Materiality and literature: an introduction

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Abstract
The field of materiality and literature can be differenciated in two directions. Materiality of literature refers to book design, printing formats and typography. Materialty in literature, however, analyzes the way, 'things that speak' are integrated in fictional and non-fictional texts. The introduction reflects the international critical discussion of the field in the last years and situates the contributions of this number in it.

Keywords Materiality · Book design · Book history · Social setting in texts

Introduction

There are not many areas in literary studies that have proved to be as fruitful and connectable to other fields of knowledge as the area of materiality in literature in recent years, especially in the German- and English-speaking countries. The notion could originally be found in museology and cultural anthropology ("material culture") and in philosophy (Heidegger's "the thing"; the "thingness of objects") and from there it found its way into social theory.[1] In art history, categories of materiality have long played an important role. For medieval paintings, Daniel V. Thompson's 1936 study is a classic (Thompson 1936; see also Kumler 2019). Contracts in the Italian Renaissance determine not only the subject and the type of representation, but also the materials to be used for a work of art; the use of gold and ultramarine is often paid for separately (Baxandall 1972). From a diachronic perspective, the reconstruction of artistic production processes allows the "biography" of colors through the centuries (Pastoureau 2000). And of course the determination of the materials typically used in a work of art at the time of its creation is a central

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[1] This particular role of the concept cannot be examined in more detail here. In the argumentation of Bruno Latour, an actant is a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman (= thing); while for Jane Bennett, "thing-power" offers "an alternative to the objects as a way of encountering the nonhuman world" (Bennett, p. XVII).

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criterion for adequate restorations as well as for recognizing (historically younger) counterfeits (e.g. Lang, Armitage 2012). In the antiquity there is an important contact zone for inscriptions and other ancient writing surfaces (Ritter-Schmalz and Schwitter, 2019; Petrovic et al., 2019). As Christopher De Hamel puts it for the medieval period, "No photographic reproduction yet invented has the weight, texture, uneven surface, indented ruling, thickness, smell, the tactile quality and patina of time of an actual medieval book" (De Hamel 2016, p. 2).

For all examples of material culture, the discussion is on 'things that talk'. They may be different—"some of the things in question are individuals, other are genera, some are in between" (Daston 2008, p. 10)—hey may also elude clear classifications, but together they have two specific features. On the one hand, they have to exist 'really', 'materially'; "They are neither mermaids nor quarks," and they have a visible and haptic dimension in their "thingness" (ibid.). On the other hand, they have to 'speak' in a semiotic sense, meaning that they have to be given meaning in a specific context. At least since the attempt to summarize a global history of mankind "in 100 objects" for the BBC with enormous success, i.e. in a radio program which means, in a medium where definitively nothing can be seen (MacGregor 2010 and numerous translations), the object-focused approach to cultural history has also had a broad international reception and even found sequels for a national memoria (e.g. Lucena Giraldo 2015).

On the materiality of literature

The situation is more difficult for the field of materiality and literature. Here it is not just about 'material things', but about the interplay of materiality and text. Basically, two areas can be distinguished, namely that of the materiality *of* literature and that of materiality *in* literature.

The first area has a visible and tactile dimension; in a way it corresponds to the analysis of carrier materials in painting. Here, the materiality of literature can be understood as a contact zone between editorial science, book history and cultural studies. Basic for this understanding is Roger Chartier's dictum that authors do not write *books*. They write *texts* that others use to make books from in a multifaceted, highly complex technical process (« Les auteurs n'écrivent pas des livres: non, ils écrivent des textes qui deviennent des objects écrits, manuscrits, gravés, imprimés (et aujourd'hui informatisés) », Chartier 1992, p. 21). From the perspective of the history of reading, Chartier emphasized early on that the historical expression of a reading experience cannot be independent from the material form of the text:

> Im Gegensatz zu der Darstellung, die von der Literaturwissenschaft selbst entworfen und von einer rein quantitativ orientierten Buchgeschichte wieder aufgegriffen wurde– nach ihr existiert der Text unabhängig von seiner Materialität—muß daran erinnert werden, daß ein Text nicht ohne den Träger, der ihn zu lesen (oder zu hören) gibt, existiert und daß kein Schriftstück unabhängig von den Formen, in denen es seine Leser erreicht, verstanden werden kann. (Chartier 1990, p. 12)

[In contrast to the idea, which was developed by literary studies itself and picked up again by a purely quantitative book history - according to which the text exists regardless of its materiality -, it must be remembered that a text does not exist without the medium on which its reading (or hearing) is based, and that no document can be understood without considering the form in which it reaches its readers.]

This knowledge first prevailed in scholarly editing and has since long become a standard (Schubert 2010; Lukas et al. 2014). In a way, the consideration has been trivial, but for decades it has only been implemented to a very limited extent in the editorial practice that love letters or everyday notes between two familiar people have a different materiality than letters to respectful persons, superiors, possibly even rulers. What one might write to the loved one in pencil 'on a torn-off piece of paper' and possibly under the time pressure of the mail that is going out has—and must have—a different materiality than the official letter requesting a special calligraphy, a special quality of paper, possibly of a specific size, which must then never be used to the edges, and generally has a material form determined by the difference in authority. A letter consequently has a 'double coding', as Wolfgang Lukas puts it, in which "the textuality [...] cannot in principle be detached from the materiality of its (autograph) writing base." In addition to its 'content' (the "official textual communication") it "always carries an unofficial and non-textual communication through its material disposition" (Lukas 2010, 45, 48).[2] Modern scholarly editions (and not only of letters) therefore increasingly document the material and media components of texts: paper qualities, writing materials, writing tools, text topography, typography (Lukas, Nutt-Kofoth, Podewski 2014, p. 1; Bohnenkamp, Ritter 2013; Malm, Ståhle Sjönell, Söderlund 2009). Historically, the programmatic criticism of the "hermeneutic idealism and textual positivism" of the established 'editorial theory' has its point of departure here (McGann 1983):

When texts are interpreted, the readings frequently ('characteristically' is the word we should use for the period between 1940 and 1980) avoid reflecting on the material conditions of the works being 'read' and the readings being executed. Those material and institutional conditions, however, are impossible to set aside if one is editing a text; and if one intends to execute a scholarly edition of a work, the social conditions of textual production become manifest and even imperative. Consequently, one comes to see that texts always stand within an editorial horizon (the horizon of their production and reproduction). (McGann 1991, p. 21)

This consideration applies not only to manuscripts, but also to printed volumes, i.e. the materiality of books. Of course, there is a difference in the format in which a printed text is presented to the audience, whether in the 'middle' in-8 for a 'middle'

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2 „Die Textualität [ist] prinzipiell nicht ablösbar von der Materialität seines (autographen) Schriftträgers"; neben seinem ‚Inhalt' (dem „offiziellen textuellen Kommunikat") transportiert ein Brief „immer auch ein inoffizielles nicht-textuelles Kommunikat mittels seiner materiellen Disposition" (Lukas 2010— p. 45, p. 48).

public, whether in in-12 or in-16, so that it can be easily pocketed, or in quarto or folio—printing formats that require a particularly complex use of materials. In view of a new reading audience who might want to read outdoors—while riding or in the garden—'simple' readings in smaller formats are practical. Many novels therefore appear in the 18th century in octavo or smaller, many almanacs even in in-16. Large formats are inevitably particularly expensive, but also allow the buyer / owner a corresponding social and cultural gain in distinction. One can rightly call this "Materialität in sozialen Praktiken" ("materiality in social practices," Spoerhase 2018, p. 37).

In addition to the format, the quality of the paper and the typography used are the most striking features of the materiality of literature. We still know the custom (especially in the French printing tradition) of printing a number of copies on special paper ("sur papier velin"). For Europe of the 18th century, a time when the cost of the paper used for printing could make up to 50% and in times of crisis significantly more than the total cost of a printed book, many texts were printed on different papers at different prices. At that time, Amsterdam was the center of European paper trade and served printers all over the continent, while England and North America were only gradually expanding their paper mills (Bellingradt, 2020; Bidwell 2019). On the level of print types, however, programs and standards "for controlling typographic communication" have gradually developed with the reader since the early modern era (Giesecke 2006, p. 420; Wehde 2000; Gutjahr, Benton 2001). Based on the insight that "the style, design, appearance and color of the individual characters, as well as their spatial arrangement and composition, which they form in combination with each other and with the unprinted white, can be relevant for literary texts" (Metz 2020, p. 9)—briefly, for "the presentation of meaning on the literary page" (Bray, Handley, Henry 2000)—authors have made demands on their publishers for specific design details of their works for over 200 years. All of this has led to the fact that a concept of literature beyond the 'pure text term' and that includes aspects of the materiality of literature has increasingly established itself in recent years (Rockenberger and Röcken, 2014). It seeks to resolve what Jerome McGann has called „the schism between textual and interpretive studies"(McGann 1983, p. 11). To put it in a formula: A text is not a book, a book is more than its pages, and a page is more than image and text. In this sense, the materiality of literature always means an aspect of its mediality. It controls text reception and reading behavior and thus contributes to the decision whether a literary work is successful or not.

Materiality in literature

In contrast, the situation of materiality *in* literature is different: it is about the function of representing things within a text. Here things characterize a person, a situation, a social environment.

One of the classics of comparative literature, Francesco Orlando's study *Gli oggetti desueti nelle immagini della letteratura* (Obsolete objects in the literary imagination: ruins, relics, rarities, rubbish, uninhabited places, and hidden treasures; 1993, 2015; Engl. 2006, French 2010) can be understood as an early and important

example in this context. In terms of methodology, his interest is strongly focused on tracing semantic fields. Starting from an *elenco* (list), he is concerned with creating an "albero semantico" (Orlando 2015, p. 84; a semantic tree diagram), but also with the "rapporto fra l'uomo e le cose" (p. 7). In our context it is of interest that he did not want to examine abstractions, "no situations, conditions, valuations, considerations, or emotions, but rather *things* in the material sense of the word" involving that objects, as the title of the book already says, must be "in every instance more or less useless or old or unusual" and consequently "in contrast with the implied and ever varying ideals of usefulness, or newness, or normality" (Orlando 2006, p. 2).

Orlando's considerations are based on literary fictional works ("i cosiddetti capolavori," 2015, p. 7; cf. also studies on the importance of 'things' in the literary work of individual authors, e.g. Bidon, Neumann 2019 on "Kafkas Dinge"). In analyzing things that are *no longer* functional, Orlando puts his main emphasis on the articulation of *temporal* alterity. Other studies focus their critical attention on the representation of *social* alterity by describing sets of 'speaking' material objects, for example in English 19th century novels (Schueling 2016). Two examples from among many possible ones can convincingly illustrate this writing strategy. It is Edgar Allan Poe who, in an essay of 1840, first thinks about the contemporary furnishing of a bourgeois room. Baudelaire translated the text into French as one of his earliest Poe translations (1852). A little over a hundred years later, Michel Butor will recognize an important element of the literature of European realism in the literary implementation of the description of furniture: « Décrire des meubles, des objets, c'est une façon de décrire les personnages » (Butor 1964, p. 54; for a broader context cf. Watson 1999). To quote a book within a book in an intertextual perspective, may formulate a poetological statement. If the protagonist of a novel (*Amalia* by José Mármol, 1851/55), however, is shown reading books explicitly banned by the government, this is an unmistakable political statement as well (Bremer 1986). The books cited here are intentional 'things that speak' and characterize the protagonist as well as the socio-political situation in which the novel is located.

However, this purely fiction-based concept of literature is by no means mandatory in our context. After several discussions since the 1970s, the inclusion of genres such as travel descriptions (experience of topographic alterity) is generally as well out of question in today's understanding of the term as its extension to factual texts which represent an historic 'order of knowledge'. Literature in this sense can be understood as part of cultural memory. It is part of the social history of knowledge, its production and circulation (Burke 2000, 2012), and therefore not astonishing at all, that its material aspect is particularly strong in moments of radical social and epistemological change. The early modern period and the Enlightenment may serve as particularly interesting examples (Bremer 2016). The 'material turn' within the last twenty years' literary studies connects them closely to cultural history and the history of knowledge and opens new perspectives in analyzing a specific contact zone.

To the contributions

The following articles reflect the full breadth of the field outlined here. In chronological order, they discuss examples from German, English, French, Italian, Spanish and Argentine literature.

Above all, the contributions by Elisabeth Tiller and Torsten König reflect the fundamental problem of experiencing the hitherto not-known, namely the integration into the system of previous knowledge. Represented by things that have not been part of the everyday world of experience in Renaissance Italy or in France in the early 18th century, the question arises as to how these can be described using the tools of literary criticism in a material and cultural contact situation. Collecting, comparing, and organizing can serve as key terms here; Tiller proposes a theoretical differentiation between matter, material and materiality. Jörn Münkner, on the other hand, uses German examples to show the system of order behind such texts in libraries, while Daniel Syrovy can show that Spanish chivalry novels have a specific set of conventions in book design (e.g. gothic types, the woodcut of a knight), and they include metafictions and metanarratives. The contribution by Kittelmann and Baumann expands the field to German-language Enlightenment and to the contact zone of literature and natural history.

The second half of the contributions primarily explores the use of things in 20th century literature. For Italian poetry, it can be said that the move towards modernity is marked by the abandonment of 'aulic' things as poetic symbols. Nobel Prize winner Montale is considered to be the best-known of authors who refer to metaphors for things that were previously little or never used: the hoopoe instead of the lark, the glasses, as well as the railway as a metaphor for the modern age (Stefano Sasso). Julio Cortázar shows a specific handling of materiality in his stories and almanac books (Verónica Abrego), the Austrian avant-garde of the 1960s with the 'Wiener Gruppe' exemplifies the play with typography and the *mise en scène* of writing (Stefano Apostolo). Alice Munro's narratives use 'things' in a characteristic way to illustrate the social status of her protagonists. The list is concluded by two investigations into literature for young audiences, which is always underestimated in literary studies: Hombrecher and Wassiltschenko analyze the design of children's books somewhere between orality and toy; using children's books as an example, Christoph Benjamin Schulz shows the possibilities of a specific book design, namely foldable books. They all show the variety of a field of research in which the materiality of and in literature is linked to a 'traditional' and more hermeneutical proceeding and are opening new horizons in comparative literary studies.

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