

Cultural Circulation and the Book: Literature, Knowledge, Space, and Economy (An Introduction)

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The book as a cultural object of special value co-determines literariness through the linguistic structure of the texts it transmits and the bibliographic codes specific to it as a medium. The book influences the social circulation of discourse and its genre differentiation and systematization. The conceptual and spatial structure of knowledge is materialized in the library (book repository or book series). Libraries are meeting places and crossroads of “bibliomigrancy” (Mani) of works having various geographical and historical origins as well as the places that allow us to establish cognitive and creative interferences between cultural spaces inscribed in the library holdings. Books evoke a variety of imaginary spatial models, including the global, while their own spaces are also physical and meaningful. From its beginnings up to the present expansion of digital textuality, the medium of the book appears in the context of economies, which set the direction and breadth of the spatial reach of the messages it transmits and encodes. Book history is therefore a field that lies within the interest of comparative literature.

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Books, literature, and bibliographical codes. The Slovenian word *knjiga* ‘book’ is part of the word-formational base of the Slovenian abstract noun *književnost* ‘literature’. Since the mid-nineteenth century, this noun has been used to refer to belles lettres, together with the terms *slonstvo*, *leposlovje*, and *literatura*. Alongside its relatives in other south Slavic languages, this trivial grammatical fact is also among the rare expressions at the global level that (also) denote the concept of literature based on its central medium, which has been best known and appreciated in the modern era (see Kos 6–18). This notion, which motivates the word-formation of *književnost* and according to which literature is comprised of an abstraction of a multitude of books, already indicates that a book—at least from the viewpoint of one, two, or three (small, marginal) European language systems—is much more than merely a physical carrier of a literary text.

With their historically persistent occurrence and prominence, such as accompanies them in a series of concrete phenomena, books also co-define the literariness of a text because they contribute to its establishment at the level of cultural units that have a special value. For centuries, possessing books has been an indicator of cultural capital, social and cultural excellence, or at least of standing out of an average of relatively illiterate and largely poor pre-modern and early-modern societies. Even in other languages that denote the term *literature* chiefly through semantic bases such as ‘word’, ‘writing’, and ‘letter’, studies in bibliography, the history of books, literary sociology, and media theory conducted in the last third of the twentieth century often led to the finding that books are not silent or inert accidents of literature. They are not merely passive, coincidental physical carriers (media or channels) of a linguistic record and the semantics coded in it. The historical practices of production and circulation of books have semiotized them even as objects. The book object is thus embedded in a discourse that has developed its own special codes, through which the book’s format, size, binding, apparatus, font, illustrations, print size and quality, and place of issue become invested with connotation. During various activities connected to the book (its creation, printing, selling, reading, library classification, critical review, and so on), the meanings evoked by these signifying systems—which Jerome McGann referred to as “bibliographical codes” in his *Textual Condition* of 1991 (13–6, 52–61, *passim*)—additionally modulate the messages arising from the linguistic signifiers that are structured into a text. In their interconnections with the linguistic order, signifiers of a book code articulate the discursive sense that is ascribed to the text if it is published in a book (and enhance the sense even more based on the book’s specific physiognomy). In addition, bibliographical codes also indicate the genre, thematic, or methodological field of the book, within whose coordinates defined within a broader systematization of knowledge the book further determines its semantic effects and functions. One of the more influential definitions of these matters was provided by Roger Chartier in *The Order of Books* (Fr. *L’Ordre des livres*, 1992). He believes that “books are objects whose forms, if they cannot impose the sense of the texts that they bear, at least command the uses that can invest them and the appropriations to which they are susceptible” (viii–ix). The technical, visual, and physical attributes of books are very informative: “More than ever before, historians of literary works and historians of cultural practices have become aware of the effects of meaning that material forms produce. In the case of the book, those forms constitute a singular order totally distinct from other registers of transmission of the canonical works as ordinary texts” (ix). According to Chartier, histori-

cally determined social and political configurations are inscribed in every work through forms and topics but, on the other hand, works transmitted in books construct not only social ties, but also an individual's subjectivity (x). Nowhere else does this come to the fore more than in the organization of libraries and their systematization of formatting and content-based classification, which is also influenced by values. This involves not only libraries as physical spaces in which books from various periods and places are collected and exist synchronously (see Latour), but also libraries in the figurative sense of bibliographical inventories, book series, selected works, (Chartier 65–88) or contemporary digital repositories (Darnton 43–58).

Libraries, circulations and systems of knowledge, places of (literary) creativity. With regard to libraries in the sense of published collections of books or periodicals as well as imaginary libraries in the form of meta-books—which compile, encyclopedically summarize, or bibliographically inventory other books in the effort to make knowledge universal and systematic—either the noteworthy uniformity of books included in a collection, or the structured content-based summary of multiple volumes into a single book stand out. Both indicate a connection between the bibliographical and linguistic series of signification: identical bibliographical signs signal a categorical homogeneity of the verbal texts they transmit. The interconnection of the bibliographical and linguistic signifying systems thus creates the impression of the uniformity or homogeneity of works from the viewpoint of their themes, methods, styles, genres, origin, purpose, value, and so on. These types of libraries “without walls,” which have also been known in Slovenia (from the lost seventeenth-century encyclopedia of seven hundred examples *Viridarium exemplorum* by Matija Kastelec and Marko Pohlin's biographical and bibliographical meta-book *Bibliotheca Carnioliae* of 1803 to modern book collections, such as the Klasje Library, the Kondor Library, or the Revolutionary Theory Library), have been historically studied, among others, by Peter Burke (56, 92–105), Roger Chartier (65–88), and Bala Venkat Mani, who theoretically elucidated their functions in the history of discourse orders; among other things, they studied *Speculum maius*, a medieval encyclopedia written in the thirteenth century by Vincent of Beauvais, Gessner's polymath bibliographical work *Bibliotheca Universalis* (1545), 224 volumes of *Bibliothèque universelle des romans*, which were published in Paris from 1775 to 1789, and the *Universal-Bibliothek* collection of world classics, which Anton Philipp Reclam began publishing in Leipzig in 1867.

Even libraries as tangible and architecturally well-organized interiors contain universal or imaginary dimensions. “The dream of a library ... that would bring together all accumulated knowledge and all the books

ever written can be found throughout the history of Western civilization,” says Chartier, adding that conceptual bases for building and setting up large libraries by the nobility, the Church, and private citizens developed from this reverie, which also motivated the search for rare codices and editions or inspired architectural plans (62). Thus according to Foucault, the actual libraries would belong among heterotopias (Foucault 26; see also Mani 288), in which the physical spatial properties inspired by imaginary or traditional images of traditional temples and symbols of knowledge cross the virtual spaces that various periods and cultures inscribed into the textual worlds of works that are part of library holdings. As Reingard Nethersole indicates, libraries—imperial, court, aristocratic, monastic, university, private, public, national, and so on—are contextualized within their empirical, locally colored social spaces. They collect texts from a wide range of various periods and cultures, which—through the acts of reading, sorting, cataloging, and studying books—evoke and systemize the mosaic of polychronous world literary space; thus every library is “a vector for the deposit, transmission, dissemination, preservation, and *wechselseitige* or mutually effective exchange of multifarious voices and polyvalent knowledges past and present” (Nethersole 307–8). Libraries are thus transitional depositories of texts, experience, knowledge, thinking, and ideas, whose circulations cross the temporal, linguistic, social-ethnic, and spatial boundaries of the environment into which library buildings are placed.

Robert Darnton emphasizes that libraries “were never warehouses of books. They have always been and always will be centers of learning” (xv). This is definitely true of the medieval monastic libraries, in which monks exchanged, collected, cataloged, and studied books, in addition to copying, illuminating, and writing them. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, several monasteries were established in Slovenian territory; their libraries and scriptoria were integrated into the “pan-European monastic network” (Golob 15). Cistercians, Benedictines, Carthusians, Dominicans, Franciscans, and Conventual Franciscans were in charge of the inflow of manuscript codices from French, Flemish, German-Austrian, Czech, and Italian areas; they also wrote, copied, illuminated, and commented on their own texts (e.g., *Commendacio celle* and *Gesta sive religiosa preconia incliti ducis Leopoldi* from the monastery at Jurklošter from the thirteenth century, and *Liber certarum historiarum* by John of Viktring from the fourteenth century). The connection of the Slovenian monastic libraries and scriptoria with Europe was also reflected in their text repertoire and selected language (mostly Latin religious writings) as well as in the artistic expression of imported or “original” codices that were influenced by various art schools such as the Lombard, Venetian, Czech, Flemish, Swabian, and

Salzburg-Augsburg schools (Golob 17–8). Peter Burke establishes that in later periods not only monastic and university libraries, but also private and public ones turned into knowledge centers, meeting points for scholars, places for exchanging information, and discussions. In addition, from the seventeenth century onwards, librarians were considered the main mediators and creators of knowledge in the international “republic of letters;” Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was only one of the many scholars that also worked as librarians (Burke 27, 56). Educated Slovenians that owned libraries or worked as librarians in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries included Sigmund Zois, Jernej Kopitar, Matija Čop, and Franc Miklošič. Even before that, in 1701, the members of the learned circle of the *Academia operosorum* convinced the bishop of Ljubljana to open the Seminary Library in the spirit of Italian Humanism as the first Slovenian public institution of this type; in 1721, Giulio Quaglio painted the library with allegorical frescoes of Wisdom, Faith, Hope, and Love, and the images of the Evangelists, ancient philosophers, and writers, and thus lent it an imaginary dimension colored with Catholic universalism and Baroque Classicist humanism (see Vidmar; Smolik). On a smaller scale, Slovenian libraries followed the general European development (Munda 54–6). Libraries were set up by monasteries, rich nobles (the Auerspergs), polymaths, scholars, literati, and patrons of the arts (Valvasor, Peter Pavel Glavar, Zois, Čop), the *Academia operosorum*, and—nearly two hundred years after the Protestants opened the first public library in Ljubljana (1565)—also the province of Carniola (the Liceum Library established in 1747). In conclusion, it can be agreed with Nethersole that libraries—large or small, private or public, real or imagined—are “nodes in a network of trans-border cultural exchanges,” “sites encapsulating and recording specific flows of symbolic and cultural capital” and “the receptacle of the world’s scriptural memory” (Nethersole 309, 314).

As such, with their holdings, which combine domestic and international knowledge and art from various periods, libraries are also places and sources of literary creativity. With the small library panopticon that he set up in the tower at his country estate, Michel de Montaigne was able to develop a modern vision of topic thinking through intensive reading and glossatorial annotation of a relatively small holding of books. Outside the control of secular and church authorities and by boldly crossing disciplinary boundaries, in his *Essays* Montaigne autonomously reflects on the moral examples and knowledge provided in books from various regions and periods; he does this using a genre that he had to invent himself for this type of thinking (Burke 191–2; Juvan, “Esej” 174–7; Nethersole 308, 310). On the other hand, some well-stocked private libraries in the eigh-

teenth and nineteenth centuries were the meeting places of the cosmopolitans of the European *respublica litterarum* and thus also the “birthplace of the modern idea of world literature;” Goethe’s private study and library in Weimar contained 7,500 volumes in more than twenty languages and combined a universe of world knowledge, literature, and art (Nethersole 309). On a smaller scale, Matija Čop’s private library had a similar cosmopolitan character; it contained 1,993 volumes and the only major difference was that it focused more on philology, aesthetics, and literary history (see Juvan, “Svetovna” 119–20). However, by the time the probate proceeding was conducted barely a hundred books remained of the private library owned by his friend, the poet France Prešeren. Of all the contemporary Romantic authors available to him, his library only included Byron and Moore, and he had considerably more ancient, medieval, and early modern European classics. Perhaps Prešeren’s intimate closeness with his personal books may explain why his Romantic poetry looks so classical. In the era during which, according to the simplified typologies—which were also criticized by Chartier (17–8) and Burke (179–82)—extensive reading had predominated for decades, Prešeren apparently remained an intense reader. As a poet he learned from the classics, much like the essay-writer Montaigne at the beginning of the modern age.

Spaces of books and windows on the world. The paragraphs above mentioned the connection between books and space, both real and imagined, or virtual. Textual worlds, which in writing and reading books mentally arise from the semantics of linguistic structures, present and model virtual spaces. Textual worlds are iconic signs and, according to Lotman, also semantic models of the cultural space in which literary works were created or to which they semiotically refer (see Juvan, *Literary* 205–8). The possible worlds of texts thus reflect actual places, landscapes, cities, interiors, and so on; they transform, assemble, and combine them creatively, seek to restore their past or envision their future, intertextually develop mythological, artificial, and literary worlds from tradition, make up utopian and fantasy settings, and so on. Every reading actualizes the textually coded settings in its own way, and connects them to our experience with real or imagined spaces or those already presented in the media or art. In the mental process of juxtaposing virtual spaces with experiential places that are called up in memory or are currently being experienced, mixed, palimpsest, and hybrid spaces emerge (Juvan, *Literary* 208–14). Such “heterotopias” (Foucault 24–7) are especially noticeable due to those virtual settings that use “bibliomigrancy” (Mani) to either travel to us from other temporally or geographically distant places or to iconize the locations of

cultural otherness. When for instance, during lunch at his home in Weimar in 1827 Johann Wolfgang Goethe picturesquely reported to his secretary Eckermann about the fictional spaces he experienced while reading the translation of a Chinese novel (allegedly he obtained it from the nearby ducal library), he used these “west-eastern” heterotopias—which allowed him a bifocal reflection on a foreign world in his own world, and on his own world from a cultural otherness—to make his most famous statement about world literature (see Eckermann 165–6). Contacts between textually transmitted spaces, which are presented before us as “multiple windows on the world,” thus also clearly establish a hermeneutic awareness of the world literary space (see Damrosch 15–7, 281–300).

However, books do not contain merely a virtual space. The word *volume*, meaning both ‘an amount of space measured in cubic meters’ and ‘a book that is part of a set’, and originating from a Roman word denoting a ‘roll of papyrus’ (Kirby 276), reveals the idea of books as tangible objects whose space is outlined by their format and size. The empirical aspect of the script and the linearity of signifiers, which create virtual spatial paradigms of signification through their recurrences and segmentation, have an impact on the logic of reading. This is testified not only by the epistemological shift that occurred in the first century BC with the transfer from “endless” papyrus or parchment rolls into “discontinuous” sheets bound into codices, but also by a minor, but exciting change that readers experienced after the introduction of print when they had to get used to the paragraphs that began to segment the formerly running text (see Chartier 11–2). Books as “volumes” are thus themselves bodies with a volume; in addition, they also take up space, which raises the question of where and how to keep and arrange the written or printed knowledge. The issues of spatial gaps, functional and prudent organization of books, and especially the overcrowding and lack of room, in which accumulation and chaotic surplus of information is materialized, have been dealt with by libraries throughout history: from the Ptolemaic Royal Library of Alexandria via Borges’ made-up *Library of Babel*, which was an allegory for the universe, to one’s modern home library that is described realistically and humorously by Georges Perec (“Brief Notes”). After questionable campaigns led by state and university libraries to solve the overcrowding issue by recording printed material on microfilms, whose durability and applicability are anything but promising compared to paper, it was only the digitization of paper and parchment material, the modern development of electronic textuality, e-books, and the gradual market predominance of “born digital” works that thoroughly changed the spatial conditions of library architecture: because electronic media relieve texts from a specific location and

the corporeity of permanent material carriers, libraries in the renovated form of online digital repositories also remain without walls (see Darnton 43–58, 109–29). With the spatially unlimited and omnipresent (but not necessarily free-of-charge) accessibility to the virtual texts stored in e-repositories, digital libraries and bookstores, and institutional, social, or personal websites, the institutional authority that books and libraries have possessed over the centuries in transmitting and disseminating knowledge has clearly diminished. Even a century and a half ago, the state and national prestige of libraries and the sanctity of knowledge inscribed in the books that they protected was symbolized by an architecture with clear reminiscences of cathedrals, Greek temples, and similar spatial forms of a venerable spiritual tradition (Nethersole 308).

Books, cultural transfers, economy, world literature space. Even though the body of a manuscript or printed book seems motionless, exchanges and transfers of materials, and movements of semiotic codes, techniques, and professional tasks that have connected countries, regions, and continents in the past millennia are embodied in the material and linguistic-symbolic structure of this artifact (see Kirby 275–6). Books are not only subjects of cultural transfer, but in and of themselves also its product; an artifact created thanks to the contacts between cultural spaces. As can be learned from encyclopedias (see Munda 8–14), our Roman alphabet, which is based on the ancient Greek alphabet, was derived from the Phoenician consonantal script, which most likely developed as early as the seventeenth century BC. Paper, which was invented by the Chinese probably in the second century BC, was brought to Spain by the Arabs in the twelfth century. From here it quickly spread across Europe and replaced parchment due to its low price. Lithographic and xylographic block printing known to the Chinese in the ninth century was brought to Europe in the eleventh century. Movable-type printing, which was also known in China and Korea as early as the eleventh century, conquered the world thanks to Gutenberg's innovation from the mid-fifteenth century and its later technological improvements, as well as thanks to the commercial and economic power of the European empires. Binding sheets of parchment into codices began to replace papyrus and parchment rolls from the first century BC and early Christianity onwards. Until the invention of print, manuscript books were the predominant medium of various text genres, especially thanks to the network of medieval European monasteries and their scriptoria (see Munda 11).

Already from the start, writing and books carried and transmitted value, and subsequently they were literally embedded in economy. Script was developed at the end of nomadic hunting and gathering and the settlement

of a community in a given territory. According to Andrew Robinson, the oldest manuscripts from around the fourth millennium BC were created in Mesopotamia precisely because of economic reasons. These manuscripts helped unreliable memory with more durable, semiotically fixed records of goods and their exchange and management (Robinson 36). Script, its contents, and media were also connected with value and exchange in a different way than merely through their economic origin. What was written down was primarily the things that were worth preserving, passing on, and thinking or talking about, and things that were exceptional or important enough to exceed the limitations of the time and space in which they appeared and died out. Because reading and writing skills, and the possession of recorded knowledge, were never accessible to everyone, they were often connected with the social positions and roles that represented and expressed political power, cultural authority, and prestige, or served as attributes to these bodies. On the other hand, physical media also had their exchange value, even though it slowly decreased over the centuries; however, their applied value increased: rare and precious papyrus was replaced by more affordable parchment, which in turn was replaced by even cheaper paper; in modernity, the rare manuscripts were replaced by increasingly more numerous print copies, the richly decorated bindings were replaced by mass-produced bindings, and so on (see Kirby 275–6). Because of both their conceptual and material value, books and their predecessors were thus treated as merchandise, and objects of exchange and trade. In this way, books connected cultural spaces that differed by language, civilization, and ethnicity.

Intercultural circulation or the trading of records, texts, artifacts, objects, practices, ideas, forms, and media was the reality of the first civilizations and their literacy. The awareness of the global space and mutual “discoveries” of civilizations or continents is also a process that can be observed in European and Asian cultures at least from the Middle Ages onwards (Burke 79–80). Land and maritime trade routes were often the main channels through which countries and continents exchanged not only goods, but also books and news—the book trade also paved its own international trade routes (Burke 78; Briggs and Burke 20–1). Exchange between cultural spaces was therefore conducted at three interrelated levels: through goods, cultural artifacts, and their inscriptions of knowledge and experience.

The “geography of knowledge” shows that in the modern age the paths of transfer of manuscripts and books, ideas, and representations led to major European urban centers, particularly to ports and the capitals of empires; from such “relay” cities the information routes spread further

to European peripheries (Burke 55–70). With their political, economic, and cultural institutions, including libraries, cities like Venice, Amsterdam, Paris, and London became “centers of calculation” (Latour; Burke 75–6). Their cultural capital was both the result and legitimization of economic, political, and ecclesiastical power. They accumulated goods, precious and exotic objects, texts, and books. Libraries, scholarly academies, museums, and similar institutions professionally handled information obtained from the remotest countries, systematizing imported knowledge and adapting it to the domestic categorial system; they further disseminated the knowledge processed this way to other European centers and peripheries through their media, social networks, and the book market (Burke 75–110). Travelogues, encyclopedias, atlases, dictionaries, news, and literary texts, which were based on experience from around the world, also reached the European periphery through these channels. By transplanting foreign sources they enriched the repertoires of the receptive cultures and thus made it possible for European traditions to be constantly updated through new ideas, forms, and knowledge. Cultural transfer helped establish and develop several disciplines, from archeology and anthropology to geography and comparative linguistics; European literatures and arts with their adventurous and historical topics, exotic stereotypes, Orientalist imagination, allegories, and decorativeness, interest in Oriental wisdom, and so on, also drew from these sources. It can be concluded that the awareness of the world space developed in Europe long before the introduction of the concept of world literature, also thanks to books and their “economy of cultural spaces.”

Economic metaphors, inter-discursively taken over from Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and other economic writings, with which Goethe formulated his vision of world literature in the late 1820s, were elaborated theoretically in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, although rather sketchily. However, today this cursory Marxist analogy between global capitalism and globalized literature has inspired world-system analyses (see Habjan; Juvan, “Svetovni”). Goethe actually experienced world literature as an emerging world market of cultural goods; as a supranational network of cosmopolitan writers and scholars; as an increase in international trade of books, literary works, themes, forms, and ideas; as windows on cultural otherness; as an endless repertoire from which the creativity of modern classics freely draws and is renovated; as a medium for establishing cosmopolitan humanism, intercultural understanding, and the policy of peaceful coexistence of nations; as an opportunity for allegedly belated or semi-peripheral literatures to become established and comparable to nations with a longer, richer, and internationally recognized literary tradition.

Many of these aspects are also typical of today's world literary system, but it seems that the economic aspect increasingly predominates among them. According to Ann Steiner, "world literature is defined and propelled by the forces and structures of the book trade that are intersected by the media market" (316). She believes that today "the world book trade is made up of a combination of enormous [i.e., transnational] media companies and a myriad of small publishers, Print-on-Demand, online internet publications, and other ways for literature to spread beyond borders" (323).

The history of books, bibliomigrancy, and comparative literature. The majority of topics I used to outline the territory of this issue of *Primerjalna književnost* (Comparative Literature) belong to the domain of the history of books. Robert Darnton, one of the main protagonists of this (trans)discipline, understands it as a "social and cultural history of communication by print" that deals with the issue of how ideas were transmitted through print and "how exposure to the printed word affected the thought and behavior of mankind during the last five hundred years" (Darnton 176). The history of books is an trans-disciplinary field, which from the perspective of bibliography, sociology, historical disciplines, literary studies, and some other disciplines studies the entire printed media "communication circuit that runs from the author to the publisher (if the bookseller does not assume that role), the printer, the shipper, the bookseller, and the reader" as well as the relationships of printed communication with the environment of other systems, from the economic, social, and political to cultural (Darnton 180). Darnton also developed a premise for reflecting on how books and their circulation connect cultural spaces and how this can be studied:

Books themselves do not respect limits either linguistic or national. They have often been written by authors who belonged to an international republic of letters, composed by printers who did not work in their native tongue, sold by booksellers who operated across national boundaries, and read in one language by readers who spoke another... The history of books must be international in scale and interdisciplinary in method. (Darnton 205–6)

From this viewpoint, comparative literature is a legitimate partner of the history of books (and vice versa) in all cases in which a study focuses on the transnational "geography of knowledge" (Burke 55) and follows the mobility of actors, practices, materials, technologies, and contents connected with books. Like the Slovenian Reformation literature with Primož Trubar, Jurij Dalmatin, and Adam Bohorič, testifies, among others, books are often written by exiled authors; they are not printed where

they were created and where they are expected to be read; imported materials and foreign capital are needed for their production; and through the book market and other forms of trade (sometimes secret and illegal) they can also reach far-away and unpredicted audiences.

At the conference *The Book: An Economy of Cultural Spaces*, which we organized in November 2010, Bala Venkat Mani argued that “specific moments of global print cultural history contribute to the ‘making’ of world literature” (285). World literature would not exist without what Mani calls “bibliomigrancy.” To him, this expression primarily means the physical movement of books as cultural objects between various points on Earth. The book trade between various places, countries, and continents, and collecting, organizing, and storing books at various libraries could be placed within this framework. In addition, Mani also understands “bibliomigrancy” in a more figurative sense, as a “virtual” mobility of contents transmitted through “physical” mobility of the book medium (Mani 289). This would also include the international circulation of representations, virtual spaces, and structures of feeling and knowledge—that is, translations of books and their appropriation, use, processing, and creative transformations. Thus in studying the development of the global system of interliterary relations, comparative literary history should focus more on printed books as the medium that, through its linguistically coded contents and bibliographical codes, regulates the economics of symbolic exchanges between cultural spaces.

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