral quotation from Duployé, made before 1870, quoted by Navarre 1909, 280.

89 I won't go into details about this story, which is well known for the United States, Great Britain and France, and on which I have published extensively for France: Gardey 2001a and 2001b.

5 Conclusion

Shorthand has had multiple heterogeneous objectives and uses in history: a system to characterise the sound of language; a rational language that would be better than vernaculars; a copying technology; a method to accelerate the production of writing; a speech recording technology; a technology for learning reading and writing (literacy or education); and, lastly, a commercial technology.

The largely unknown social history of shorthand as a technology can revive a world of inventions, uses and users. It can also account for the historicity and locality of formal and practical meanings of language, art, and technology.

In addition to exhibiting the existence of a culture of the written word, of a scriptural tradition, and of a specific cognitive and spiritual culture, the early history of shorthand in Great Britain is an invitation to reconsider the complexity and diversity of relationships between the oral and the written, handwriting and printing, language and signs, sound and text. Shorthand, as an experimental space with a production of knowledge of its own, is a field with many contributors, one which has been the object of controversies and formal and practical competition since the sixteenth century. Paradoxically, it emerged in a specific linguistic and cultural context (English and British culture in the Early Modern Period) but was described as a 'universal' language and invention that effectively developed as such two centuries later in many versions and many European languages.

The comparison between Great Britain and France allows us both to qualify the differences in trajectories, meanings and uses, and to identify some similarities. It allows a better account of the locality (and sometimes non-locality) of formal and practical actualisations, as well as religious, social, and political shaping of a technology. Conversely, it is yet another way to exhibit the fact that technologies (considered as cognitive, intellectual, and material resources) play an active role in shaping Western cultures, societies, and economies. Focusing on the uses of shorthand in the parliamentary setting allows us to account for both the specific features of each parliamentary culture and how the public sphere emerged in Great Britain and France. As a political technology, shorthand has played a key role in the establishment of major institutions of democracy (justice, parliament) and each language and country deserves a history of its own. Here again, the issue of the oral and the written needs to be revisited. As a note-taking – or speech-recording – technology, shorthand claims to serve an ideal of truth and exhaustiveness. It is an instrument of record-keeping, accountability, and publicity – a tool of democracy that facilitates an informed public.

The educational and commercial actualisations of shorthand in Great Britain and France are evidence of the expansion of the desire for exhaustiveness, truth,

and accuracy from the religious sphere to the judicial, political, and economic spheres. This is where shorthand played an essential role after the mid eighteenth century: as a technology to democratise literacy; as a key instrument for the operations of democratic institutions; and as a means and object of renewal of literacy-based economies.

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