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- ¹ The aim of *Book, Text, Medium: Cross-Sectional Reading for a Digital Age* is to provide “a sustained conjunction of book studies, textual studies, and media studies” (ix) that focuses on reading as a possibility inscribed, and as an event performed. Loyal to his idiosyncratic writing style, Garrett Stewart probes into traditional and conceptual art’s engagements with the printed codex in order to highlight the operations of language as medium and the mechanics of reading. This study extends the scholar’s previous work in *Bookwork: Medium to Object to Concept to Art* (2011) and *The Look of Reading: Book, Painting, Text* (2006), and recalibrates it “under the shadow – or in the glare – of the digital” (102).
- ² The opening chapter on “Bibliographics” examines painterly representations of the codex and its ensuing textual (non)operations. Stewart cites three paintings, Marco Palmezzano’s *St. Jerome in an Extensive Landscape* (1503), Jacques-Emile Blanche’s *Portrait of Arthur Acton and Harold Acton Seated in a Room at Villa La Pietra* (1913), and Antonello da Messina’s *St. Jerome in His Study* (1475), as examples that portray books with no textual experience, thereby emphasizing their loss of instrumentality and resultant demediation. His examination of John Caley’s *The Reading Room* (2011), a conceptual work that features LED reading lamps “[i]n the absence of living book users” (40), is centered on “bookhood,” Stewart’s own term “for the ontology of the codex” (39), which is clearly contrasted with Jessica Pressman’s concept of “bookishness” that

involves a more commercialized fetishization of the print book. Stewart concludes his art history wanderings with the observation that “[w]hereas the bibliographics of painted pages in traditional canvas representation may have reminded viewers of real books, sacred or secular, many conceptual *bibliobjets* denature the book to the point of satirized reception if not cultural obsolescence” (56; emphasis in original).

- 3 In “Platformatics,” Stewart discusses conceptual book art in galleries, drawing attention to installations where “form [is] abstracted from all content, the site of reading demediated of any textual surface or inscription, bookhood emptied into sheer objecthood” (58). Embarking on the discussion via the “Odd Volumes” exhibition at Yale University Art Gallery (2014-15), Stewart sets the “temporal mechanics” of book reading against “the spatial shape of its mere artifactual instrumentality” (64). In this regard, Stewart sharply remarks, “book form can become the figurative text of its own medium” (64; emphasis in original). His exploration of the intriguing *Negative Entropy*, Vol. 5 (2015) by the New York artist Mika Tajima leads to the assumption that it is “[u]nder the book/text/medium paradigm that the general ‘entropy’ of bookhood is most sharply revealed” (83).
- 4 Part Two of *Book, Text, Medium* begins with “Reading In,” and an investigation of Fiona Banner’s works *No Image Available* (2012) and *Font* (2016). While he discusses Banner’s use of uneven font, Stewart employs varying typefaces, a practice that continues intermittently and is even present in the study’s final paragraph. This strategy creates a meta-referential layer and highlights the potential of typographic variation – if not multimodality, more broadly – to inform the (typically) rigid design of scholarly work. Stewart insightfully notes that “[p]art of the irony of Banner’s digital graphic is that its palimpsest of computerized lettering serves to drive it back toward an irregularity that most closely resembles handwriting” (107). This sensibility echoes Christian Mosbæk Johannessen and Theo van Leeuwen’s theorization of irregularity, as well as José van Dijck and Sonja Neef’s scholarly work on handwriting. What Stewart considers one of *Font*’s most significant contributions is its suggestion of “a poetics of the letter before any word forms thus actively realized” (105), which prepares the ground for the subsequent “Reading Out” chapter.
- 5 It is here that Stewart brings the work of film theorist Michel Chion into the discussion, arguing that in *Words on Screen* (2017) Chion actually advances “a theory of text rather than cinema” (131). References to cinema and cinematic metaphors cut across several chapters, and serve to illuminate Stewart’s point about the transition from mere inscription to text: in his words, “a book’s text, released to the mind by its medium, in and through it, is virtualized in the process as inscription’s own filmstrip” (130). The final section on the press of language and “prose’s own phonemic weave” (137) in Don DeLillo’s *Underworld* (1997) and *White Noise* (1984) calls for a different rendering of language, one that Part Three seeks to fulfill.
- 6 Delving deeper into the relationship that inspired the book’s three-part title, Stewart suggests that “medium is what allows the performance of any distributed lettering as text” and therefore considers a book to be “the support and sponsor of reading, not directly of meaning” (141). The analysis combines Giorgio Agamben’s theories on ontology (*What is Philosophy?*) with John Cayley’s creative work on Amazon’s Alexa (*The Listeners*) in order to negotiate the current machinic and digital operations of language. Stewart remarks that “the sayable passes into the said in literary writing, becomes manifest in it, through the *medium of language in action*” (164; emphasis in original).

The notion of language as possibility is brought to light, and Stewart ultimately defines “the textual medium as the *process* by which the sayable reaches manifestation in the said” (207; emphasis in original). As the book’s role in an age when book reading is predominantly screen-based is described as that of a “vanishing mediator” (179), what emerges is the significance of book-driven engagements in broader cultural transformations.

⁷ In a media-dominated environment that witnesses the rising popularity of audiobooks, podcasts, and screen-based reading practices, Stewart’s study does not approach the book as an elegiac medium superseded by technology or displaced in the current cultural landscape, but rather as an unyielding enabler of intriguing textual experiences and inspiring reading practices that reposition print-based textuality in a digital age. Blending traditional painting and conceptual book art with literary texts and scholarly work across fields, *Book, Text, Medium* demonstrates that a discussion on the printed book is a discussion on broader art and culture, past and contemporary.

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