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NEW MATERIALISM AS A TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY LITERARY THEORY: ORIGINS, DEVELOPMENT, MAJOR THINKERS, AND CONTEMPORARY DIRECTIONS

1. **Tariq Usman**
Assistant Professor of English Literature, University of Okara
tariq.usman@uo.edu.pk
2. Izzah Rashid
Teaching Fellow, University of Okara
izzahrasheed74@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

One of the most impactful theoretical advancements of the material turn in the humanities of the twenty-first century is New Materialism. It emerged around the turn of the millennium in reaction, in part, to the shortcomings of linguistic, discursive, and social-constructionist approaches which had prevailed in the late 1980s and 1990s. In contrast to the passive, substantive, representational, and interpretive view of matter that characterizes the humanities, new materialist thinkers see matter as dynamic, relational, embodied, productive, and with the capacity to act. Literary studies are deeply affected by this re-thinking of the concept because it enables a questioning of anthropocentric notions of authorship, representation, subjectivity, textuality, and humans and nonhumans. The essay maps out the intellectual lineage and evolution of new materialism from its roots in Spinoza, Marx, Nietzsche, Bergson, Deleuze, feminism, science studies and poststructuralism to the interventions of Karen Barad, Jane Bennett, Rosi Braidotti, Manuel DeLanda, Elizabeth Grosz, Stacy Alaimo, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost and others. It explores the key tenets of this theory: vibrant matter, material agency, assemblage, becoming, embodiment, trans-corporeality, intra-action, relational ontology and posthumanism. The essay then traces the use of new materialism for literary criticism, material ecocriticism, feminist literary studies, animal studies, postcolonial criticism, Anthropocene literature and contemporary cultural studies. It also takes into account significant criticisms of the approach, such as those based on the notions of political agency, linguistic mediation, anthropocentrism and the risk of dehumanising responsibility. The essay is a powerful redefinition of literary theory in that it moves the act of literary interpretation from a system of interrelated ideas into a dynamic system of bodies, objects, environments, technologies and material processes. It remains significant for its ability to re-imagine literature in a period of ecological crisis, biotechnology, digital culture, climate change, and ever more intricate human–nonhuman entanglements.

Keywords: *New Materialism, literary theory, material turn, material agency, posthumanism, embodiment, ecocriticism, Anthropocene*

1. Introduction

What has been referred to as the ‘linguistic or cultural turn' in the twentieth century was a major development in literary theory. Throughout its various forms—structuralism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, discourse theory, psychoanalysis, reader-response theory, cultural studies—Language, representation, signification, discourse and cultural construction were all emphasised. These methods revolutionized the study of literature by showing that meanings are not clear and do not fall into place automatically. Texts are organized by linguistic systems, cultural codes, ideology, discursive practices, and interpretive communities. But in the last decades of the twentieth century a growing number of scholars started to argue that the language/ representation bias had created another kind of theoretical constraint – the relative lack of materiality.

In this intellectual framework, New Materialism was born. It is a general term for a wide constellation or body of schools, rather than a single school, but the date of its appearance is generally set between the turn of the millennium. It is an interdisciplinary and politically engaged discipline that emerged during the post-constructionist, ontological or material turn, and Susan Yi Sencindiver mentions Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Jane Bennett, Vicki Kirby and Manuel DeLanda as some of its key practitioners. The

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progressive evolution of the movement has been possible because of fruitful cross-fertilization between feminist theory, science and technology studies, philosophy, environmental humanities, cultural theory, and the natural sciences.

New Materialism does not simply represent a return to an older materialism. The adjective "new" is significant, as the contemporary materialist theory is trying to rethink matter in another way than the mechanistic materialist or the economically reductive materialist. Matter is no longer considered inert substance awaiting human organising, interpretation and exploitation. Matter is being known as an active, relational, processual and generative entity, rather. New materialist thinking refutes the idea of matter as inert substance and sees it as alive, dynamic and potentially transformative, says Rachel J. Crellin.

The change is significant for literary theory. Interpretation of literature is no longer limited to human agency, consciousness, language, and representation, if matter is an agent. Things, creatures, environments, bodies, equipment, climate, the sea, rocks, germs and systems can become important actors in literary realms. This doesn't mean that a forest in a novel should be nothing but a symbol for human emotion. Rivers don't always have to be a metaphor. A machine doesn't have to be a symbol of industrial modernity. New materialist criticism is asking what these entities do, how they are in relation to one another in a network and how literary narratives capture the inter-relations among human and nonhuman forces.

But this approach has gained a special importance in the face of ecological crisis. There are reasons to question the notion of the human being as a subject, onlooker and outlier of material nature, due to climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, resource extraction, Pandemics, Biotechnology and environmental degradation. The ecological crisis proves that human life is inextricably linked and is dependent upon material systems beyond human control. Coole and Frost contend that current economic, environmental, geopolitical and technological realities require re-thinking of the nature, agency, and material relations. Their ground-breaking anthology New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics gathered together a group of people who wanted to rethink matter, materialisation, agency, embodiment, and politics.

New Materialism is thus a significant shift in today's literary theory. It doesn't only contribute to existing interpretive vocabulary; it confronts assumptions of what a subject, an object, an environment, an action and even a text might be. The literary work enters into a larger material complex of bodies, books, technologies, institutions, readers, environments, and cultural infrastructures.

This essay is an examination of the new materialism as a major theory of the twenty first century. It first outlines its intellectual lineage, and then considers its development as an independent theoretical structure. It then reviews its key thinkers and concepts, and explores its use in the fields of literary studies. Feminist materialism, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, Anthropocene studies, animal studies and the object and environment in literature are among the things that receive special attention. The essay also addresses some of the critiques of new materialism, and analyzes its potential trajectory in an age of ecological crisis, digital technologies, biotechnology, and artificial intelligence. The main thesis is that the new materialism has opened up the ontological domains of literary criticism, shifting the focus on the human, sign-centred, world to a more material world of relations.

Intellectual Genealogy of New Materialism (2015)

New materialism has a strong association with the theory of the twenty first century, but the intellectual roots of new materialism are much older. It's roots run through philosophies that blurred the boundaries

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between mind and matter, subject and object, man and nature. There are conceptual resources to be found in the work of Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Marx, and most recently Deleuze and Guattari, which have been taken up by contemporary materialists.

Spinoza is important because of his monistic view of reality. Spinoza did not see mind and matter as distinct realities, but rather one reality manifesting itself in various forms—attributes. This conception undermines the so-called hierarchy of man's active mind and the passive material world. As a result of this, relationality, embodiment, affect and material agency have been developed by contemporary new materialists, based on the work of Spinoza.

Nietzsche also challenged common notions of the independence of the subject. The focus on forces, drives, embodiment, and becoming helped shape subsequent philosophical attempts at going beyond the rational, unified subject. From this point of view, the human person is not a single and stable consciousness but a precarious assemblage of forces and relations.

Another influence on contemporary materialist thought was Henri Bergson's philosophy of duration, creativity and vital movement. Bergson rejected mechanistic notions of life, and instead focused on becoming. His philosophy was to have an impact on the theories of later vitalism and creativity.

Another important precursor is Karl Marx; Marxism and new materialism are related in a complicated manner. Historical materialism asserts that human consciousness forms under material social relations, and that there is no separation between economic life and political, cultural and ideological life. Contemporary new materialism also shares the emphasis on material conditions of Marxism but often attempts to broaden the notions of materiality beyond a focus on class, labour, and political economy to include the body, the environment, technology, biological processes, and nonhuman forces.

New Materialism and Ontology

The ontological nature is one of the key features of new materialism. In literary theory, the traditional study has been epistemological, that is, questions aimed at how people know the world. What is the depiction of reality? What is the way language creates meaning? Some attention is redirected to ontology: What kinds of entities exist? in new materialism. How do they communicate with each other? What constitutes agency? What is a body? What is matter?

According to Coole/Frost (2010), new materialist thinking is attempting to challenge the notion of materiality, as in the current state of the world the theories that subject and consciousness predominate are proving to be insufficient. Their account focuses on a posthumanist notion of matter as animate, or agentive.

This ontological change has far reaching implications for literary studies. The literary text is no longer just a linguistic entity, subjectively interpreted by a human subject. Rather, it is a materialing, an assemblage of materials. The book, the paper, the binding, the typography, the ink, the storage, the circulation and the reading of the book all make it. Digital texts are also material since they rely on technological infrastructures. Ontology is then a literary matter. Who are the characters in literary texts? What connection between humans and animals, plants, machines, landscapes and technologies? What if the human was no longer the privileged one in literary interpretation?

Jane Bennett and Vibrant Matter

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Jane Bennett is the one of the most influential current materialists of the new materialism. Her Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things (2010) critiques the dichotomy of "active subject" versus "passive object". Bennett suggests that material objects have some kind of life and can be part of an assemblage that produces effects. Her idea of "vibrant matter" is more significant in literary criticism. Matter is not a thing that is simply used by people to create things. Objects can have an impact on human behavior, create environments, create affects, and be part of a social process.

Think about a literary scene of garbage. One standard reading could focus on the garbage as a sign of social decay or consumer culture. There should also be questions about the material properties of garbage in a Bennettian reading. Attracts animals, causes odors, pollutes soils, impacts human health, and is part of ecological cycles. It has more material agency than symbolic. Thus, in Bennett's theory, the critic is called to go beyond representational interpretation to material relations. The question is not just "What does the object mean?," but also "What does the object do? This change can alter the meaning of literary objects like houses, machines, weapons, clothes, food, books, landscapes and technological devices.

Karen Barad and Agential Realism

Karen Barad is one of the most theoretically complex practitioners of new materialism, who has arrived at such materialism through the notion of agential realism. Based on feminist theory, quantum physics and science studies, Barad (2007) argues that subjects and objects are not pregiven in a relationship, but are instead always becoming. At the heart of her work is the idea of "intra-action. Intra-action implies that things are related and that the entities are born in relation to others, unlike 'inter-action' which implies that entities exist independently and then come together. Agency is thus never just the property of pre-established people, but rather is produced within material-discursive configurations.

This means it has significant implications for literary theory. The character, environment, object and narrative are not always separate entities. Their identification can come in the form of relationships. For instance, a literary depiction of a human body in a polluted environment cannot be grasped by extracting one from the other. The body is formed via interactions with air, water, food, microorganisms, chemicals, and technological systems. Barad's framework enables to see literary bodies as relational phenomena. Language and matter are also thought to be in separate realms, an assumption challenged by agential realism. Using the term "material-discursive" practices, Barad shows how materiality and meaning are intermingled. It is especially useful for literary criticism as it does not put material reality in opposition to the representation in the text.

Rosi Braidotti and the Posthuman Subject

Rosi Braidotti has played an important role in the creation of new materialist posthumanism. In her *Posthuman* (2013) she challenges the traditional humanist subject of contemporary theory. In the past, humanism placed the autonomous, rational, individual human being at the center of knowledge and ethics. Braidotti counters this model with a focus on relationality, embodiment, difference, and interdependence. The posthuman subject can't just be the technological human or the science fiction cyborg. Instead, it is a topic that is created through relationships with other people, animals, technologies, environments and material processes.

Braidotti's work poses a challenge to the notion of protagonists and narrative perspectives in literary studies. Literature does not necessarily have to be understood only through the human mind. Different aspects of multispecies relations, technological embodiment, ecological interdependence, and nonhuman agency can

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be explored in the narratives. There is an ethical aspect to Braidotti's posthumanism too. The decentering of the human is not an ethics-free zone; it is a redrawing of the ethical lines that can view interdependence.

Elizabeth Grosz and the Materiality of Bodies

Elizabeth Grosz has made many contributions to feminist materialism by reconceptualizing the connections between bodies, sexuality, temporality, and materiality. Her work questions "the object body" as a culturally constructed object. Grosz (1994) claims that bodies are both material and socially constructed. They cannot be distilled down to biology nor to culture. This method is especially relevant to the study of literature since the body is never presented in a purely symbolic manner. Humans feel pain, pleasure, get old, sick, become sexually aroused, feel hungry, get pregnant, become tired, and are subjected to the environment.

The new materialist literary reading is thus asking how the bodily materiality of text is represented. In what ways does a novel depict hunger? In what ways does poetry depict breath? What is the image of menstruation, pregnancy, illness, aging, disability or physical labour in literature? These questions take literary criticism "off the page" into the body.

Material Feminisms

The connection between the new materialism and feminism is basic. In fact, feminist theory and feminist science studies are a significant source of the initial development of much of the movement. Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012) highlight the feminist aspects of the new materialist turn, and Alaimo and Hekman (2008) explicitly underscore that materiality is a key issue to feminist thought.

Material feminism is an oppositional stance to the nature/culture dichotomy. In the past, women were linked with nature, the body, reproduction and materiality, and men with culture, reason and transcendence. Feminist theory upset this balance, yet some forms of social constructionism were at risk of being too far in the other direction, seeing the body as being constructed in the main through discourse. New materialist feminism seeks another possibility. The body is material but material is dynamic and socially mediated. Gender is not a fixed biological substance, nor just a linguistic artifact. It offers literary critics ways to examine depictions of pregnancy, childbirth, sexuality, domestic work, reproductive technologies, sickness, disability, and environmental experience.

Stacy Alaimo and Trans-Corporeality

Stacy Alaimo's "trans-corporeality" has taken on a special significance in environmental literary studies. According to Alaimo (2010) in Bodily Natures, bodies are physically related to their environments. Chemicals enter into the body through food, air and water; chemicals are stored in tissues; chemicals react with hormones in the environment. Trans-corporeality is then an assault on the notion of the autonomous body as a sealed and closed system.

It is a very fruitful notion for literary criticism. In the literature of the environment, bodies are often read in relation to toxic spaces, polluted water, industrial pollution, radiation, pesticides and climate change. A trans-corporeal reading is an analysis of the material entanglements of body and environment. Politically, this is also an issue. Damage to the environment is inequitable. People who live in a community near a industrial facility, contaminated waterway, mines, waste facilities, and hazardous workplaces may be more exposed. Material feminist criticism can then relate to environmental justice and embodiment.

Assemblage Theory

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Assemblage is another significant engagement with current materialist theory. According to Deleuze and Guattari (1987) social and material formations are assemblages of heterogeneous elements. There is no central focus in an assemblage. It can consist of human, objects, technology, institutions, biological organisms, space, affects, discourses.

An influential assemblage theory of relations between the heterogeneous parts was developed by Manuel DeLanda (2006). As a form of assemblage, the literary text can be read as a text itself. A novel is a collection of people, books, technologies, historical events, publishing institutions, characters, language and conventions, and readers. These elements cannot be considered individually to explain the literary work. Assemblage theory thus offers an alternative to the reductionist approach to interpretation. The critic does not ask what one structure represents in a text, instead, he charts the relations by which meanings and effects are generated.

Material Agency

Material agency is perhaps the most controversial of all new materialism concepts. Theories on agency are largely related to intentional human subjects. New materialists oppose this anthropocentric model, suggesting that agency can be found in networks of humans and nonhumans. This is not to imply that rocks, rivers, machines or animals have agency in the same way that humans have agency. Instead, agency can be assigned to assemblages.

A river can influence human settlement, devastate infrastructure, carry pollutants, support agriculture, and influence political decisions. A Virus has the potential to change global economies and social practices. Technological instrument has the capacity to change communication patterns and behavioural patterns. Such material forces are recorded in literature on many occasions. These can be made analytically visible as a result of new materialist criticism.

New Materialism and Literary Representation

A traditional literary criticism is often done by looking at the representation in literature. A text is a world and critics read the text and interpret its construction of meaning. The new materialism is not against representation, but against simple representation. The literary text itself is material. It takes bodies, technologies, institutions, economic resources and environmental materials to produce. It's similarly received through embodied readers and material spaces.

Literature is not just a depiction of the material reality from outside it. Literature is involved in material networks. For instance, a novel printed requires paper from trees, industrial processing, transportation, printing technologies, labor, energy and markets. Servers, electricity, rare-earth minerals, software and computational infrastructure all are needed for a digital novel. Literary interpretation can thus be extended from a text representation to a production of material.

Material Ecocriticism

Material ecocriticism is one of the most fruitful offshoots of the new turn in materialism. Iovino and Oppermann (2012) define material ecocriticism as "a new mode of critique that integrates materiality, agency, text, and narration. Unlike previous ecocriticism, material ecocriticism neither confines nature to the role of a setting or object of representation. Rather, it sees environments as agents in the process of story.

This was later elaborated on by Iovino and Oppermann (2014) as "storied matter. Matter itself can become a part of stories. Remnants of industrialisation, migration, war, extraction, pollution and ecological

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change are noted in landscapes. From this viewpoint, it is clear that environmental literature has a profound impact. River pollution is not just a visual metaphor for environmental degradation. It is a repository of industrial practices, political choice, chemical reactions, and human and nonhuman effects. Material ecocriticism can thus turn literary critics into "environmental readers" who can read environmental processes materially and narratively entangled.

New Materialism, Anthropocene.

New materialist literary theory is increasingly relevant in the Anthropocene. The idea encompasses the general notion that human activities are a significant geologic force that is altering planetary systems. The Anthropocene is an interesting conceptual issue regardless of whether it is recognized as a new geological era or not. The image of humans as separate from geological, atmospheric, ecological, and technological processes is no longer so easy to imagine.

Climate change has radically altered historians and humanists' approaches to the interplay between human history and geological time, as has been beautifully articulated by Chakrabarty (2009). Ecological crisis obscures traditional historiographical accounts that focus on humankind. The challenge can be answered with a theoretical framework of new materialism. It highlights the relationality and the entanglement of human bodies with planetary processes.

The importance of literature as a place to examine these temporal and ontological complexities. Climate fiction, environmental poetry, speculative fiction, dystopian fiction, and Indigenous literature are now expanding their focus on the interactions of human societies, the environment, and earth futures, and technologies.

New Materialism and Animal Studies

Animal studies have also been affected by new materialism, as it has drawn attention to anthropocentric assumptions. But when matter is active and agency is distributed, animals can't be treated like objects of human representation. Haraway's contribution to this is so important. The relationality of humans to other species is highlighted in When Species Meet (2008). Multiple species relationships are the source of human identity.

Criticism of literature informed by this point of view can consider the animal figures not only as vehicles of human attributes but also as agents operating in the material and relational worlds. This strategy can revolutionise the reading of literary animals. The physicality, the senses, the helplessness, the work, and the relationship between a canine and the human narrators in a novel can all be a factor influencing the story. This brings about a multispecies centric literary criticism.

Comparative Literature: New Materialism and Postcolonial Literary Studies

New materialism and postcolonial theory are a fruitful and a problematic mix. Traditional postcolonial studies of literature has focused on discourse, representation, colonial knowledge, identity and power. New materialism introduces questions regarding extraction, infrastructure, land, bodies, resources and environmental transformation. Colonialism was not just a discursive endeavor. It was about the material appropriation of land, the exploitation of human resources, the alteration of ecosystems, the transfer of flora and fauna and the reorganisation of agricultural production systems.

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From this perspective, it is possible to analyze colonial power in terms of material changes.This is why colonial power can be studied from a materialist post-colonial criticism. The postcolonial ecocriticism of the present day is a particularly fruitful intersection. For instance, Huggan and Tiffin (2015) show the ways in which colonial histories are linked to environmental exploitation. This view also offers a welcome counterpoint to universalist views on the Anthropocene. It might seem like to give humans as much responsibility for the ecological crisis as colonialism, capitalism and industrialization have given themselves.

New Materialism and Digital Culture

Digital culture is yet another space where new materialist criticism can be applied. The intangibility of digital information can make it difficult to recognize the physical systems that support digital technologies. Digital literature demands devices, servers, electricity, cables, data centers, minerals, software, and human manpower. Extensive material infrastructures are also essential to social media.

New materialism thus gives way to a conventional opposition between virtual and material. Digital culture is in the material. Literary studies implications because of the perspective are that reading today is happening more often on screens or platforms. The physicality of reading alters the reading and flow of literature. The AI produced texts, literary blogs, social media poetry, e-books, and online literature journals are material technological systems.

The era of new materialism and artificial intelligence has arrived.

Perhaps one of the most interesting new materialist literary theory applications for artificial intelligence is the one that has been proposed. The advent of generative AI systems calls into question the meaning of agency, of language, of material, and of the human authorship of the work. A new materialist view of the world would see an AI poem as not being made by a single machine. It is a product of a collection of algorithms, a training set, the programmer, the hardware, the electricity, the server, linguistic resources, the user and institutional structures. The issue of the authorship then becomes relational.

The literary artefact is not only the manifestation of an independent human consciousness. It turns into an effect of a complex material-technological assemblage. This can also shed light on the environmental impact of AI. Large computational systems need significant cooling equipment, data centers, hardware and energy. Then the production of language is materially intensive, so seemingly immaterial. AI can therefore be discussed in new materialist literary criticism as a topic of representation as well as a material infrastructure for contemporary cultural production.

New Materialism and Affect

This area of affect theory has evolved in tandem with new materialist perspectives, and both are interested in processes that are embodied and are beyond conscious representation. For instance, affect, as studied by Massumi (2002), is not just an emotion it is an intensity and a power of body. This is an important point for literary criticism. A text can preemptively impact readers physically and emotionally without the meanings being consciously expressed.

A new materialist perspective might therefore be interested in rhythm, sound, typography, sensory description, atmosphere, spatial organisation, and bodily reactions. Poems are particularly fruitful texts for this kind of analysis. Material processes of metre, rhythm, repetition, sound, visual arrangement and physical

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performance can be interpreted as being more than just carriers of semantic meaning. The new materialism and literary form.

Backed by the political implications of new materialism.Supported by the political implications of new materialism. New materialism is not only an ontological theory. It is a political issue. When humans are materially connected to environments, animals, technologies, and other bodies, then so is political responsibility. The body is politicized in environmental politics. Pollution, food, water, energy, reproduction, disability, health and climate are questions that are taken up as material questions.

It is this political aspect that Coole and Frost (2010) highlight in their discussion of new materialist thinking related to current biopolitics, political economy, technoscience and environmental contexts. But new materialism is presented with a tough political dilemma: how is it possible to assign responsibility when agency is spread across human and nonhuman assemblages? A corporation, a government, a machine, a river and a person can all be material agents of an event, but not moral or political. This has been a topic of discussion that has led to valuable debate. Here are some of the more serious objections to and problems with New Materialism.

Theoretically, new materialism has garnered significant criticism.

The first critique is for novelty. There is a debate as to whether new materialism is truly new. Its leading ideas can be identified as going back to Spinoza, Marx, Nietzsche, Bergson, feminist materialism, and others. Its originality may thus be overstated by saying that it is "new.

The second criticism is political. It has been suggested that a focus on matter and ontology may sometimes offer weaker attention to ideology, discourse, capitalism, class, racism, colonialism and to institutional power. When all things have agency the particularity of political domination can be hard to establish.

The third criticism relates to anthropomorphic language. Using words such as "vibrant" or "agentic" for an object may lead to anthropomorphising the object.

The fourth critique is the responsibility of humans. Climate change, colonialism, and environmental destruction are not just the result of unmarked materializations. They are institutions that can be identified as political and economic institutions.

In the fifth criticism, the language/maturity issue is addressed. It has been suggested that the response of new materialism to the linguistic turn may downplay the significance of discourse, representation, ideology, and symbolic power. The points of criticism are important, but not fatal to new materialism. Rather, they show the need to create a balanced materialist criticism that affords the recognition of material agency and discursive power.

New Materialism and Marxism.

It is important to note that both materialism and Marxism focus on material conditions but have different conceptions of materiality, a point that bears special consideration in the context of new materialism and Marxism. The traditional subject matter of Marxist literary theory is that of the labor, the production, the class, the commodity, and the capitalist social relationships. In new materialism, materiality is extended to bodies, animals, technologies, ecological systems and nonhuman processes.

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There is thus scope for discussion. Today's capitalism is sustained by material infrastructures, such as factories, supply chains, energy systems, data centres, logistics networks and ecological resources. A combination of the Marxist and new materialist theories would yield a strong description of the present system of capitalism. Such a theory would preserve those features of Marxism that focus on nonhuman agency and ecological interdependence while also preserving the analysis of exploitation and class that is central to Marxism. This synthesis is relevant to the issue of an environmental crisis. Capitalist accumulation relies on material extraction, and ecological systems react in ways that can disrupt economic systems.

New Materialism & Feminist Literary Theory

One of the most fruitful intersections of new materialism and feminism is the attempt to merge the two. The merging of new materialism and feminism is perhaps one of the most productive intersections in the field. Traditional feminist literary criticism revealed the patriarchal representation and structures in literature. Material feminism continues on this line of inquiry by exploring bodies, reproductive systems, labor, technology, medicine, and environments.

One feminist new materialist interpretation of the literary text may thus ask:

How do women's bodies get materially regulated?

What is the impact of reproductive labour on the narrative?

In what ways do technologies alter the gendered embodiment?

What are the gender and class specific patterns of environmental harms?

How do bodies become political and material struggles?

The questions illustrate that new materialism is not incompatible with the traditional feminist issues. Instead, it can provide new ways of conceptualizing them. The development of New Materialist Reading as a Literary Method.Establishment of New Materialist Reading as a Literary Method. There are several questions that can be posed in organizing a practical new materialist literary reading. The critic will first discover which material entities are in the text: bodies, animals, objects, environments, technologies, foods, water, architecture, machines, infrastructures.

Second, the critic can study the interrelationships of these entities, instead of considering them separately. Third, the critic can explore agency: what is changed by a given material object? Fourth, There is a possibility to analyze embodiment by the critic. How does the world work for the characters in their bodies? Fifthly, the critic has the freedom to explore environmental and technological relations. The critic can examine the relationship between materiality and language and representation in its sixth sense. Last, the critic may ask themselves what the political and ethical implications of the material configurations of the text are. This kind of criticism changes literary criticism from finding symbolized meanings to a study of dynamic relations.

Contemporary Directions

The advancement of new materialism is still in quick pace. One of the key areas is material ecocriticism, which has focused on the material agency, the environmental process and narrative in the study of literature. Iovino and Oppermann's work has played a special role in the development of this interdisciplinary field.

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The other direction is post anthropocentric literary studies. The recent scholarship explicitly brings new materialism and object oriented approaches into the field of literary criticism for a rethinking of relations between human and nonhuman entities. For instance, Moslund et al. discuss the way in which material and post-anthropocentric theory open literature toward feminist, queer, postcolonial, and Anthropocene approaches. The third is the research of material infrastructures. Transportation, energy, data centres, publishing technologies, supply chains and other infrastructures that enable cultural production are subject of growing literary scholars' interest.

The fourth direction is the study of digital literature and AI from a material point of view. The 5th direction is planetary crisis. Materialist approaches are more and more relevant in the context of climate change and ecological instability as it shows that the human and nonhuman systems are interdependent.

The new materialism approach to literary studies is still being used in recent years and debate continues on the political implications of this approach. As in the case of recent research on nineteenth-century American literature, which names a new materialism as one of a number of literature's political commitments to materialism, including posthumanism, ecocriticism, speculative realism, and affect theory, there is a need to problematize the ways in which the focus on materiality can contain, or may be used to further, political and ethical commitments. (Hurh,

Conclusion

New Materialism is one of the most important trends in the theory of literature in the twenty-first century. It is a way of thinking that emerged around the turn of the millennium, out of the synthesis of feminist theory and philosophy, science studies, environmental humanities and posthumanist thinking, which sought to overcome the limitations of the theories that centred language, discourse, and human subjectivity in the interpretation process. The most significant thing that it added was its redefinition of matter. Matter is not passive, inert or available for human representation and manipulation. Dynamic, relational, embodied, processual and event-productive. This proposition has far-reaching implications for literary studies.

The work of Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Stacy Alaimo, Manuel DeLanda, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, and others has provided a vocabulary for thinking through the material aspects of literary and cultural production.The work of Jane Bennett, Karen Barad, Rosi Braidotti, Elizabeth Grosz, Stacy Alaimo, Manuel DeLanda, Diana Coole, Samantha Frost, and others has provided a vocabulary for thinking through the material aspects of literary and cultural production. These ideas provide the means for critics to read texts as places of human–nonhuman entanglements, such as vibrant matter, intra-action, assemblage, becoming, trans-corporeality, posthumanism, and material agency.

New materialism has also begun fruitful dialogues with ecocriticism, feminism, postcolonial, animal, affect theory, Marxism, and digital humanities. It is especially apparent in material ecocriticism, which explores the materiality, agency, narrative and ecological processes. This is even more relevant in the Anthropocene. Whether it's climate change, pollution, the loss of biodiversity, pandemics, biotechnology, digital infrastructures, or artificial intelligence, the picture of people largely detached from material networks reveals their failure. Simultaneously, new materialism needs to be aware of its shortcomings. Material agency cannot be mistaken for human agency; ontological relationality cannot take the place of political analysis; nor can the focus on material lead to the loss of language, discourse, ideology, class, race, gender or colonial power. Dialogue will then be the most fruitful future of new materialist literary theory, not theory isolated.

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Finally, new materialism alters the starting point of the question of literary criticism. Literature is not just a representation created by human subjects for human readers but an event in a complex event of bodies, objects, technologies, environments, institutions and discourses. Literature is not just a description of material world. It is an object of the world that it reflects.

This perception is more potent in an era of ecological crisis and technological change. As humans are increasingly not the major force in a world, so literary theory has to find ways to respond to this new world. One of the most ambitious projects in the development of such a method is new materialism. So its lasting legacy isn't just that it brought matter back into the subject of literary criticism, but also that it made some of the distinctions made by critics between humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects, culture and nature, language and materiality, literature and the world seem questionable. References

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