3 Media and modalities – Literature

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When we think of literature, we most commonly think of books filled with text, and for a very long time literature has been nearly synonymous with written texts and books, but not with every text in every book. We might think of literature as being novels, short stories or poems. When we speak of literature, we think about text written in a certain way that makes us perceive a strong connection between form and content. What we perceive as literature depends on place and time and the technical devices and media types we have access to.

In this chapter, we will discuss how our understanding of narratives and the experiences communicated in novels, poems, essays and folk tales is formed and shaped by the material objects we interact with and how the basic media types of speech, text and images are integrated differently according to the conventions of different qualified media types. We can approach the question of the mediality of literature from different directions. Different material technologies that are used for writing and reading define and transform literature. This is the technical media of display dimension. We will consider the basic traits and activities that define literature, such as the reading and writing of text and how text and images can be integrated. This is the basic media aspect. Finally, we will also consider how social and cultural settings, norms and institutions construct notions of what is and what is not (considered to be) literature. This is the aspect that concerns literature as a qualified medium. All three aspects are subject to more change and variation than the prototypical image of a shelf filled with books may suggest. Our interaction with them in the four modalities differs depending on whether we read the text of a printed novel, listen to the auditory text of an audiobook, read and decode the graphic narration of comics or listen to a storyteller.

Technical media of display: How to organize flat surfaces

Although the books on a bookshelf are just part of a longer story of writing and reading, the qualified medium of literature is very intimately connected with the book as its technical medium of display. Scrolls, wax and clay tablets and surfaces of stone, as well as books, have in the past provided relatively flat and smooth surfaces that could be marked and used to store and give access to the

basic media type of the written words of texts. Books are a way of organizing larger quantities of flat surfaces, often thin sheets of parchment or paper. But when text could only be copied by hand, the storage and dissemination of text was laborious and expensive. Handwritten books were accessible to a relatively small group of readers and writers, and selected information was written down in order to establish corpora of legal or religious texts; narratives and songs were stored, too, but were meant to be read or performed to an audience. The fact that parchment, sheets made out of animal hide, was not always available in medieval Europe also restricted the information that could be stored and written down. Paper, which had been produced for a long time in China, reached Europe gradually during the Middle Ages; this, along with the technology of the printing press and with movable metal type, changed the reproduction and dissemination of texts. Any new text could be comparatively rapidly set and easily reproduced. The printing press turned books and booklets and single-sheet brochures or chapbooks into mass products: written texts were not for storage only (see Krauß et al. (2020) and Kwakkel (2018)).

Nowadays we not only use sheets of paper but also the screens of electronic media. Literary texts that for a long time have mainly been published in the form of printed books are now frequently published as e-books or audiobooks. The fact that we see these published forms as ‘books’, though neither of these digital publishing forms uses books as the technical medium of display, is just one of the many examples of how new technical media not only transmediate what is perceived as content but also represent functional aspects of older media types. E-books represent functional aspects of material books in order to achieve a better orientation and navigation in the text.

When we speak of an e-book, we are referring to a specific electronic publishing format for digital text. An e-book is often seen as the digital version of a printed book, which is often correct, for example, when we think about PDF documents, which lock the electronic text into a particular dimension and layout. Other digital text formats, such as e-publications, are not tied to a specific layout but adapt to the scale of the screen of a designated e-reader or any computer or smartphone screen. E-book formats enable new ways of interaction with the text. The fact that digital files are easily searchable is a feature that is specifically appreciated in professional interaction with all kinds of texts. But even when reading fiction, searching the text for keywords can provide new connections between different parts of the book, leading to possible new ways of interacting with a literary narrative and thereby changing the dynamics between memory and text in the reading process (Hall 2013).

The e-book as a publishing format was first developed at the same time as digital media and portable screens. Audiobooks, the recorded reading of a written text, have been distributed via all kinds of audio-storage media such as reel-to-reel tapes, records, cassettes and CDs (Rubery 2011). However, it was the digital formats for compression, such as MP3 files, in combination with portable audio-players and the possibility of internet streaming audio files that have made audiobooks widely and more conveniently accessible. As a

consequence, an increasing proportion of the audience of a novel are listeners to instead of readers of literature. Digital and electronic technical media of display do not only update older media types. They provide the basis for a kind of literature that involves digital technology to tell stories and express experiences as well and involves the reader in interactive reading experiences that can be said to be ‘born digital’ (Hayles 2008).

When we read text, on screens, paper sheets, or stone, we are primarily interacting with a two-dimensional surface and pay less attention to material depth. However, the material aspects of the technical media influence how much text can be stored and moved across temporal and spatial distances. Stone provides storage across time but is less easily transported. Thus, it makes sense that the writing on stone often indicates places of interest or places to remember. It tells stories for different purposes than stories noted on portable surfaces, like the pages of a book. With computers and smart-phones, information and even whole libraries of books can be accessed from anywhere.

Another characteristic of how we think about literature and writing is whether we consider reading and writing to be an individual or a collaborative activity. Compared with cinema, for example, writing a poem or a personal essay describing a childhood memory doesn’t require a production crew with different kinds of technical skills – this is what we assume, at least. However, children’s books and the graphic narration of comics often are the result of teamwork. Digital poetry, for instance, stems from collaborations between writers and programmers. The technical medium of the book requires dedicated technical expertise. There is in fact a whole production crew at a publishing house that turns a manuscript into a published book. Once a manuscript is accepted, the editing process may involve not only proofreading to check the spelling and grammar but also structural changes, choices involving aspects such as the wording of the title, decisions about its visual appearance that concern things like typography and page and cover design, and marketing strategies. Even in the case of self-publishing, which has become much more common on the internet and with easily available software, authors still depend on several other professionals such as designers, marketers, media content producers, retailers and distributors, as well as, of course, the readers – including reviewers, content generators and online communities, which spread the word about new publications (Squires and Ray Murray 2013).

Even if literary works are often discussed as if they are detached from decisions concerning which working material and production style to use, technical possibilities are also important for literature and are not just relevant for cinema or for visual arts. We may not pay very much attention to how typography and page layout influence our meaning-making process (although we might perceive a difference between a first edition and a cheap, everyday edition). But layout and typography always play a certain role in literature, and perhaps in particular in poetry, comics and graphic novels, and children’s books.

We often tend to think of writing as something that is not really affected by the *technology* of writing. However, the importance of technical media of display goes beyond ‘displaying’. For instance, all kinds of material interfaces that display text mediate between writer and text as well as between writer and reader. Material devices like computers, typewriters and various writing tools shape and organize the role of readers and writers. Interfaces like screens and pages provide the basis for both reading and writing, and for switching between them. Thus, the writer always is the first reader of her text as well as the reader of multiple previous texts. This experience is explored and staged in many postmodern novels. Seen from this perspective, today's digital interfaces only draw our attention to the performative aspect of material interfaces in general, that not only display but engage in interaction (Drucker 2013).

However, digital media change the way we write and think about writing. The rewriting and reworking of a manuscript written by hand or on a typewriter is a different process from editing a digital text using ‘delete’, ‘copy’ and ‘paste’. Of course, you can consciously work with different drafts using the computer, but digital writing does not force you to rewrite each draft from beginning to end to the same extent as previous writing techniques. The fact that you can easily edit digital words also affects their authority. Text is no longer carved into stone and no longer unchangeable when printed; it has become much more flexible and changeable.

Basic media types: Text, speech, images

The printed book is closely connected to our idea of literature, and the relation is so conventionalized that it has become ‘invisible’ for us. The printed book has long been central for the whole network of organizing, storing and disseminating information. The basic media type of text has been used even longer to both store and transfer thoughts, memories, narratives and experiences on flat surfaces. Until the emergence of auditory and audiovisual recording techniques, writing as a notational system to record the transitory sound waves of speech was for a long time the main option to store and disseminate information across time and space (Kittler 1999). The written words of a text can no longer rely on a multimodal context of face-to-face communication, and therefore we use language differently when writing and speaking. On pages and screens, the written words of a text are integrated into other multimodal contexts on pages and interact, for instance, with images, and the spatial information of layout.

In audiobooks, however, the basic media type of text is not perceived visually on a page but acoustically via electronic sound waves. This difference changes the affordances of the reading experience, for example, listening to an audiobook enables reading while moving through space, allow for auditory forms of immersion, and benefits readers who like to learn by listening (see Have and Stougaard Pedersen (2016) and Engberg et al. (2021)). In spite of the changes in the material and sensorial modality, the basic medium of audiobooks is still text (not speech): the voice actor reads a text that has been written. We can therefore speak of auditory text.

Listening to the auditory text of an audiobook is a different experience from listening to a skilled storyteller. Before writing and reading were widespread competences, narratives were communicated via the basic media type of speech, performed in front of an audience and stored in human memory. Using spoken words to share stories and experiences, the technical media of display are the body and voice of the performer. In the embodied context of speech, the words interact with, for instance, intonation, rhythm and gestures. Professional performers can store long speeches, poems and narratives in their memory using different kinds of mnemotechnics. When using the basic media type of speech, the narratives, experiences and dramatic conflicts worthy of being passed on have to be structured in a way that suits human memory. Repetitive structures of rhythm (verse) and sound (rhyme) formulas help people to tell good stories and help listeners to be able to remember them. The verses of a poem or a song are always easier to remember as compared to paragraphs of prose (Ong 2002).

What do we do when we read text? In the *material modality*, we engage with a stable object. As printed text is stable on the page, we have to move our eyes and our head or adjust the position of the book as we read. All this physical action brings a muscular, embodied component to the act of reading. When we write and read digital texts, the text moves as well. Recent research has investigated whether this muscular action influences how people remember, recall and pay attention to written text (see Baron (2015) and Mangen (2016)). In the *sensorial modality*, we primarily perceive text visually. However, certain types of writing technologies, like carving or using individual pieces of metal type in a printing press, can be experienced via touch as well. The written language of Braille, which was designed for people who are blind or visually impaired, is based on this kind of tactile information. Even if the text on pages in a book is primarily experienced visually, sound either explicitly or cognitively plays an important part in reading. When we read, we utter sounds, either explicitly or quietly within our brain or body. Even the silent reading of words continues to trigger the auditory imagery of the sound of spoken words in what is called silent speech or subvocalization (Smith et al. 1992). Reading digital literature, on the other hand, may involve a multi-sensory reading experience that involves visually perceived text, auditory text, sounds, and moving images (Engberg et al. 2021)

Box 3.1 Embodied reading

The multisensory reading experience of digital literature draws attention to the fact that even reading a book engages more than our eyes and draws attention to the dimensions of embodiment. The pages of books and screens of e-books also involve different tactile and other sensorial impressions. In the material modality, we touch the book and feel the surfaces of the pages, hear the rustle and perceive the smell of an old (or new) book. Reading a printed book requires the physical action of flipping the pages.

When reading an e-book on a touchscreen, the swiping imitates the flipping of paper pages. Or, in the case of literary apps, touch gestures of different kinds (panning, tapping, rotating, pinching, dragging and dropping) may be used to not only flip through metaphorical pages, but to navigate through text segments and through a variety of other media such as images, sounds, or moving images according to widely different interactive structures which may or may not resemble pages of linear texts.

The printed book weighs something and takes up space. When we read a printed book, we notice how the progress of our reading transfers weight from our right hand to our left hand (in the West). The spatial dimensions of a printed book already provide temporal and organizational information. When we look at a novel of 900 pages, we infer from the spatial extensions the amount of time it will take to read it. E-books, and in fact all digital documents, therefore need other markers that will help us to orient our reading and navigate whether we are at the beginning, the middle or the end of the text.

While we may perceive reading as a primarily visual activity, learning how to read highlights an activity that involves the body: we may trace lines with a finger or move our lips while reading aloud. Reading text also evokes haptic sensations through certain lip and tongue movements, which might have consequences for the spatial perception of certain sounds (Ramachandran and Hubbard 2001, p. 10). While the reading of a word thus closely connects us with the experience of its sound, other sensational feelings linked to smell, taste and touch are not immediately linked to the reading of words. Instead, these sensorial modalities are represented in the semiotic modality by words that represent smell, taste and touch. This process exploits our cross-modal capacities and resembles the sense of tactility that viewing a statue without touching it still evokes.

Although words are stable on printed pages, the reading of texts, specifically of prose, is perceived as more of a temporal event in the *spatiotemporal modality*. We read one word after the other in a fixed sequentiality. The reading directions differ with different alphabets, but almost every text has a fixed linear sequentiality. As readers, we are more or less in control of the temporal sequentiality of the text; we can read as fast or slow as we want to or can. We can choose to stop in the middle of a sentence or at the end of a chapter. Here, the sequentiality of text behaves differently from the temporality of the performance of film, music or theatre that is temporally fixed already in the material modality. The linear sequentiality of the text is not only present in our reading, however. Whenever we write something, we have to translate a multidimensional web of ideas into a linear stream of information. The syntax of languages allows them to nest hierarchical structures into sequential texts. The word ‘text’, which has the same root as ‘textile’, derives from the Latin *texere*, ‘to weave’, and points to this property of reading and writing as an

interweaving line. Thus, whenever we meet words, we relate them to the context of other written words. This, in fact, is what is defined as ‘intertextuality’, one of the basic concepts of modern literary theory and cultural studies.

Literary works can also creatively experiment with or even break with the linear sequentiality of the text. Qualified media types such as poetry or comics exploit the more spatial relations and visual perception of text, the words and letters on a page, and the choices of layout and typography such as contrast, shapes, proportions, visual intervals and colour. An interesting example is concrete poetry, a neo-avant-garde literary movement which was started in the 1950s by the Brazilian poets Augusto de Campos (b. 1931), Haroldo de Campos (1929–2003) and Décio Pignatari (1927–2012), the Bolivian-Swiss poet Eugen Gomringer (b. 1925), and the Swedish artist Öyvind Fahlström (1929–76). Concrete poems can break away from textual syntax and instead adopt a two-dimensional syntax using the flatness of the page. Reading these poems can be similar to reading graphs and diagrams (such as Décio Pignatari’s 1956 *Semi di Zucca*), and perceiving them visually can be similar to perceiving geometric abstract paintings (such as Augusto de Campos’s 1972 *Viva Vaia*). Breaking away from syntax also changes how words convey meanings. Considering words in themselves sometimes makes them sound and appear strange. Some concrete poems create this effect – they merely suggest vague possibilities of association between the meaning of words, their appearance and their sound (such as Eugen Gomringer’s 1953 ‘Untitled poem’ [*‘Silencio’*]). They illustrate how the basic medium of text can in itself be a vast domain for creative exploration and not just a tool to convey structured thoughts and messages. Similar to how digital literature involves digital technology, code and algorithms, concrete poetry involves the materiality of the book, and the visual and auditory basic media types in the sensorial modality.

When reading text, we do not usually pay attention to all the aspects we have discussed above. We very seldom pay attention to the fact that we interact with words on paper (or screens) unless a specific text self-referentially draws attention to the existence of words on a page. Usually we cognitively interact with what they represent, namely the storyworlds, and characters with emotions and experiences. In the *semiotic modality*, written language is primarily symbolical, representing objects by means of conventions. When using words, both the writer and the reader primarily connect the words to their objects by habit. But literary language may also draw attention to the iconicity of words, which happens in different ways in poetry, in comics and in the representation of speech in dialogue. The choice of words can have onomatopoeic qualities. In written dialogue, the spelling of words can be in iconic relation to a specific pronunciation. Comics often highlight or create iconic relations between the sound and shape of words and their meanings: If you write a dialogue IN ALL CAPS to indicate that someone is shouting, the size of the letter forms an iconic relation to the loudness of the voice that the letters represent.

When we not only consider words, but text, indexical relations are important as well. Indices are crucial for the interweaving of a text. Many words in a text merely indicate an idea that has been presented previously. All kinds of pronouns,

words such as ‘they’, ‘it’ and ‘this’, indexically point towards the noun they replace. Another kind of indexicality weaves together the text itself with the world around it, such as the signature of an author, the handwritten text of a manuscript, or the handwritten comments of a previous reader in the margins. They point to a presence of a person and the movement of her hand.

On the flat surface of the page, texts are often combined with images. Images on a cover of a book, illustrations and photographs in novels, travelogues or in artistic literary magazines are part of the reading experience even if they have not been chosen by the author of the text. Text and static images have a lot in common in the material and sensorial modalities: they appear on flat surfaces, are perceived visually and are primarily spatial in the material modality. They are most easily integrated when writing and drawing by hand, as seen in comics or in the illuminated letters of medieval manuscripts. In printed texts, the technology of printing decides how closely text and image can be combined. In qualified media types like children’s literature and comics, images are not only illustrations for a text but an integrated part of a narrative that is told by the text and the images (see Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) and Kukkonen (2013)).

Although text and images integrate closely on the page, we engage with them differently in the spatiotemporal and semiotic modality. We understand images primarily as iconic and as representing their objects through similarity. Singular illustrations are not arranged in a temporal sequentiality like text – yet the panels of comic books are. The images in comics also illustrate how images are not only iconic but involve a high degree of convention. The conventions for expressing emotions such as anger, sadness and joy differ between Western and Asian comics, for instance (see also Chapter 8).

Qualifying aspects

Technical media influence qualified media types

The use of technical media and basic media types, whether we use text or speech, publish a printed book or share texts in social media, shapes our understanding of what kind of stories can be told and which kind of experiences and memories and feelings can be expressed. Therefore, when we say we have read a good book lately or discuss texts in a literary seminar, we refer to the technical and basic media types, but we appreciate and discuss narratives, thoughts, ideas and experiences that are, for instance, disseminated as books and that are constructed and expressed in the linearity of the text.

Earlier in history, when it was not as easy for most people to choose to read and write as it is today, narratives and experiences were shared via oral storytelling in the form of epics, folk tales, myths and legends. Some of them have been transcribed at some stage. The first works in any literary tradition tend to be epic poems that presumably have long been part of an oral tradition before they were written down, such as the epic of *Gilgamesh* (ca. 2100 BC) or the *Mahābhārata* from Ancient India (the oldest parts are from 400 BC). And even

after they were written down, these poems were composed to be shared, sung and performed; not only the words but the orality and the gestures of the storyteller were important. The co-presence of the storyteller and the audience allowed for interaction, feedback and improvisation (Ong 2002). These aspects are easily forgotten if you read transcriptions of oral storytelling, such as the folk tales that were collected in Europe during the nineteenth century, and compare them with the eloquence and style of written narrative prose. And in fact the term oral literature is self-contradictory, as the very term literature refers to the use of *letters*. The term ‘orature’, coined by the Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu (d. 1977) to refer to the African non-written tradition, captures the mediality aspects better (Thiong’o 1998).

The sharing of spoken narratives does not only belong to the past. Storytelling is a fundamental human activity that not only engages literary scholars but also anthropologists, psychologists, linguists and historians (Anderson 2010). In informal contexts, we tell stories about our lives, crack jokes and share urban legends. Telling stories and appealing lyrically to an audience is something that people do in stand-up comedy shows and spoken poetry, or during professional storytelling. These are all contemporary qualified media types of oral traditions with its own social contexts, conventions, festivals and prizes.

The novel and the printing revolution

The printing press enabled mass reproduction and distribution of books and changed what kind of narrative, argumentative and poetic texts could be conceived and distributed to an increasing audience of readers. Written text that is reproduced and distributed to be read instead of being spoken orally enables another kind of narration. Written narratives are not restricted by the frailty of human memory, but they cannot rely on the multimodal context of the co-presence of oral performance. At the same time, a change in the material and sensorial modality meant that narratives distributed on surfaces could be perceived visually as well as orally, and authors were very quick to exploit the new possibilities of this.

The narrative prose and the novel as qualified media types are deeply dependent on printed texts being distributed as books. Early modern prose is full of digressions, detail and long enumerations that indulge in the possibility of telling a story that does not need to be remembered by heart. The French Renaissance writer Francois Rabelais’ (ca. 1495–1553) grotesque and satirical stories of the giants *Gargantua and Pantagruel* (1532–64) are full of such examples, e.g. when a character asks the same question in many different languages, or when the foods offered at a feast are enumerated in what seems like an almost endless list. Baroque poetry enjoyed exploiting the visual aspects of texts by making the words on the page form an iconic relation to what the words represent; for instance, the 1686 poem ‘*Ein Sanduhr*’ (‘An Hourglass’) by the baroque poet Theodor Kornfeld (1636–98) is a poem about the mortality of life that is arranged in the shape of an hourglass. This kind of poetry depends on the audience of the poem being readers rather than listeners.

On the other hand, the context of reading a text is different to the multi-modal context of speech and lacks the interactivity between narrator and audience in the co-presence of performance. Early modern narrative prose was clearly aware of moving the situation of oral storytelling into a new medium. In prefaces and other forms of direct addresses to the reader, writers reached out to their audience across time and space. These prefaces to a 'Dear reader!' might appear old-fashioned conventions to us, but they were an attempt to bridge the gap between narrator and audience that came with the distribution of books and the reading of texts. Rhyme and a regular metre, characteristics of the qualified media type of the oral tradition, turned into genre conventions. High-status genres such as tragedy and poetry or the epic continued to be qualified by a regular metre for a long time. Narrative prose, however, which qualifies as the media type of the novel – today the bestselling and most widespread literary form – did not, for a long time, possess the high status it has today. In the early nineteenth century, novel-reading was considered to have the power to damage readers' character, just as reading comics or playing computer games were viewed by later generations.

Literature inherits forms of expression that are older than writing or printing. Currently, digital technologies have been and continue to reshape the qualified medium of literature, including some very basic assumptions about how literature is created and communicated. Digital poetry can be composed with the help of algorithms, which challenges the assumption that a poem is constructed so as to express a poet's thoughts and feelings. Also, when digital technology allows for new technical media of display beyond the printed book, changes occur in our use and understanding of the basic media type of text. And it changes the conditions for how text, sound and images can be combined. Digital technology allows new forms of reading, for example, by allowing readers an interactive experience with narratives, such as the hyperlink novels in the 1990s. Different forms of what is called twitterature engage with the character restriction of the microblog as a creative challenge. The microblog disseminates, for instance, short poems, very short stories that fit into one single tweet, or entire novels, disseminated in a succession of tweets. Reading twitter novels or fan fiction together with the comments of thousands of other fellow readers turns the reading experience into a socially shared phenomenon.

In sum, it is not only written words that tell stories and express poetic experience. We meet audiovisual complex storytelling in films and television shows. Narratives and poetic language develop interactively in computer games and in many other contemporary media types. All of these expand our understanding of what literature is. Writers (or, more broadly, artists working with literature as one of their preferred media) are constantly experimenting with new and alternative ways to use words, spoken or written, in combination with other basic media types to mediate experiences, tell stories and promote forms of reading interaction.

Social context and conventions

Let us not forget that simply talking about basic media such as written text and technical media of display such as the book still don't allow us to differentiate between literary and non-literary media products. It is, rather, social and cultural settings, norms and institutions that construct notions of what is and what is not (considered to be) literature. In contemporary Western settings, we probably think of novels, short stories, poetry, perhaps travel writing, possibly essays: texts involving characters, feelings, ideas, conflicts written by professional authors and published by publishing houses, sold in bookshops, book fairs or online, found in libraries, discussed in reading circles, read individually or in book-reading events. Literature is not only text and objects; it involves social interaction and economics as well. Books need to find their readers or customers so that professional writers can make a living. This market for literature qualifies the medium of literature as well. We should be careful not to forget that literature in the past, present and future is a historically constructed notion that is shaped by social institutions and power constellations that decide what kind of literary texts are stored, published and spread.

It is not only context and convention but also how we use a text that defines what we call literature. Audiobooks not only transform the reader into a listener but mean that the listener can combine listening to literature with other activities, for instance, commuting, running or doing housework. Therefore, having access to audiobooks means that you do not have to make time to read and do anything else. These changes in the material and sensorial modalities make literature more accessible. From being a by-product of book-publishing for specific target groups, the audiobook has changed into an option for a much broader audience. The rise of audiobooks thus includes a shift in reading practices that challenge traditional hierarchies (see Have and Stougaard Pedersen (2016) and Engberg et al. (2021)).

The fact that publishing houses issue guidelines on how to write a text that is suitable for the audiobook format (recommending a clear and chronological storyline, told from one perspective) does not necessarily mean that the audiobook as a literary media type is destined to mark the end of complex, rich, literary storytelling; instead, it reflects changes in the operational qualifying aspects of literature, that is, the contexts in which we use literature are changing. A parallel development has been clear in certain mainstream crime and thriller genres, where novels have clearly been designed to be able to be made into action films or thrillers.

We must also acknowledge that the auditory perception of written text, which some literary critics think leads to a reduction in complexity, can accomplish the very opposite. The performance of the voice actor can highlight the auditory experience of words, rhythm and voices in a way that can also make complex literary texts more accessible. Thus, different technical media of display seldom mark 'the death' of a specific kind of qualified medium; instead, when we look at literature as a qualified media type in the digital age, we can see how new technical media are slowly changing the qualifying aspects of literature.

Therefore, digital technology not only changes how we access written narratives and what they look like, but also influences our understanding of what literature is and can be as the context, the conventions and the uses of written literature change: we demonstrated this earlier concerning both the searchable e-book and the new affordances of an audiobook. In the same way that the printing press allowed for new literature-related possibilities in the early modern epoch, digital media in the twenty-first century allow different kinds of often (but not always) more interactive, collaborative forms of literature.

Table 3.1 Media and modalities – Literature

Media types and modalities	Description
Technical media type	Handwritten or printed books, computers, e-readers, smartphones, computers performance
Basic media type	Text, image Audiobooks: auditory text, organized sound, sound effects Oral literature: speech, orality and gesture Digital literature: text, auditory text, organized sound, sound and haptic effects
Qualified media type	Text, auditory text or speech convey narratives, emotions and experiences (sometimes together with images or organized sound) Genres: Prose narratives, epic poetry, poetry, concrete poetry, drama, oral narratives (folk tales, legends), digital literature (digital poetry, twitterature, literary apps), text and image narratives (children's books, comics)
Material modality	Flat surfaces of pages (or screens) Storytelling: body and speech organs of performers Digital literature: screens, loudspeakers
Sensorial modality	Text-based: primarily visual, embodied Performance-based: auditory, co-presence Digital literature: visual, auditory, tactile (multisensory reading)
Spatiotemporal modality	Material: spatial object of a book, reading time Sensorial: fixed sequentiality of a text Loose sequentiality of images Spatial relations of text and images on the page Semiotic: virtual time and space of the storyworld
Semiotic modality	Text: dominantly symbolic (increased iconicity in, e.g. poetry or comics, indexical in manuscripts, autographs and comics to act of writing) Image: dominantly iconic (increased symbolicity in, e.g. comics) Speech: dominantly symbolic, iconic/indexical in relation to the expression of emotions

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