

The Matter of Words – (im)Materiality of Literature in Multimodal and Experimental Texts

This project investigates the phenomenon of (im)materiality of literature by rethinking the relation between texts and writing's capacity to record and produce experience. It focuses on the tradition of experimental literature, understood broadly as a signifying practice attempting to transgress its own medium, often employed to privilege the reader's activity or to effect a certain change in their consciousness.

While the rise in 'non-traditional' literature (multimodal, hypertextual, visual, ergodic, etc.) might be seen as an antidote to the pervasive domination of virtual existence in present day culture, such tendencies seem to stem from more than a yearning for a material experience in a largely non-material world. These impulses not only contrast the general belief that literature functions regardless of its medium (immateriality) but can be thought about as something different from the nostalgic fetishism connected with a longing for an analogue, non-mediated, immediate experience that physical books (and other material objects) connote. The 'materiality of writing', manifested in disparate typographical, visual or physical dimensions of writing noticeable in a fair share of contemporary literary production as sensory engagement practices, might perhaps be also correlated with the necessity to develop new modes of artistic expression. This becomes particularly relevant in the context of evoking important matters (e.g. social issues) as well as the ones which resist traditional forms of representation (like global warming and climate crisis).

Building on the current state of knowledge, the proposed research will attempt to map some of the most recent phenomena within textual production and in contemporary literary studies. It hopes to identify important changes informing the textual landscape of today, while remaining rooted in tracing their forerunners. Locating underexplored inter-artistic relationships between literature and the visual arts, looked at from novel perspectives on materiality and the latter's conceptualisation within recent theories (e.g. new materialisms or speculative realism), will contribute to a renegotiation of our understanding of the modes and functions of literature in contemporary society. The project thus offers not only to research a range of experimental texts (both physical and digital) but also seeks to revisit some well-established practices (like concrete poetry) by juxtaposing their ideas about writing beyond the book with present day artistic and literary production that address the question of matter and environment.

Researching the role of (im)materiality in literary and artistic practices will yield results in the form of scholarly articles published in high impact academic journals and a manuscript of a monograph on the subject, both of which will further our grasp of the role of materiality in 'things' and 'words that matter'.