

Ka-CHONK!

A Textile -> Computing History Zine via Punched Cards

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Abstract

Ka-CHONK! puts textile + computing technologies into conversation via the history of the punch card. Part of the Multithreaded textiles/computing history project based in the Maryland Institute for Technology in the Humanities (MITH) at UMD, the zine visually traces the material history of punch cards in the U.S. by reproducing different punch cards throughout history – from Jacquard weaving patterns to the 1890 U.S. census to the rise of IBM. Arranged chronologically with photographs, notes from historical sources, and QR codes to videos of these machines at work (where available), this incomplete assemblage helps us see technologies both historical and alive.

Threading this history together surfaces relationships between machines and people, with a visual focus on the interfacing of hands and machines. Gender, labor, and power come to the fore. We begin to see stories of whose hands punched out the data of early computation – who worked, who counted, and who was counted. By stitching together these stories, we put the history of computing back into our own hands.

As part of Multithreaded, Ka-CHONK! is designed to engage and expand spaces where readers can see/touch/play with physical examples of textile and/or retro computing technologies. At MITH, it accompanies Hilda, the lab's Silver Reed SK280 knitting machine (named after Hilda G. Carpenter, who wove the first planes of core memory that would enable the Apollo mission).

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