BOOKS, MATERIALS, TEXTS: A THREEFOLD FOREWORD

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ABSTRACT   *This foreword introduces to the focus of this volume, i. e. the intricate interconnectedness of the book as a material medium, its specific materiality, and the texts it is said to 'contain'. Drawing from philosophers and literary scholars such as Michel Foucault, Sybille Krämer, Marshall McLuhan, Jerome McGann and others, it sketches the horizon whithin which the contributions of this volume are situated, arguing that it is essential for literary scholars to consider the material embodiment of texts.*

I. BOOKS

For approximately 1600 years the book has been the most important medium for collecting information coded in written language in Europe. Although it underwent a number of modernizations throughout its history, the codex's shape and form have never been drastically altered. In fact, the codex proves to be a sound medium for word and picture until this day and may very well be of importance for centuries to come. The noun 'book' refers to more than just the codex-form. Leaving aside more metaphorical uses, Merriam-Webster's online dictionary lists seven meanings for this particular word: (1) "a set of written sheets of skin or paper or tablets of wood or ivory," (2) "a set of written, printed, or blank sheets bound together into a volume", (3) "a long written or printed literary compo-

sition," (4) "a major division of a treatise or literary work," (5) "a record of a business's financial transactions or financial condition—often used in plural," (6) "magazine," (7) "e-book." It becomes clear that the decision about what a book *is* largely depends on the perspective taken. Literary and cultural studies, it seems, mainly focus on the third definition, but lately the first and second definitions have become more relevant as the e-book, present in the seventh definition, becomes increasingly more important for professional and non-professional readers and writers alike. One has to wonder in what relationship "sheets bound together into a volume" stand with a "literary composition", and how, if at all, one affects the other?[1] And what, if any, is the impact of the rise of the e-book on this relationship and its individual parts?[2]

While it is unlikely that the e-book will supersede the codex, chances are that the codex will at some point in the not so distant future become a marginalized medium. Much like the scroll that it had mostly replaced by the 4th century, the codex may then be limited to a few specific roles within an entire cast of media. As more and more readers start using digital devices, texts no longer depend on being "in print". As more and more writers switch to tablet PCs for note-taking, blank books lose in importance. This prospect—often lamented as the "Death of the Book"—has been discussed widely. It can be conjectured that, once the codex has assumed its new position, the laments will quickly dissipate—considering how few people bewail the lack of the scroll in every-day communication today. The codex's new status may well be one of more regard than it is today. With the e-book becoming more popular and widely adopted, the need for cheap paperbacks with their often coarse paper and lacklustre typography will surely subside. On the contrary, the hardbound book, delicately made and exquisitely designed, will likely have a longer life and be cherished as an object of artistic merits, much like it is now or, in fact, even more so. Besides, billions of printed books remain in public libraries and private collections all over the world, and, in spite of points made by Nicholson Baker (2001), it seems highly unlikely that they will be completely destroyed any time soon, even if they are only preserved for practical or economic reasons (digitizing books is an expensive endeavour). However, the rise of the e-book and the improvements in digitization technology and scanning equipment will undoubtedly bring changes that might, in the long run, threaten two-penny paperback productions with extinction. Small public libraries that see their role mainly in making popular texts accessible will likely reduce their number of printed books in favour of digital copies, much like they dispose of books that are outdated or have fallen out of favour with readers and librarians. Digitization might then even enlarge the number of texts that are publicly available. In

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1   See Monika Schmitz-Emans' contribution in this volume, pp. 11–27.
2   See Christoph Bläsi's contribution in this volume, pp. 65–75.

any case, libraries that function as archives such as national libraries seem much less prone to such measures.

Apart from the (nowadays uncertain) fate of the codex as a medium that we have become used to in the course of history, from early modernity on there has been a second approach to the materiality of books, one that connects the medium and its content more "intimately". Ever since Laurence Sterne's ground-breaking novel *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, a book that came out between 1759 and 1767, have authors of literary texts openly reflected upon the intricate relationship between the literary text and the printed book that 'contains' it. Around 1800, Jean Paul (*Das Leben des vergnügten Schulmeisterlein Maria Wutz im Auenthal*; *Leben Fibels*) and E.T.A. Hoffmann (*Lebens-Ansichten des Katers Murr*) made the book a central theme of their writing. Later in the 19th century, Stéphane Mallarmé would modernize our idea of the poem by consciously relating the printed verses to the blank of the page around them. Early in the 20th century, Italian Futurists like Filippo Tommaso Marinetti experimented with new ways of bookmaking and new forms of typography, producing, among others, The Tin Book (*Parole in Libertá Futuriste Olfattive Tattili Termiche*). Members of later avant-garde art movements like Kurt Schwitters, El Lissitzky, and Johannes Baader followed suit. In the wake of these developments, Paul Valéry (1960: 1246–1250) noted that the page of a book could be read as well as looked at as a picture. After 1945, these ideas led to further advancements in book arts and finally the rise of the artist(s)'s book in the 1960s spurred by protagonists such as Ed Ruscha, Christian Boltanski, and Marcel Broodthaers, to name but a few. Drawing additional inspiration from concretist poetry, literary works like Raymond Federman's *Double or Nothing* (1971) were published in this period. More recently, writers such as Mark Z. Danielewski or Jonathan Safran Foer have authored works in which the book features prominently as a material means of storytelling. So, quite contrary to common perception, as a means of artistic expression the codex form is perhaps more relevant than ever.

II. MATERIALS (AND PERFORMANCES)

This process in the world of art becomes a trend at approximately the same time that material culture (Bräunlein 2012: 14–28) has become a scholarly concern—in the second half of the 20th century. Starting out with archaeology and ethnology, in the 1980s the humanities have picked up on the notion that culturally relevant information is not solely coded in language, but in material objects as well. Can what we consider a text exist immaterially at all, as a sort of structure of fabula and stylistic devices? Does it have material quality, even cohesion, outside the author's or the recipient's consciousness? Does said text exist as pure material? And if so, what type of material are we speaking of here: only ink on paper? Are the signs that the ink forms material or immaterial objects, and in what way does

the one relate to the other? Maybe what Anselm Haverkamp calls "Latenz / latency" is the better applicable term, the inherent presence of hidden structures in the literary text that are only readable through a method of archaeological precision? These structures constantly transverse and deconstruct whatever the text obviously says and the reader tries to draw from it. Or is "latency" only the somewhat tropological counterfigure to literal speech?

In the early 1990s, sociologist Roger Chartier argued that we "are never confronted with abstract or ideal texts detached from all materiality; they manipulate or perceive objects and forms whose structure and modalities govern their reading" (Chartier 1994: 3). Literary texts used to be published in books or magazines, both of which have aesthetic and pragmatic traditions of their own, they command specific types of information that they can carry as well as individual forms of reception, including spaces, gestures, and so on. With the rise of the e-book and the shift of literature from the "real" to the "virtual", the question concerning the materiality becomes more pressing. Or does the digitalization pose entirely new questions? The connection between thought and body is immediate, and so is the relation between the material and the virtual side of texts. It lies in our performance. This connection is originally drawn by early drama theory. Aristotle (in his *Poetica*) argues that, in drama, we watch people—not actors—PERFORM. A chain of performance forms a myth, the "fabula". What we would call a performance, the re-enactment on the stage, is a repetition, a re-actualization of the fabula. Performing a text—whether reading it silently, a technique unknown in European antiquity (Augustinus: *Confessiones* VI, 3), reciting it, narrating it, or performing it on a stage—connects the dubious and polysemantical signs on the page to our body, and in this way makes them "come alive". But is this re-enactment of signs on a page really what one may call performative? And are literary texts purely virtual when they are not read or performed?

For Michel Foucault, statements ("énoncés")—the elementary units of discourse—are neither "completely linguistic" nor "exclusively material" (Aristoteles: *Poetica* 1449b).[3] They are necessarily connected to material and medial environments and cannot be cut out of them without risking a loss of functionality. Even though Foucault does not talk about literary texts here: they, too, can be taken as statements insofar as they participate in historical and material settings and play their role in forming social discourse. Their fictional or virtual worlds can, therefore, not be strictly separated from "reality" (Foucault 1969: 131–138).

Language philosopher Sybille Krämer has criticized what she calls the "Two Worlds Model"—the common idea that the sign as "something accessible to our senses is interpreted as instantiation of something that is not immediately present, but precedes the singular phenomenon logically and genealogically" (Krämer

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3   "[…] ni tout a fait linguistique, ni exclusivement matériel […]" (Foucault 1969: 107).

2002: 324, transl. S. H.). In her theory of performativity,[4] following Foucault, she argues that there is no language apart from language in use, and use is always situated in identifiable space and time—and therefore will automatically and indiscriminately carry traces of its mediality (Krämer 2002: 331–332). "In this way, 'embodied language' becomes a search term for the material, pre-predicative shaping of our linguistic being" (ibid.: 332). Our body is, apart from all the other media involved, the foremost medium through which literature and other arts work. Performativity, as Krämer understands it, tries to formulate its theoretical framework along the lines of event and repetition, embodiment and realisation, out of which is generated a surplus effect for the reader, listener or audience (ibid.: 345).[5]

As Elisabeth Strowick (2005: 78) has pointed out, when the material aspects of literature are discussed, literary scholars usually focus on the written or printed word and the mechanisms employed in reading. Other concerns, e.g. the quality of paper or binding, are treated less favourably and are often left for book studies to explore and make sense of. And scholars in the field of book studies, such as Michele Moylan and Lane Stiles, have made very clear what they think about the materiality of literature:

> "Clearly, when we read books, we really read *books*—that is, we read the physicality or materiality of the book as well as and in relation to the text itself. Literacy, then, may be said to include not only textual competence but material competence, an ability to read the semiotics of the concrete forms that embody, shape, and condition the meanings of texts. Bindings, illustrations, paper, typeface, layout, advertisements, scholarly introductions, promotional blurbs—all function as parts of a semiotic system, parts of the total meaning of a text." (Moylan/Stiles 1996: 2)

III. TEXTS

In *Understanding Media* Marshall McLuhan assumed that the "printed book had encouraged artists to reduce all forms of expression as much as possible to the single descriptive and narrative plane of the printed word" (McLuhan 2001: 59). While McLuhan's assertion is true for the most part, the examples given above serve to illustrate that some writers venture well beyond the printed word. Com-

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4 Krämer (2002: 325, 332) demonstrates how in classical speech act theory not the actualized (oral) speech act serves as a model, but rather the written text.

5 Cf. Krämer 2002: 345. Even older reception theories describe the interaction between text and reader as resulting in a surplus of meaning—not yet taking into account the medial/physiological effects: The work formulates only incomplete speech acts, which the reader has to replenish to form worlds. It can furthermore be used as a critical method for establishing formerly marginalized issues in the center of discourse (see Iser 1984: 284).

monly, works of these artists are called novels, poems, or, more generally, 'books', just like the works of their peers that show no particular interest in the material conditions of their publications. Literary scholars traditionally—and indiscriminately—address the works of either groups as 'texts', that is to say: as meshworks of words, stripped of their 'outward' surroundings. Thereby, the supposed immaterial character of the text is underlined. On the one hand, oftentimes the material aspects of literary texts are indeed of minor concern, and rightfully so, for the rhyme scheme of a given poem, to take a simple example, is hardly affected by the paper the poem was printed on. When, on the other hand, a poet chooses to have a cycle of poems about the four seasons printed on paper in four different colours, one for each season, like Louis-Antoine de Caraccioli's *Livre des quatre couleurs* (1757), the line between the 'text', understood as a sequence of words, and the book, understood as the material medium of the printed word, is blurred. Similarly, with books that have not been written or printed but that the letters were cut out of, the paper becomes part of the text (e.g. Diego de Barreda's *Preces Latinae*, 1600[6]).

Around the time McLuhan published *Understanding Media*, Michel Butor stipulated that "tout écrivain honnête se trouve aujourd'hui devant la question du livre" (Butor 1964: 104). He anticipated that "[l]e journal, la radio, la télévision, le cinéma vont obliger le livre à devenir de plus en plus 'beau', de plus en plus dense" (ibid.: 109). In Butor's view, conceiving of a book, then, entails more than merely typing out a number of words, namely taking into account the exact placement of text on the page. Arguably, this shift has already taken place, or is at least on the verge of taking place. In turn, it can be argued that the notion of 'text' has to adapt to these 'denser' literary works, examples of which have been given above and will be discussed in more detail in the papers presented in this volume.

Already in 1991, Jerome J. McGann concluded that we "must turn our attention to much more than the formal and linguistic features of poems or other imaginative fictions. We must attend to textual materials which are not regularly studied by those interested in 'poetry': to typefaces, bindings, book prices, page format, and all those paratextual phenomena usually regarded as (at best) peripheral to 'poetry' or 'the text as such'" (McGann 1991: 13). This 'volume' ventures to do just that.

The papers collected here form the proceedings of a congress session titled *Book—Material—Text* that was part of the XXth congress of the International Comparative Literature Association, which took place at Sorbonne, Paris, in 2013. This section aimed at exploring the literary text as a material as well as a 'virtual' object. It referred to the first question raised by the congress organisers: "Is Comparative Literature just another Comparative Science among others?",

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6   http://www.dartmouth.edu/~library/Library_Bulletin/Nov1995/LB-N95-Cronenwett.html [30 Nov. 2016].

focusing on a concept of literature as can be defined in the discussion between scholars of Comparative Literature and researchers in the fields of book science, neuropsychology (enquiring the reading process), media science and history of art. Questions that were dealt with include: How does the medial change affect the process of reading? How does it affect the production and the commercialisation of texts? Does it enhance or question the fictionality of the literary text? Will the book from the primary source of well-grounded information turn more and more into an art object worth collecting? Not all of these questions can be answered in the present proceedings, but some light can be shed on them.

The editors wish to thank the organisers of the congress and the participants of the workshop for their contributions (and their patience).

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