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L'ART DU MENUISIER. WORK PRACTICES OF FRENCH JOINERS AND CABINET-MAKERS IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

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There is little we know about the work practices of old handicrafts. Research so far has not shown much interest in this aspect of material culture; on the other hand there are only few relevant sources available, at least in the classical form of written tradition. Thus, a reconstruction of pre-industrial work methods and - what would be most interesting - of the ways in which the artisan sections of society viewed themselves, is considerably hampered by the fact that in few cases do the written documents stem from the master workmen and the journeymen themselves. Most of the artisan-diaries and artisan-autobiographies that have been published date from the nineteenth century, and this applies to France as well as to Germany. Some sources may still be discovered from earlier centuries which would display a self-assessment of such groups of the population, but the works by Daniel Roche, Jacques-Louis Ménétra. Compagnon vitrier, and Alain Lottin, Pierre Chavatte, prove, as yet, to be the exception in the French case.[1] No details of the pre-modern world of work are to be gathered from the popular reading material, dating from the 18th century, which Robert Mandrou has studied.[2] This paucity of information contrasts with the numerous hints to be found in the songs and diaries of people like Agricol Perdiguier and Martin Nadaud, who wrote in the first half of the nineteenth century.

Nevertheless we could learn about the attitudes and patterns of behaviour from various documents of handicraft folklore - apart from those few written self-reflective statements (which, incidentally, originate from the more sensitive minds and cannot be taken to be representative of the whole group), quite separate from sources relating to various authorities. An investigation into

festival activities, songs, rituals, myths, and into the material culture of handicrafts would offer special insights into the intrinsic outlook and norms of oral culture.

The social and industrial relations of those cultures were to a large extent ritualised; they were governed by strict norms, while the communication of those norms was conducted through rituals, celebrations, processions and songs. These were forms of symbolic action, which characterized a given social system and a given social position; they are to be decoded as such.

If the present study of French joiners' work practices does not make adequate use of these sources, the only excuse lies in the fact that the appropriate materials are very hard to come by in German libraries. Therefore my considerations have to be based almost entirely on one published document, which relates in minute detail about the work practices of the French menuisiers-ébénistes and which was written by a practitioner of the craft himself. Yet judging this book by its language and composition one recognizes the author as an enlightened spirit, a highly gifted outsider, who took classes in geometry and architecture under Blondel and who was familiar with the works of Montesquieu, Buffon and Rousseau. The four volumes of this work, L'art du menuisier, were published between 1769 and 1775 and were commissioned and subsidised by the Academy as part of its project "Descriptions des arts et métiers".[3] Besides Hulot and Perret, Roubo belongs to that handful of craftsmen who, according to Duhamel du Monceau's judgement, were capable "de rendre aussi bien les connoissances qu'ils ont acquis par un long exercice".[4]

Despite its pretentious aim of exposition, Roubo's work, according to his own conception, was not really intended for the connoisseurs in the upper classes; as he stated explicitly, he wrote for his fellow craftsmen, "ses confrères".[5] He wished his work, which took

him seven years to compile, to be useful "à la conservation et même à la perfection des moeurs des hommes qui, par état, sont obligés de travailler la plus grande partie du temps pour se procurer des moyens de vivre".[6] By giving detailed descriptions of the work processes within the various branches of the joiners' craft, of the materials and tools, complete with diagrams and illustrations, by giving an introduction to geometry, and by expressing some critical remarks upon the social condition of his profession, Roubo wanted to assist his fellow guild members "pour se développer et atteindre à la perfection de leur Art".[7]

André-Jacob Roubo was born of a joiner's family, who lived in meagre circumstances. He always confessed to his milieu and to the beliefs of his kin. His grandfather and father had been practitioners of the joiners' profession, though never reaching the rank of master, which the son managed to do in the interval between the publication of the first and second volume of his work. "Né de parents honnêtes, mais pauvres comme le sont tous les ouvriers qui n'ont d'autres ressources que le travail de leurs mains, ils furent, par consequent, hors d'état de me donner de bons Maîtres, et je ne reçus d'autre éducation que celle des Ecoles publiques de charité".[8]

Roubo began his working life, when he was eleven years of age; he received training in the traditional way by practical exercises following his father's instructions. "Mon père, qui étoit et qui est encore Compagnon Menuisier, me fit commencer à travailler avec lui, pour me transmettre ses connoissances et son état, le seul bien qu'il eût à me donner et qu'il avoit pareillement reçu de son père, aussi Compagnon Menuisier".[9]

This is virtually all the information we have about the material and social conditions of Roubo and his family. We know nothing about any membership in a corporation of <u>menuisiers-ébénistes</u>, nothing

about the place of his work. The legal state of industrial affairs is dealt with only casually in his book, its predominant aim is to give a detailed and precise description of the working techniques, of the tools and materials that were used in joinery. Roubo subscribed to the work ethic of his profession, i.e. solidarity and perfection being his highest guiding-principles. We find few utterances which deal with problems of pay and hint at his social self-perception; but through this scarse evidence, as we shall illustrate later on, he can be shown as defending the traditional values of his guild. It is equally true, however, that the author's contact with ideas of the Enlightenment and with the culture of the élite is reflected throughout his work, such as when he laments the menacing ossification of his profession which will result from too close an observance of customary behaviour or from lack of theory.

I am enquiring about eighteenth-century work culture, therefore, a critical approach to Roubo's L'art du menuisier is called for. We have to ask about the influences exerted by his teachers and about a possible reflection of concepts usually associated with the Enlightenment. The question is, in what ways his rendering of contemporary work culture, which is the everyday version of popular culture, can be taken as representative. Roubo's statements have to be compared with several sources, mostly to be found in private papers and in declarations of bankruptcy, which give an account of Parisian joiners' material situation; a comparison with other documents of handicraft culture, such as songs and rituals, would be equally useful. Such comparative observations would necessarily focus on the menuisiers-ébénistes of Paris, since the sources would not allow otherwise.

Artisan-culture was, first and foremost, a work culture. It was work that gave all the meaning to the craftsmen's life. For them

work was a form of life. The dignity that was claimed for work, in the cases where it was craftsmanlike and guided by guild tradition, is expressed in the very terms which were used to define it. The artisan corporations belonged to the arts et métiers, their members were gens de métier as distinguished from the gens de bras, i.e. the workmen and day labourers. Accordingly Roubo regarded his craft as art and called his book L'art du menuisier. The gens de métier would not perform travail, i.e. labour while toiling and sweating; they conceived of their work as a technical skill, as art, thus referring to Man's ability to emancipate himself from nature by using his intelligence and skills. That from art and not from travail one would gain honour was one of the cardinal maxims governing culture during the European ancien régime. Roubo thought along the same lines, when he set as the aim for his profession, indeed for all arts méchaniques, to push the latter "du plus haut point de perfection".[10] Consequently he explicitly aimed to execute his exposition of joinery "avec le plus de précision" and "avec la plus grande exactitude".[11]

Roubo's minute description of the various working processes and tools relating to the different branches of joinery bears witness to a conception of work as a concrete process, which in itself is a matter of direct experience. This process, it is assumed, symbolises perfectibility and is instrumental to human self-realisation. Time and again Roubo begins his disquisition by enumerating the qualities that make for the perfect menuisier. "Pour que la Menuiserie soit parfaite, il ne suffit pas d'avoir apporté tous les soins nécessaires à sa décoration et à sa construction, il faut encore veiller à sa conservation".[12] Roughly seventy years after the cataclysm of the French revolution it was still the precision of work, according to the joiner journeyman Agricol Perdiguier, singer and poet of the journeymen's movement,

by which an honest, proper master artisan would be recognized. "Il savait parfaitement couper le bois; il était véritablement menuisier", he said of a master, for whom he worked during his 'Tour de France'.[13]

Of all branches of joinery it is ébénisterie, i.e. cabinet-maker's work, which demands the highest degree of precision and orderliness from the craftsman. This is why Roubo prefers to call him an "artiste". For he needs not only a great deal of practical experience, but a vast amount of theoretical knowledge as well. "De sorte qu'un bon Menuisier-Ebéniste doit non seulement être en état de bien faire la Menuiserie ordinaire, mais encore de savoir coller et polir toutes les différentes espèces de bois, tant François qu'Etrangers; il doit aussi savoir teindre les bois et les brunir, et travailler diverses sortes de matières, comme l'yvoire, l'écaille, la nacre de perle, l'étain, la cuivre, l'argent et même l'or et les pierres précieuses; ce qu'il ne peut faire sans connoître parfaitement toutes ces différentes matières, qui toutes s'emploient et se travaillent différement. La teinture des bois demande aussi quelques notions de Chimie pour la composition de ces teintures. A ces connnoissances théoriques-pratiques, les Menuisiers-Ebénistes doivent joindre celles de goût qui s'acquirent par le Dessein de tous les genres, comme l'Architecture et la Perspective, l'Ornement, la Paysage et même la Figure, afin d'être en état de représenter toutes sortes de sujets avec toute la précision dont leur Art peut être susceptible".[14]

Yet this does not end Roubo's list of skiils and knowledge, which an accomplished cabinet-maker should have a good command of in his own profession and in neighbouring fields. Roubo's claims surely extended beyond the actual knowledge most of his companions could be said to have mastered, as will presently be explained, and outbid the demands of customary craftsmanship.

Having claimed the most comprehensive knowledge for a proper

exercise of his craft, Roubo proceeds to a detailed description of its working methods, its tools, and materials. In most cases these are shown in parallel illustrations. While trying to render his description as precise as possible, he endeavours to reduce the number of designations for one and the same object or process[15], thus complying with the postulate by the encyclopaedists for an exact definition of things. In his article "Art" in the Encyclopédie Diderot had postulated that, in depicting manufacturing procedures "tous les mouvements sont réductibles, sans aucune erreur considerable, au mouvement rectiligne et au mouvement circulaire".[16] The descriptions given by Roubo could certainly meet these demands for logic and "ésprit géométrique". This can easily be exemplified by a random list of passages from his work, e.g. when he deals with the production of chairs, with the technique of veneering, or when he makes an item-by-item inventory of the various kinds of wood.[17]

Roubo's description of tools, like the wooden boring machine (vilbrequin), is a characteristic instance of the precision and synthesis he was able to apply to a given object. "Le vilbrequin est un outil à peu près comme un demi-ovale, à l'un des bouts duquel est placé une poignée, laquelle a un tourillon qui passe à travers la tête du vilbrequin. Ce tourillon a, à son extrémité, un bouton qui l'empêche de sortir de cette tête, son autre bout étant collé dans la poignée; à l'autre bout est percé un trou carré dans lequel entre un morceau de bois qu'on appelle la boete; c'est là que doit s'assembler ou emmancher (en termes d'ouvriers) les mèches de fer qui servent à percer le bois".[18]

His thinking (and that of his companions) was moulded by the concrete material on which they were working, and it developed with the very operational procedure they were following. "Une pensée qui s'éprouve dans le matériau, qui réfléchit dans le matériau,

qui se construit dans l'ouvrage, - et non à propos de l'ouvrage".[19] The depiction of the various sawing processes is an interesting case in point, as the increasing division of labour went hand in hand with the more explicit differentiation of social standing within the joiners' profession: working with the veneering saw required many years of practice and generated further job-differentiation in this particular field. "Ce ne sont pas les Menuisiers-Ebénistes qui refendent leur bois, mais des Ouvriers qui ne font uniquement que cet ouvrage".[20] Payment, again, was different from the standards applied in the rest of ébénisterie. Even more striking was the differentiation in cleave sawing, a hard and badly paid job, which most menuisiers liked to delegate to workmen.

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the joiners' craftsmanship became an ever widening spectrum of operational procedure. It reflected the growing demands from the market-place, while at the same time mirroring the craftsmen's interest to secure a moderate income through steady job-differentiation. Roubo classifies the menuisiers-ébénistes according to the diverse manufacturing processes and diverse materials that are handled. At first, following the general usage of his day, Roubo differentiates between two special fields only, "menuiserie d'assemblage" and "menuiserie de rapport" or "marqueterie", which soon came to be called "ébénisterie". The constant increase of menuiseries in numbers and in manufacturing domains produced yet another differentiation within these two branches. Eventually five sub-groups came to be distinguished in Roubo's time. The classification in the "Dictionnaire universel de police" edited by Desessarts in 1788 closely follows the one Roubo had laid down: "On distingue les Menuisiers en cinq classes: 1. ceux en ébénisterie, 2. en batimens, 3. en meubles, 4. en voitures, 5. en treillages de jardins".[21]

The division of labour was even greater among the menuisiers

than among the ébénistes. The former differed from the carpenters in that they, as a matter of principle, would only use seasoned wood, which was already cut and planed, whereas the carpenters would dispose of damp and unplaned wood in any quantity. The "menuiserie d'assemblage ou de batiments", i.e. the timber work, came to be divided into "la dormante", including the production of every non-removable object like the inlaid floor, and "la mobile", comprising doors, windows etc. The "menuisiers en carosse" built coach bodies, the "menuisiers en meubles" produced non-veneered wardrobes, chest of drawers, as well as armchairs, chairs and beds. From 1700 onwards, anybody who availed himself of veneering technique was called ébéniste. Those who fabricated furniture and did the inlaying work as well, and those who handled only finished pieces of furniture while covering them with expensive "bois des Indes" - both of these belonged to that class of cabinet-maker.

Roubo also mentions two causes for the ongoing differentiation within the joiner's craft: the increasing number of craftsmen and the market's heightened and refined needs. Of course, for a great many craftsmen the growing division of labour guaranteed a means of living; but the specialisation of jobs also entailed a growing alienation within the menuiserie, "de sorte que les Ouvriers d'une espèce de Menuiserie ne sont guere en état de travailler que dans la partie qu'ils ont embrassée; et que s'ils voulaient travailler à une autre partie, il faudroit qu'ils en fissent une espèce d'apprentissage pour pouvoir se mettre en état de le faire avec sûreté".[22] It is only in the "menuiserie de batiment" that Roubo himself admitted having any practical experience of long standing. While writing his book, he not only made the effort to study the "construction des principaux ouvrages",[23] but was keen on seeking expert advice on every single branch of menuiserie.

The rapid change in fashions and tastes led to further alterations and continual differentiation within the cabinet-makers' profession. Roubo doubted that they were wholly useful or necessary; they often arose, he surmised, rather from a capricious craving for something new, thus contravening, to his mind, convenience and the functional design imperative in his trade. Moreover, they induced craftsmen merely to imitate and to produce bad copies which, in order to satisfy the passion for innovation, were furbished with some ill-considered variations.[24]

Roubo also attributed the ensuing loss of solidity to the fact that many craftsmen presumptuously strove "de faire et de conduire ce qui n'est pas de leur état et à quoi ils ne connoissent rien ou très-peu de chose".[25] thus de master harness-makers assumed the right "de fournir aux particuliers les voitures toutes finies, et d'entreprendre tout ce qui n'est point de leur ressort, comme le train, la caisse etc. et qu'ils ne payent que le moins qu'ils peuvent aux autres Ouvriers".[26]

By tradition the individual work-area and professional honour were bound up with a rigid particularism - this notion was fully shared by Roubo himself, a trained outsider imbued with the ideas of the Enlightenment. The demarcation from neighbouring and rival professions was particularly marked. There were verbose variations in the guilds' statutes on that one theme: the jealous defence of the privilege of demarcation of their respective professions.

Since the fourteenth century the Parisian menuisiers had managed to secure a number of privileges, which described in great detail the working procedures and materials reserved to their exclusive supervision; the privilege of 1580 contained a particularly extensive nomenclature of these products; its "luxe de description" reflected Renaissance-type rationality, and moreover, the guild's strong desire for demarcation of its field.[27] The overdetailed enumeration

of legally registered products indicates the range and significance of the joiners' work and provides an account of contemporary working techniques and working conditions. The extensive list keeps referring to the different quality-norms, mostly phrased in not very strict terms, which were used to separate off a given profession from the non-guild "gens sans qualité" as well as to prohibit ruinous competition among guild members and dumping through the use of inferior materials and poor work. Thus it was decreed "que nul ne face bureaulx, comptouers, bancs à couche, bancs à dossiers, monstes et autres, à commandement, estant dudit estat de hucher-menuysier, pour accomoder toutes personnes que ce syt, que le tout ne soit bien et deuement fait en assemblage, tourneure, taille et autres ornemens".[28]

The quality-stipulations in the "Statuts des menuisiers-ébénistes" of 1751 were even more extensive and detailed.[29] All products, according to this document, were required to fulfil the standards of good fabrication, to be made of high-quality wood and were not to display any blemishes, knags, or worm-holes. The document went on to define the powers of the guild-jury (jurés), who could seize any products of poor quality and - in the case of gross defects - burn them immediately; any infringement of the rules was to be fined 100 livres by the jury.[30]

The particularism and tendency towards separation were ostentatiously demonstrated by the new statutes of 1751. No fewer than thirteen Parisian guilds protested against these statutes, because they believed that some articles infringed on their claim to a guaranteed monopoly, which was basic to their livelihood. Eight years later the Parisian parlement eventually settled tough negotiations with contiguous guilds and ratified 106 sections designed to shield the monopoly of production and trade against developments threatening the guilds' existence.

These arose primarily from the advent of a multitude of German cabinet-makers, who were more skilled at the art of "peinture en bois". Initially they settled in the guild-free lieux privilégiés, chiefly in the Faubourg St. Antoine. One way of impeding the intrusion of illegal labour was to revive the old privilege of stamping: each master workman was required to keep a stamp (the impression of which had to be deposited with the corporation's bureau) in order to mark all his products.

It was not only the exempt locations like the lieux privilégiés that limited the jurés' sphere of influence; the rich merchants, the marchands-merciers[31], escaped effective control by the joiners' guild, since every visit of inspection by a juré had to be announced in advance at the marchand-mercier's office. Provisions of this kind and other precepts of an exclusive nature indicate the mounting pressures that jeopardised the master joiners' monopoly in the course of the eighteenth century. First and foremost, it was threatened by the wealthy marchands-merciers and the ouvriers-libres of the lieux privilégiés. But it was further threatened by the artisans and retailers "suivant la cour", i.e. the court-artisans: since they were subject neither to the jurisdiction nor to the commercial and work régime exercised by the guilds, and did not suffer any market-restrictions, they were in a position to develop modern forms of production and distribution.[32]

The stamp regulations were frequently broken - a fact which proves the strength and the quality attained by these producers while competing with the guild. For these two types of guild-free joiners produced by no means solely low-quality goods; on the contrary, occasionally they classed among the élite of their group, as can be seen from their fine pieces of work in the art of furniture making. We can gauge from Roubo's work the importance - though of a quite ambiguous nature - attached to the high-quality standards

of craftsmanship by the menuisiers-ébénistes themselves (and by other artisans as well). To Roubo's mind solidity and perfection were the highest norms to be aimed at in handicraft. They also vindicated the artisan's pride in his craft and work. In the last chapter of his work Roubo once again voiced the notion he had of his own craft: "L'art que je viens de décrire est un des plus considérables des Arts méchaniques et c'est même le plus utile et le plus répandu après les Arts d'une nécessité absolue, tels que l'Agriculture, la Charpenterie et la Maçonnerie".[33] The importance of this art, he argues, is founded in "l'utilité de ce bel Art nécessaire à tous, riches comme pauvres",[34] because it does a great deal to promote the comforts of life. He believed that, in order to guard and transmit the claim and conception of menuiserie as "une profession honnête et distinguée",[35] a complete and profound acquaintance was needed of the particular field in which the individual craftsman specialised, as well as a good general knowledge relating to all the neighbouring branches of this art and their corresponding professions. Roubo shared the craft's traditional pride in its own manual labour and in his class;[36] at the same time he broke the mould by his deep concern for the acquisition of theoretical knowledge, i.e. architecture and design. His work would only be useful to his confrères, he claimed, "qu'autant qu'ils joindront à beaucoup de bonne volonté et d'amour pour leur état, une grande assiduité à l'étude et au travail, n'ayant que ce moyen pour acquérir les connoissances théoriques et pratiques de leur Profession...".[37]

To supplement and to complete practical experience with theoretical knowledge, above all basic geometry, is a repeated claim, almost a leitmotif of Roubo's work. "Il est néanmoins de la dernière nécessité pour les Menuisiers, d'entrer dans le détail des différents profils usités dans la décoration de la Menuiserie, afin de pouvoir

parvenir à une parfaite pratique par le moyen d'une théorie sûre et constante".[38]

In short, the author held the lack of theory to be responsible for the fact that many joiners made only meagre progress in the art of drawing and designing, and that precision and solidity were frequently found wanting. Attributing this deplorable state of affairs mainly to the tenacity of guild customs, Roubo revealed his own fundamentally ambivalent attitude towards tradition. He went by handicraft's traditional beliefs and conceptions of labour, yet, as a disciple ofthe Enlightenment, hewanted to put them on a rational and more perfect basis: "Il faut absolument joindre le flambeau de la théorie à l'habitude de la pratique".[31] Clinging to custom ("la coutume") could be obstructive to this effort in many ways, it could even be held up to ridicule and accused of unreasonableness. Practice, untended by theory, easily rendered the artisan's labour a waste of time, "ce qui est une perte irréparable";[40] he merely imitated the various fashions, but would not be able to bring forth products that were solid, functional and tasteful. "Je ne cesserai jamais d'exhorter les jeunes gens de travailler à acquérir des connoissances, les quelles en joignant l'agréable à l'util, les mettent dans le cas de perfectionner leurs ouvrages et d'en accélerer l'execution, ce qui est un double avantage".[41]

The relative positions Roubo assigned to theory and practice in the work process reflect the economic and technical conditions of late ancien-régime menuiserie. The old craft achieved its final peak through perfection and aesthetic refinement, not by technical innovations.[42] It is clear from Roubo's description of work techniques and tools that additional accomplishments and improvements in all parts of joinery were achieved, or were expected to be achieved, by refinement of traditional methods, and not by employment of new

and mostly costly innovations. To the majority of craftsmen the prices of eighteenth-century technical innovations in this field proved to be prohibitive: Roubo reports for instance that hardly a craftsman was in a position to use a planing machine for fluting the legs of a chair;[48] at best it was reserved for some large-scale workshops in Paris, which could invest in technical innovations and special tools. However, the tools and the actual workshop, as depicted by Roubo, refer to a medium-sized artisan firm, which more often than not was governed by traditionalism in techniques. From his description we can identify a basic stock of tools, which formed a workshop's normal equipment. These tools had undergone hardly any change in their make-up over the centuries. Only the inexpensive tools were held in sufficient supply, i.e. they were normally and for the most part made out of wood and almost exclusively were produced in the joiner's own shop.[44]

In most cases the instruments were manufactured by the craftsmen themselves. The master workman generally supplied the tools, while only the small and most indispensable pieces of equipment were owned by the journeymen themselves. They would usually keep them in a delicately embellished box serving (together with the tools it contained), so to speak, as a certificate of their skills. By tradition the artisans' tools were locked away in the workshop and were not to be taken home: Roubo approved of this provision of law, "parce qu'elle empêche ceux qui n'ont point de qualité de travailler à leur compte".[45] But he was well aware of the inherent ambivalence in this traditional manner of protecting the quality of work and of eliminating any "faux ouvriers" in the interest of the master workshop. For it was pretty hard for the law-abiding journeyman to produce his own tools at his bench, "ce qu'il ne peut même faire que les Fêtes et Dimanches et aux dépens de son repos".[46] Roubo knew that the corporative order was constantly

undermined by all sorts of abuse, which by the end of the eighteenth century made the guild-orientated forms of life and work ever more precarious: "Que ces mêmes hommes", he continued, "ne rougissent pas de se servir de cette loi pour enlever à un ouvrier foible et sans défense, le seul moyen qu'il a de gagner sa vie, puis qu'ils se refuseroient de lui donner de l'ouvrage s'il n'avait point d'outils ".[47]

Before finally touching on the social aspects of joinery, we should take note of another genus of historical source material: the picture, which Roubo employed to describe the joiner's workshop (apart from doing so in writing). The workshop he presented is a firm of intermediate size, where the master himself still worked together with eight to ten men. The illustration in the Encyclopédie, which closely parallels the one in Roubo's work,[48] shows four workmen: one planing, another two sawing up a beam (the master is distinguished by his dress), and the fourth nailing a piece. The illustration provided by Roubo for purposes of instruction focuses on eight long planing benches, which are attended by five workmen: the first is grooving a piece of wood with a mallet and chisel, another couple are sawing, while the other two are respectively planing and polishing. Further along to the side two apprenctices are engaged in sharpening the tools and fetching hot glue. Roubo's workshop apparently is a smallish and rather unassuming place; the Encyclopédie, in contrast, gives a much more liberal impression of such a workshop which, it is likely, was modelled on an ideal type of a workshop rather than on a real one. The same tendency towards stereotype, as Jacques Proust has pointed out,[49] can be discerned in another illustration in the Encyclopédie, which records a typical workshop of menuiserie en meubles.

By the end of the eighteenth century the social reality of Parisian joinery was marked by a growing differentiation in plant-

size, production and market-orientation. The bulk of enterprises was made up of numerous small workshops, their average value seldom exceeding 100 livres. A middle-sized firm's usual equipment and value can conveniently be gauged from the balance sheets left by a joiner named Jean Gottlieb Frost. In 1785 he was elected member of the Parisian guild of menuisiers-ébénistes, with the support of the famous joiner-undertaker and purveyor to European courts, David Roentgen. The balance sheet drawn up for Frost's workshop in autumn 1789 registered the following assets: ten benches "en bon état", tools for ten workmen, a stock of additional tools, and "differentes machines très couteuses", the latter valued at a mere 1200 livres. In addition to that, the statement lists untreated wood for a value of 3600 livres, marble and bronze at 1200 livres, and unsold goods at 9600 livres.[50] According to contemporary reports there were also some Parisian cabinet-makers who were employing up to 200 journeymen and were relying on rationalisation of means and specialisation of jobs for the enhancement of their production.[51]

The transition from traditional guild-economy to capitalistic forms of business may be grasped from those passages in Roubo's work, where he deals with the fixing of current wages and prices; his discussion of the menuisiers-ébénistes' growing market-strength is also a case in point. At the same time these considerations reveal the ambivalence underlying guild tradition.[52] Roubo writes of a growing general trend to pay wages per piecework rather than per week or per day - a measure, he says, preferred by masters and journeymen alike. The former liked it "parce que leur ouvrage est mieux fait et qu'il leur coûte moins cher de façon"[53], while the latter began to warm to this type of labour organisation, "parce qu'ils sont, disent-ils, plus libres et qu'ils gagnent davantage qu'ils travailloint à la journée".[54] Roubo did not

deny that a clever journeyman would earn half as much again or even double by payment on a daily basis. But he added the rhetorical question: "En gagnant davantage, en sont ils plus riches?"[55] He attached much more importance to the costs in declining social morals caused by rationalisation and progress than to any temporary profit which master or journeyman might gain from the new forms of labour organisation. For, to the degree that profit would become the sole maxim of work, this new development would be harmful to the solidity of the craftsman's work; it would further alienate masters from journeymen, and would accentuate the differences between them. The major pieces would still be produced on a daily wage basis, but the great majority on a piecework wage basis: "parce qu'ils coûtent moins cher de façon que s'ils étoient faits à la journée et cela aux dépens de la solidité de l'ouvrage et de la santé de l'ouvrier, qui s'épuise de travail pour gagner davantage".[56] Thus this new trend would destroy the arts and foster mankind's misery.

Roubo was equally critical of another development, which reflected the role capital was going to play in the industrial world. The increasing influence of the marchands-merciers, he argued, diminished the quality of work and would bring about the ruin of the workman, "en lui enlevant ses pratiques et en le forçant... à leur faire de l'ouvrage au prix qu'ils jugent à propos de lui payer."[57] Lack of perfection and deficient solidity of work would be the consequences "de cette entreprise des Marchands",[58] thus causing the continual decline of craftsmanship in general. "De plus, ces Ouvriers une fois accoutumés à faire de mauvais ouvrage que les Marchands leur payent très médiocrement, ne veulent et même ne peuvent plus changer leur routine".[59]

It was the traditional guild economy and the corporative ethic which Roubo held to, when he criticised the growing alienation

and exploitation and lamented the downfall of standards of quality. He strove for a state of affairs which had passed, but which he wanted to see restored: "Mais si tous les Ouvriers travailloient à la journée et qu'en cet état le merite et l'habilité fussent récompensés, ces difficultés s'évanouiroient, et l'émulation et la concorde régneroient parmi des Ouvriers et entre ces derniers et leurs Maîtres, qu'ils regarderoient comme leurs supérieurs quant au commandement, mais aussi comme leurs amis et leurs compagnons de travail, puis qu'ils seroient obligés de travailler avec eux, ne fut ce que pour les exciter par leur exemple".[60]

The dream Roubo had about returning to the old guild tradition reveals the reciprocal interrelationship between tradition and revolution, and apparently matches Rousseau's ideals of the social polity. Roubo's ideal of a virtuous citizen was faithfully modelled on the corporative ideal of individual independence and moral economy which resulted from honest, thorough work. "Le citoyen vertueux n'est-il toujours libre, lorsqu'il jouit en paix de lui-même et du fruit de son travail, qui, de quelque nature qu'il soit, n'est jamais un esclavage, mais une occupation honnête, qui égale en quelque façon les conditions, en ne faisant dépendre celui qui travaille que de lui-même et en le rendant nécessaire aux Riches, qui lui payent le prix de son travail pour satisfaire leurs besoins réels ou imaginaires?"[61]

Again, his idea of a fair pay deal originated in the old notion of a fair price: work must have sufficient reward, so that the workman "ait le nécessaire honnête et qu'à l'aide d'une sage économie, il lui reste encore, après avoir pris sur son gain ce qui est nécessaire à soutenir son existence et celle de sa famille et cela suivant son état, qu'il lui reste, dis-je, assez pour se soulager dans des temps de disette d'ouvrage ou de maladie afin qu'encouragé par cette espèce d'aisance il travaille avec

plaisir et ne se considère pas comme un forçat condamné à une peine dont il n'espère la fin qu'avec celle de sa vie".[62]

The master's profit "doit être modéré, mais fixe et relatif à la quantité des ouvrages plutôt qu'à leur qualité".[63] The profit, calculated for a firm employing five to six journeymen should come to 20% of the sales price for a given piece of work; this, he estimated, would allow the master to earn a decent and sufficient living.

Yet far from being a mere visionary moralist, Roubo was familiar with the industrial economics of his time, and made ample provision for human fraility, as can be seen from his calculations of the incidental costs, and from his admission that the circumstances would not allow honesty to be taken as the employer's sole guiding principle, but would force him to charge extra, so that the customer could get the chance of a rebate.

To sum up: Roubo's descriptions of the methods employed in joinery and of the self-perception prevalent in that craft at the end of the eighteenth century reflect the values and beliefs of guild tradition. They also indicate a situation where these norms came to be altered and threatened by rationalisation and the advancement of capitalistic principles. His work displays the refinement and the final peak achieved by traditional handicraft by means of rationalisation and specialisation; it conceives of work as a concrete process, which in itself is a matter of direct experience, and which is instrumental to moral self-realisation and to independence of all those, who "vivent en travaillant".[64] These people felt work to be a matter of self-esteem, a moral commitment,[65] and the basis of all social solidarity. Yet Roubo

also records the impact suffered by the traditional guild-centred patterns of life and work from capitalistic principles, on which, in turn, the ensuing social criticism was based. Later, this was moulded and translated into the political realm by the sansculottes movement of the French Revolution.[66]

Notes

1. Daniel Roche (ed.), Journal de ma vie. Jacques-Louis Ménétra. Compagnon vitrier au 18e siècle, Paris 1981; Alain Lottin, Chavatte. Ouvrier lillois. Un contemporain de Louis XIV, Paris 1977.
2. Robert Mandrou, De la culture populaire aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles: la bibliothèque bleue de Troyes, Paris 1964, p. 137.
3. See Cole and Watts, The handicrafts of France as recorded in the Descriptions des arts et métiers, Cambridge (Mass.) 1952.
4. André-Jacob Roubo, compagnon: L'art du menuisier. t. I, Paris 1769. Extrait des Régistres de l'Academie royale des sciences, p. II.
5. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV. L'art du treillaguer, Paris 1775, p. 1261.
6. Ibid., p. 1040.
7. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. II, Paris 1770, préface.
8. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 1259.
9. Ibid., p. 1260.
10. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. II, p. 1.
11. Ibid.
12. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. II, p. 258.
13. Agricol Perdiguier, Mémoires d'un compagnon. Introduction d'Alain Faure, Paris 1977, p. 117.
14. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. III/3: L'art du menuisier ébéniste, Paris 1772, p. 763.
15. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. II, p. 312.
16. Quoted by Guy Besse, 'Aspects du travail ouvrier au XVIIIe siècle en France', in Essays on Diderot and the Enlightenment in Honor of Otis Fellows, ed. by J. Pappas, Genève 1974, p. 84.
17. See Michael Stürmer, Handwerk und höfische Kultur. Europäische Möbelkunst im 18. Jahrhundert, München 1982, p. 103.
18. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. I, p. 89; see Planche 22, Fig. 1.
19. Besse, Aspects du travail, p. 85.

20. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. III/3, p. 799.
21. N.-T. Desessarts, Dictionnaire universel de police, Paris 1788, t. VI, p. 452.
22. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. III/1, Paris 1771, p. 453.
23. Ibid., p. 454.
24. Ibid., p. 564.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., p. 471.
27. René de Lespinasse, Les métiers et corporations de la Ville de Paris, t. II, Paris 1842, pp. 634, 645.
28. Ibid., p. 651.
29. Statut et règlement des menuisiers-ébénistes, Paris 1751; see Steven L. Kaplan, 'The luxury guilds in Paris in the eighteenth century', in Francia. Forschungen zur westeuropäischen Geschichte, t. 9, 1982, p. 279.
30. As an example of the practice of control of quality, see the reports of the jurés in the Archives Nationales, Paris, Ser. Y: "François contable maitre menuisier a Paris Doyen en charge et Juré comptable de la communauté des maitres menuisiers...: lad. armoire de la hauteur de sept pieds trois pouces et de la largeur de quatre pieds un pouce mauvaise façon et de mauvais bois et dud. buffet de la largeur de trois pieds et demi. J'ai estimé le tout valoir cent dix livres scavoir L'armoire soixante livres et le buffet cinquante livres." (AN, Y 8531). Another juré, Roussel, "sindic de la Communauté des maitres Menuisiers-Ebénistes", decided in 1781 about "une table à Ecrire de Bois de Rose plaquée ornée de fleurs garnie de sa tablette Couvert d'un maroquin vert et Ecritoire et poudrière argentis, avec un tiroir dessous": "Nous estimons quelle pouroit Estre du prix de Cinquante Cinq Livres, mais Eu Egard aux deffectuosités que Nous y avons remarqué et qui sont causés par la mal façon

de L'ouvrier qui l'a faitte, sur tout aux fleurs qui Se trouvent Entaillés Sur le dessous de ladite table; Nous avons prisé Et Estimé Laditte table avec tous ses accessoires, a La Somme de quarante deux livres." (AN, Y 8531). - I want to thank U.C. Pallach (Erlangen) for these hints.

31. See Pierre Verlet, 'Le commerce des objets d'art et les marchands merciers à Paris au XVIIIe siècles', in: Annales E.S.C., 1958, p. 10-29.

23. See Stürmer, Handwerk und höfische Kultur, passim.

33. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 1255.

34. Ibid., p. 1256.

35. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 1257.

36. Compare Perdiguier's pride in one of the poems he quotes:
"...Dans leur conduite on les admire,
Ils triomphent dans leurs travaux,
Aussi partout on entend dire
Honneur et gloire à nos gavots."
A. Perdiguier, Mémoire d'un compagnon, p. 201.

37. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 1258.

38. Ibid., t. I, p. 40.

39. Ibid., t. IV, p. 1263.

40. Ibid., t. II, p. 404.

41. Ibid., t. III/1, p. 638.

42. See Stürmer, Handwerk und höfische Kultur, p. 83.

43. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 925.

44. See Stürmer, Handwerk und höfische Kultur, p. 75-96.

45. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. I, p. 52.

46. Ibid.

47. Ibid.

48. Encyclopédie ou Dictionnaire Raisonné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, Neufchâtel 1765, t. V: "Ebéniste", Planches t. 5. "Menuisier", Planches t. 7.

49. Jacques Proust, 'L'image du peuple au travail dans les planches de l'encyclopédie', in Images du Peuple au 18e siècle, Paris 1973, p. 11 sq.
50. Archives de la Seine, Paris D^4B^6 Carton 107, doss. 17588, Frost, 28 7bre 1789, 8106 - quoted in Stürmer, Handwerk und höfische Kultur, p. 80.
51. Nützliche Nachrichten und Abhandlungen das Oekonomie- und Commerzwesen betreffend, Wien, April 1767, p. 256-58.
52. See Hans-Ulrich Thamer: 'Arbeit und Solidarität. Formen und Entwicklungen der Handwerkermentalität im 18. und 19. Jahrhundert in Frankreich und Deutschland', in U. Engelhardt (Hg.), Handwerker in der Industrialisierung. Lage, Kultur und Politik vom späten 18. bis ins frühe 20. Jahrhundert, Stuttgart 1984, p. 469-496.
53. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 1243.
54. Ibid.
55. ibid.
56. Ibid., p. 1244.
57. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. III/1, p. 601.
58. Ibid.
59. Ibid.
60. Roubo, L'art du menuisier, t. IV, p. 1244.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., p. 1253.
63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 1253.
65. The importance of the moral code is proved by the songs of the artisans, especially the journeymen. Charles Nisard in his Des chansons populaires chez les anciens et ches les français, Paris 1876, p. 459 remarked on the "chansons de métiers": "Sauf ce léger écart, on remarque dans ses chansons une certaine tenue jointe à une certaine bonhomie; le sentiment du devoir y paraît sincère et y est exprimé sans emphase..."
66. See Thamer, 'Arbeit und Solidarität', passim.

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