



## **Kristina Hartfiel/Tobias Winnerling: (Making) Use of Books: Counting, Measuring, Weighing, Reading. What Use is ‘Materiality’ in Examining Early Modern Books?**

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### **Introduction**

1. Let an object be a material thing with a potential to be used in a way co-determined but not completely determined by its materiality.
2. Let a book be an object.
3. As a result, let a book be a material thing with just that potential.

What follows from these three steps? If one is to accept the premises 1 and 2, which we have set up hypothetically for the time being, then the conclusion 3 seems to be compulsory. A book would thus come to carry a much less definite character than just providing a material basis for the information recorded in it.<sup>2</sup> At the same time this would tie the information recorded in the book and the possibilities to make use of this information much more intimately to the material configuration of the object ‘book’. This configuration could be read as a source for statements not only about the object ‘book’ itself but also about all kinds of practices connected to it. Thus, the whole complex of text(s) and material(s) taken together can be put to direct use in historical research.

At this point we will drop the subjunctive and consider not just hypothetically but emphatically books as material things in the sense given above. This means that books only produce effects in combination with the practices connected to them, their uses and appropriations. Following Hans Peter Hahn, material culture and its meanings do not exist autonomously from objects’ contextual use but constitute a dimension of things which is constructed, shaped and to be understood by the use made of objects.<sup>3</sup> And

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<sup>1</sup> Previous publication in four parts from 8 October 2015 to 6 November 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Some historians already have assumed this, cf. James Daybell/Peter Hind: Introduction. *Material Matters*, in: — (Eds.): *Material Readings of Early Modern Culture. Texts and Social Practices, 1580 – 1730*, Basingstoke 2010, 1 – 20; pp. 15–6.

<sup>3</sup> Hans Peter Hahn: *Materielle Kultur. Eine Einführung*, Berlin 2005, p. 11.

Andreas Reckwitz makes a case for thinking about things as necessary, contingent but not non-arbitrary components of social practices. The social relevance of things lies in their potential to establish practices if they are used in certain ways.<sup>4</sup> Books as things are hence essentially polyvalent: they unfold their specific contextual meaning only if framed by practices.

Methodically this becomes problematic if just the things themselves but not the accompanying practices have been preserved – as is almost always the case. Unlike Ethnologists, Historians cannot determine the use of things through observation. They may try to retrace the common or commonly intended uses of things from normative sources; however, this approach does not account for the possibility that other practices may have been connected to a thing to establish completely different correlations of use and meaning in the context of a productive appropriation. In consequence, a book does not always need to be read: A thick-bodied herbal is very much suited to press herbs, and an essay by Montaigne's can be put on a shelf just as an ornament.<sup>5</sup> Appropriation thus is not or not foremost the physical taking of an object but the individually shaped handling of it. In such an appropriative process the material configuration of the object "book" may change, be defined or nuanced in a new way. Yet this change is never possible without taking exactly this material configuration into account and only possible in connection to the relevant societal norms.<sup>6</sup> But how are we to retrace these interactions between object and subject (be it user or researcher) from hindsight if the objects are all that is left?

We will tackle this question in this essay. We will present specific examples to outline different perspectives on and strategies of how to deal with the materiality of books in specific research situations. Our examples derive from presentations given at the workshop „Vom (Be-)Nutzen der Bücher“ – „About (Making) Use of Books“ which we held in November 2014 on the use of books in Early Modernity.<sup>7</sup> The concentration on that particular timeframe (roughly 1450-1800) proved especially fruitful because of the peculiar character of early modern printed books. The early modern printed book is characterised by the transition from a hand-written singular piece of work to a serial object due to the development of the printing press. Because of the still considerable

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4 Andreas Reckwitz: Grundelemente einer Theorie sozialer Praktiken. Eine sozialtheoretische Perspektive, in: Zeitschrift für Soziologie, 32, 4/2003, 282 – 301; p. 291.

5 Michel de Montaigne: Essais. Erste moderne Gesamtübersetzung, translated by Hans Stilett, Frankfurt/M. 1998, p. 424.

6 Cf. Julia A. Schmidt-Funke: Buchgeschichte als Konsumgeschichte. Überlegungen zu Buchbesitz und Lektüre in Deutschland und Frankreich um 1800, in: Hanno Schmitt/Holger Böning/Werner Greiling/Reinhart Siegert (Eds.): Die Entdeckung von Volk, Erziehung und Ökonomie im europäischen Netzwerk der Aufklärung, Bremen 2011, pp. 259–279. We have to especially thank Dr. Julia A. Schmidt-Funke in this place. With her knowledge of early modern material culture she provided us with indispensable animation and inspiration. See also her recent article: Handfass und Hirschgeweih. Zum Umgang mit den Dingen im Kontext frühneuzeitlichen Wohnens, in: Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte 28, 2013, pp. 115–142.

7 For a complete synopsis, see the conference minutes by Nancy Erasmus: <http://hsozkult.geschichte.hu-berlin.de/index.asp?pn=tagungsberichte&view=pdf&id=5819>.

amount of manual labour that was invested into the production of each book in the process of binding we may of course not speak of mass production in its modern meaning. But these printed books can no longer be considered as singular, truly individual objects because of the standardized book block.

In the three parts of this essay, we draw on a select sample of the workshops' presentations and discussions and complemented by what we have learned from them. In this, we focus on three key issues we have come upon within the material at hand:

1. The object
2. Paratexts
3. Collections

Each of these parts will open up perspectives for the integration of the material object 'book' into historians' research strategy by analysing select examples from the workshop. We explicitly embrace the ambiguity and equivocality of material traces of books. This means that the different perspectives and strategies we present are to be understood neither as mutually exclusive nor as better or worse ways of how to deal with the material character of books. We rather aim to offer a set of tools that may diversify and enrich historians' research agenda when dealing with material book culture.

### **The object**

As promised in our introduction, we will now focus on books as objects. Material culture research can only work with books by approaching them as objects. This means to consider primarily the physical objects as which books are for instance stored in libraries or archives. This approach may produce valuable insights about their producers and consumers alike. Thomas Nutz's object definition captures this notion very well. He defines objects understood in the sense of a material culture approach as mobile things which can be moved across time and space. Thereby they establish a physical link to the documented information. This physical link distinguishes them as objects from a pure signifier, which merely signifies without a material link to the signified. Nutz in addition notes that objects have to be 'authentic' in the sense of being produced by precisely the people these objects shall be used to document.<sup>8</sup> Along these lines a book can be seen as a part of the "extended self"<sup>9</sup> of its users and/or producers<sup>10</sup> which means that their personal characteristics may be traced in and by the specific characteristics of the possessions (books in this case) users assembled during their lifetimes. In order to analyse the book in this way, an evaluation of the materiality of the

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8 Cf. Thomas Nutz: Wissen aus Objekten. Naturgeschichte des Menschen und Menschheitsgeschichte, in: Ulrich Johannes Schneider (Ed.): Kulturen des Wissens im 18. Jahrhundert, Berlin/New York 2008, 599–606; p. 599.

9 Russel W. Belk: Possessions and the Extended Self, in: Journal of Consumer Research, 15, 2/1988, 139–168; pp. 140–1.

10 Which may fall in one but do not have to.

'thing' book has to be carried out first of all, parallel to the standard procedure of bibliographical recording. This means posing questions such as: What kind of object am I dealing with? How big, how heavy is it? What material is it made of? What do I know about form, pages, binding, and covers? Which traces of use or non-use are inscribed on it? Such traces are rarely without ambiguity and therefore demand contextualisation.<sup>11</sup> A dog-ear may for instance indicate that a certain page was marked; but it could also hint at careless handling. A refitted binding may point to wear and tear through heavy use or it may be due to storage damage caused by years of disuse. It may even point to an entirely different set of circumstances: perhaps the body of the book was trimmed anew, or a particular binding was used which the original owner liked for his personal library; or it might have been bound together with or separated from other works in one volume. Markings, marginalia, names, ownership notes and similar traces are often easier to contextualise, though they are ambiguous in their own ways: Has the former owner done the markings which were executed with a broad feather while his/her signature was carried out with a slim one? Do different kinds of ink hint at different kinds of notes, users, or both? If additions have been made, or sheets, leaves, or even plant or mineral parts have been put into the book and kept there, was this done because of the book's content or just because of its material suitability? In general, the approaches we observed at our workshop can be divided into two categories: one is perhaps characterised best as "inductive" and the other as "exemplary" approach.

An inductive approach considers at once a larger number of objects. These objects may then be purposefully examined in search for correlations and clusterings. It is a research strategy that aims at minimising the necessary contextualisation of the objects in question. Every new description of the objects ideally rules out conflicting context interpretations that had to be regarded as possible before Christine Haug focused on the specific materiality of miniature books. She showed that they were used as collectors' items and as jewellery. Furthermore, miniatures could serve as an easy disguise for content not seen as fitting public display such as erotica and forbidden texts. Iris Bunte studied the long-term orientation of the Werler Erbsälzer libraries as family collections.<sup>12</sup> She focused on the use of these books in spiritual and economic education as well as in raising the family status by analysing the traces of usage inscribed in the material objects.

An exemplary approach, on the other hand, centers on single persons or objects as its starting points whose materially manifested connections to one's own field of research

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11 Cf. Dominik Collet: Creative Misunderstandings. Circulating Objects and the Transfer of Knowledge within the Personal Union between Hanover and Great Britain, in: German Historical Institute London Bulletin, 36, 2/2014, 3–23; p. 7.

12 Hereditary brine workers and owners of brine works in the North West German town of Werl. See also: Iris Bunte: Bildung, Bekenntnis und Prestige. Studien zum Buchbesitz einer sozial mobilen Bevölkerungsschicht im "katholischen Teutschland" der Frühen Neuzeit: die Bibliotheken der Werler Erbsälzer, Berlin 2013.

may be investigated.<sup>13</sup> It aims at enlarging the potential context of the guiding research question, thereby possibly making visible perspectives that would otherwise remain obscure. Simone Zweifel, for example, took the case of Johann Jacob Wecker (1526–86/8) and his Books of Secrets as a starting point. Tobias Winnerling started from one specific object and examined a single herbal, a copy of Jacob Theodor’s (1522–90, al. Tabernaemontanus) “Neuw Kreuterbuch”, from the University and State Library Düsseldorf.<sup>14</sup> By analysing marginalia, markings and deletions, Simone Zweifel was able to show that recipe books, such as “Books of Secrets”, were actually (sometimes even critically) used. This is not as self-evident as it seems, since books could be bought for a number of other reasons than to use them as intended by their author. This presupposes the existence of a potential consumer group willing and able to deal with them. Tobias Winnerling found quite fragile dried plant parts in one of the volumes of the “Neuw Kreuterbuch” which he analysed and which had never been noted before, at least not in the catalogues of the library that keeps them. He argued that the volumes’ good condition proves a non-use since their acquisition by the Royal Düsseldorf Library at the end of the 18th century. With the transition from private to public ownership the volumes went quite literally out of use.

Of course the inductive and exemplary approach are neither mutually exclusive nor restricted to certain research contexts concerning the materiality of book objects. Their use should be determined pragmatically regarding needs and limitations of one’s research question. Should the range of possible interpretations be enlarged or rather downsized? Is it better to analyse individual objects in a condensed or an intensified manner? To begin by analysing a single person might generate a large quantity of objects to be taken into account, and almost no object is so singular that it could not be integrated into a range of other similar objects (see below). And in any given number of similar objects one may always find an outstanding exemplar which may then be singled out for closer analysis. Above all, however, the object should not become a fetish to be admired for its very essence but should be considered a means to answer a research question – and therefore to optimally (make) use (of) it in this sense.

### Paratexts

It seems self-evident to first look into the books themselves if we are searching for the traces of early modern book use. Paratexts are interesting in this case because, as Genette observes, they are

“what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public. More than a boundary or a sealed border, the paratext is, rather, a *threshold* [...]; it is an ‘undefined zone’ between the inside

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13 Jacob Theodor (al. Tabernaemontanus): Neuw Kreuterbuch/ Mit schönen/ künstlichen vnd leblichen Figuren vnnnd Conterfeyten/ aller Gewächß der Kreuter, Frankfurt a. M.: Nicolas Bassé, 3 Vols., 1588–91, ULB Düsseldorf 01 M-3-544-1 u. 01 M-3-544-2.

14 ULB Düsseldorf 01 M-3-544-1 u. 01 M-3-544-2.

and the outside, a zone without any hard and fast boundary on either the inward side (turned toward the text) or the outward side (turned toward the world’s discourse about the text).<sup>15</sup>

Paratexts extending beyond the basic text of a work are particularly suited to be analysed when we are dealing with the use(s) of books, because they were intended to be instruments of use to the reader. This means prefaces, prologues, dedications, (printed) marginalia, copper plates, frontispieces and all such things.

The worth of prefaces for instance was already known to the authors of the largest early modern encyclopedia, Johann Heinrich Zedler’s “Grosses Vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste” (Grand Exhaustive Universal Dictionary of all Sciences and Arts). This encyclopedia was printed in 68 volumes in the middle of the eighteenth century. “A preface is a useful thing in a book, and those scholars are judging well who say, if you are wanting to read a book; you will have to read its preface and register first of all.”<sup>16</sup> Prefaces, prologues and introductions seem to communicate foremost the author’s intentions and information about the addressed audience. They are often used to justify claims about the addressed audience. Yet the question remains whether this kind of use of a book intended by the author is congruent with its actual use: Can we really extrapolate the actual recipients from the audience addressed in such paratexts? This is not the question about the ‘implied reader’ of literary theory but first of all a pragmatic questioning of the assumption that paratexts may be accepted at face value. We argue that indeed careful examination is necessary to determine whether paratexts might not have been incorporated into a book for other reasons than those stated in the paratexts themselves. At our workshop, this topic was discussed by Kristina Hartfiel using the example of early modern history books. On their title pages and in their prefaces, these books directly addressed the ‘studying youth’. But were they really used as textbooks at school or in private educational contexts? Or was ‘studying youth’ just an advertising slogan? Fittingly, the “Universal-Lexicon” already noted: “In the prologues we are served the dishes, as it were, and being shown what it is that we shall enjoy. The article itself is to wake the hunger within us.”<sup>17</sup>

Paratexts should be seen as platforms which reach out beyond the text and serve to negotiate diverging interests. Such interests may derive from authors, editors, printers, publishers, and last but not least the readers as users. They can serve to retrace a spectrum of practices put to work in using a book. Daniel Bellingradt highlighted in his commentary that intertextual connections hint at the actual uses of books. If they appear, this implies readers who consciously navigated increasingly complex text-paratext-arrangements to get to what they wanted to know. However, it is important to keep in mind that this kind of reading is first and foremost a very learned practice of

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15 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts. Thresholds of interpretation*. Cambridge 2001, pp. 1 – 2. [Author’s emphasis.]

16 Anon., *Vorrede, Vorbericht, Lat. Praefatio*, in: *Universal-Lexicon*, Vol. 50 (Vo–Vrh), Halle/Leipzig 1746 [URL: [www.zedler-lexicon.de](http://www.zedler-lexicon.de)], col. 1073 – 1077; col. 1073. [Own translation]

17 *Ibid.*, col. 1075. [Own translation].

using books. Books may well address an audience that differs from the one constructed in their paratexts. A learned prologue might serve to exculpate the author in the circle of his peers for writing a text with popular appeal and thus be directed at an audience not likely to read the book at all. Thus we consider the approach formulated by Daniel Bellingradt at the workshop slightly problematic. To him, the practice of compiling would be the early modern book's defining mode of use, in turn making it necessary for research to make visible the "interdependent, inter-medial and inter-textual dimensions of the early modern media agglomeration".<sup>18</sup> We agree completely with the second part of the argument which we quoted directly. We must admit, however, that we are sceptical towards the first. Most of the time, paratexts may not even be directly assigned to an author. Not only were prefaces routinely written by other people than the bulk of a book, they could also be seen as a chore demanded by publishers: "It is well known how many learned men have complained about the audacity with which prefaces for a piece of work everyone knows to be a miserable effort already are being demanded from them."<sup>19</sup> What is more, printed paratexts with organizing functions such as registers, indices, marginalia and glosses for the most part go unsigned and thus are potentially the work of other hands than that of the author of the book's main text. And many (other) people may have had a hand in organising the final shape of a book. This holds true especially for early modern works: these books were made by many hands.

If we want to analyse paratexts, text, context, and paratext have to be differentiated first of all. After that it is important not to neglect the text as compared to the paratexts. Text and paratext are symbiotic and highly interrelated. They can only be analysed properly by paying due attention to both of them. Moreover, it should be avoided to privilege one kind of paratext over others. Any kind of paratext can provide answers to the questions concerning the implied readers of texts. To be true, what really can be extracted this way are not actual uses, but the reading practices those implied readers were supposed to use when reading the book in question. If we know which practices of reading should by intention of its makers be used on the book in question, this provides clues to possible readers (which were able to put these practices to use). Flemming Schock analysed the working and reading practices of miscellany authors of the 17<sup>th</sup> century in this vein. He showed that printed paratexts such as registers, marginalia and sub headings can provide information about the reading practices they intended their audience to deploy, in this case fast, selective, and extensive reading. Another of the reading practices they intended to be used on their works, which he called "Auslesen des Wissenswerten", "picking out what's worth to know", points to a mirror-inverted relationship between authors and users. The authors had to deploy a time-consuming compilatory reading

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18 Daniel Bellingradt, *Periodische Zeitung und akzidentielle Flugpublizistik. Zu den intertextuellen, interdependenten und intermedialen Momenten des frühneuzeitlichen Medienverbundes*, in: Volker Bauer/Holger Böning (Eds.): *Die Entstehung des Zeitungswesens im 17. Jahrhundert. Ein neues Medium und seine Folgen für das Kommunikationssystem der Frühen Neuzeit (Presse und Geschichte – Neue Beiträge 52)*, Bremen 2011, 57 – 78, p. 57. [Own translation].

19 Anon., *Vorrede, Vorbericht, Lat. Praefatio*, in: *Universal-Lexicon*, Vol. 50 (Vo-Vrh), Halle/Leipzig 1746 [URL: [www.zedler-lexicon.de](http://www.zedler-lexicon.de)], col. 1073 – 1077; col. 1074. [Own translation].



practice in order to produce their texts, and exactly this practice of reading these same texts were to spare their readers who could just pick out what they wanted to know.

In a similar way, Paula Niemeier analysed the structure of works belonging to the so-called household literature. They contain printed paratextual elements such as thematic schemata, tables of content, indices, and registers, which facilitated their use. Niemeier suggested that these paratexts were included by authors and/or publishers to adapt the books to the needs of their users. In a diachronic comparison, Niemeier was able to show a trend towards an increasing complexity of text-paratext-arrangements within the household literature genre. This increase was paralleled by the tendency to a growing differentiation and specialisation regarding the content presented in these works.

Is it possible to make the text reveal its actual readers, users or consumers if the analysis of paratextuality is coupled with that of textuality? After such an analysis a book presents itself to us, as Foucault termed it, as “a knot within a net” and a “game of associations”<sup>20</sup> as should have become apparent by now. To follow these links it will be useful to uncover possible – if in most cases likely still theoretical – insights into the users of books and other stakeholders involved in practices connected with books. From the point of view of a research strategy, the study of paratexts is a method to enlarge the field, to tie in new traces to be followed. On the one hand this will be useful if the object itself remains ‘mute’ without mining paratextuality. On the other hand, such an approach necessarily presupposes that there is enough paratextual material to be mined.

## Collections

Research designs are not to be based on any inherent properties of the research materials (if those exist) but are most of all dependent on research questions, methodology and pragmatic considerations, as Deleuze and Guattari have reminded us: “The coordinates are determined not by theoretical analyses implying universals but by a pragmatic composing multiplicities or aggregates of intensities.”<sup>21</sup>

This, on the one hand, allows for establishing links between individual material books-as-objects analytically, as the examples above have already shown. On the other hand we are faced with links of this kind which have already been established historically, as in the case of collections, which we now turn to. The increase of books available through printing facilitated collecting them in larger numbers than before, making the size and number of private and official libraries grow throughout the whole early modern period. The practice of accumulating a large number of different books over time results in the production of collections which by their distinct character constitute a particular field of

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20 Michel Foucault, *Archäologie des Wissens*, 6th ed., Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp 1994, p. 36. [Own translation].

21 Giles Deleuze/Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, translated by Brian Massumi, London/New York: Bloomsbury Academic 2013, p. 15.



inquiry.<sup>22</sup> A collection is organised by an internal context of meaning. The collection consisting of objects interconnected by this context of meaning may be viewed as an ‘object of objects’. As such an ‘object of objects’, the collection has its own materiality distinct from that of its parts. A collection of books such as a library differs strongly from a randomly assembled amount of paper, even though a library might appear as just a truckload of books when being moved. Therefore, the spatial configuration is of major importance in regard to libraries. The materiality of books influences the order of books in libraries – books are sometimes big and heavy – and can even make some kinds of arrangements impossible. That this materiality imposes specific restrictions on the collector was Elizabeth Harding’s claim at our workshop in her presentation on the private libraries of various professors of Helmstedt University.<sup>23</sup> She showed that the limited space of the professor’s houses which held their libraries was partitioned by the need they felt to address different audiences – colleagues; students; visitors without connections to science – in different ways precisely by the arrangement of certain books these groups were to face as part of the surroundings in which the visitors were received. The houses frequently proved to be too small to facilitate that, creating unwanted situations in social contact. The symbolism and representative status of certain books and/or parts of the collection could be used to communicate important self-presentation claims – if properly presented in the context of a library.

The material object of the book in this process assumes the function of a non-textual information carrier: the books on the shelves do not have to be read to convey their messages. This is only possible because they intrinsically are textual information carriers: the message rests on the assumption that it is indeed possible to read the books on the shelves. Though the visitors of the Helmstedt scholars if at all only partially read the books displayed to them, they could only work as status and scientific position indicators if the visitors assumed that their host was able to read them and, theoretically at least, really had read them all.

The library as a part of the “extended self” of its collectors or users could be put to use in drawing on its representative functions by its material presence to reach out beyond learned circles only. Julia Bangert illustrated this by the example of the ducal house of Brunswick-Lüneburg that did so in printed texts and images alike to fashion its own image “*deo et posteritati*”. These texts which catered to an audience far wider than just the circles of university scholars provided a general public with detailed information about the state and configuration of the ducal book collection and its uses. It did so for the purpose of casting a most favourable light on the ducal house by and through the library it had assembled.

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22 Cf. Burckhard Dücker, Vorbereitende Bemerkungen zu Theorie und Praxis einer performativen Literaturgeschichtsschreibung, in: Friederike Elias/Albrecht Franz/Henning Murmann/Ulrich Wilhelm Weiser (Eds.): *Praxeologie*, Berlin/Boston 2014, 97–128; p. 119.

23 See also her recent book: Elizabeth Harding, *Der Gelehrte im Haus. Ehe, Haushalt und Familie in der Standeskultur der frühneuzeitlichen Universität Helmstedt (= Wolfenbütteler Forschungen 139)*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz 2014.

Similarly, Iris Bunte at our workshop exemplified how researchers can make the transition from the seemingly superficial corporeality of a book collection to its informational content. She analysed the traces of use within the Erbsälzer libraries, ranging from markings and notes to materials deposited in the books such as plant leaves and small stones. These traces can be related to each other much more meaningfully in the context of the libraries as wholes. By this means, Bunte was able to make visible the connections the users made within the library as a space constituted by books between individual titles, other titles, their personal lives, and their place within the family tradition and genealogy.

Any analysis of a collection could be much enhanced by taking into account both sides of the assembled books, the material as well as the textual. We would like to stress that collections of books – and library rooms or buildings as spaces connected to them – should neither be viewed as a large quantity of things nor as a mass of collected texts only. They are more than the sum of their parts. To incorporate materiality into the analysis of libraries and collections as a research guideline is a useful strategy to produce new research questions in this quite popular field of inquiry. It also may serve to critically evaluate existing claims put forward by intellectual history about books so far. To do so, it will be necessary to test how these claims fit together with new findings made through the close inspection of the physical objects. If the hypotheses resting on analyses of the intellectual content of collections differ from those resting on their materiality, we will be challenged to bridge them in a new way.

Approaching collections in this way will mean to expand one's research design. If you are already researching libraries or collections, a turn to materiality may mean that you will have to conduct a lot of additional work – yet it will provide valuable insights and new perspectives.

### **Non-concluding remarks**

In the end, does all we told you come down to the simple insight that objects can be quite troublesome? In a certain way – yes. Materiality produces endless questions, and more often than not it is quite difficult to use it to get to the answers. This especially pertains to books whose materiality is not like an epitext separated from (para/)texts. It is not just another part of the whole to be decoded according to known rules. We cannot just *read* materiality. Size, thickness, weight; matter, features, condition, usability; entries, marks of use, damages; all these are carriers of information about material books but no biblio-glyphs, no transcribable kind of alphabet. The three key foci #1 the object, #2 paratexts and #3 collections are nothing but signposts for the field of inquiry materiality studies focusing on early modern books open up. The reward might be that we can put forward claims about readers and users who have long vanished from this earth except for their material traces. These traces can be found in the material objects of their reading and use: books as physical objects. And this should be enough of a reason to go on counting, weighing, measuring, and reading in new ways.