

International Workshop Invitation: How Matter Comes into Literature & How Literature Comes into Matter: New Materialist Methodologies for Literary Studies

International Workshop, Tübingen, 18th-20th October 2018
English Department, Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen
Organisers: Katharina Luther & Mascha Wieland

Keynote Speaker: Dr. Marlene Marcussen, SDU, Denmark

Valedictory Speaker: Prof. Dr. Catherine Keller, Drew University, USA

The full moon floated up into green light; and as the rose and violet hues spread over snow and sky, the colour seemed to live its own life, to have body and resilience, as though we were not looking at it, but were inside its substance.

(Nan Shepherd, *The Living Mountain* 30)

Light, usually perceived as immaterial, becomes substantial during Nan Shepherd's experience on the mountain plateau of the Cairngorms, Scotland. In Shepherd's prose piece *The Living Mountain* (1977), the colour of light becomes "vibrant matter" (Bennett 2010) and presses upon Shepherd with its "body and resilience". Such a material experience, in which the perceiver is an integrated and entangled component within his/her environment – described by Shepherd as being "inside its substance" – is only recently discussed by New Materialist theory. Impelled by visions of a materially integrated world, intellectuals from both the sciences and the arts have developed interdisciplinary theories and experimental pieces of art which critically explore our material connections further – most notably Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* (2016) or Transolar and Tetsuo Kondo's *Cloudscapes* at the ZKM in Karlsruhe (2015).

In this workshop, we would like to further investigate the relationship between the literary arts and material processes and phenomena *out there* by engaging with texts of a new materialist intervention. We generally believe that such a refocusing on matter is required to face the challenges of our contemporary world. Current developments, such as the destruction of 'nature' (environments, species, habitats) or a dematerialization through digitalisation, demand new ways of thinking (Beer 2017, Latour 2017). A new materialist view of the world could serve as an instrument to detect challenges and point out solutions of how to deal with current worldwide changes. These challenges and their discourses tend to further establish dichotomies e.g. nature/culture, human/nonhuman etc. Here, especially new materialist literature can

provide us with speculations of a shared world we have to live in (Haraway 2016, Tsing 2015). The task for this workshop will be to develop specific methodologies, which are informed and suggested by literary texts, and to prepare literary scholars with much needed tools for reading literature and matter together. In conversation with New Materialist theories, the aim of this workshop is to explore how matter comes into literature – and finds its way out again.

Thereby, this workshop wants to bring literature back to the forefront of the current interdisciplinary debate surrounding matter. Literature, as a privileged site of engaging with matter (Hotz-Davies 2016), has so far remained relatively unexplored in terms of its direct agential relationship with materiality. As a starting point, we would thus like to explore the onto-epistemological question of how matter finds its way into literature, and out again. To find answers to this question, we would like to further develop a toolbox entailing new materialist thematic units, namely (1) “naturecultures” (Haraway 2003), (2) textures (Reinfandt 2016), (3) phenomena (Barad 2007, 2008; Merleau-Ponty (2014)), and (4) matter (Barad 2007, Bennett 2004). The question of how literature is entangled with matter is vital since literature offers specific and local materially-semantic experiences that translate into a relationship between an actual thing outside the text, in the text, and while reading. All of these three transversal levels feed into a new materialist experience of literature and matter. This point is important since literature offers a specific local pathway into a concrete experience of the entanglement of space, time, and matter that theory does not provide. Returning to literature, Annie Dillard’s lyric essay *Total Eclipse* (1982) offers us such a specific local pathway into experiencing a total eclipse in the Yakima Valley, Central Washington, on February 26, 1979: “There was no world. We were the world’s dead people rotating and orbiting around and around, embedded in the planet’s crust, while the earth rolled down” (18). But, how can literature connect readers to such a material experience despite the differences in space, time and matter? Each thematic unit ((1) “naturecultures” (Haraway 2003), (2) textures, (3) phenomena, and (4) matter) will offer different answers and methods for overcoming these dichotomies of here/there, past/future, matter/semantics.

Based on the workshop sessions we aim to develop methodological tools which can guide literary scholars through the reading of new materialist literary texts. We suggest as a start the following guiding questions within each cluster:

1. Naturecultures
 - a. How are differences and boundaries established in naturecultures and how do they work?
 - b. How can we further specify naturecultures as a monist concept through motifs/themes/strategies/techniques from literary sources?
2. Textures
 - a. How can we read intra- and extratextual textures materially?

- b. How does literary texture inform a sensory experience of matter and vice versa?
- 3. Phenomena
 - a. How can we specify an entangled experience of matter and text? How is everything connected to something?
 - b. How can a phenomenological approach inform the concept of “phenomenon” as developed by Karen Barad?
- 4. Matter
 - a. How does matter come into literature?
 - b. How does literature come into matter?

The workshop aims at bringing together PhD students and scholars who are interested in and/or work on the interface between literary studies and the New Materialism. We want to intensely discuss and work on key issues of the workshop topics guided by close readings of literary texts. A reader will be made available beforehand.

To register, please send an email – including some information on your research – by 31st of August 2018 to workshop.literature.matters@gmail.com.

Poster Presentations and Travel Stipend

PhD students are encouraged to present a poster to communicate their research interests related to the New Materialism. If you are interested in the poster presentation, please apply for this session until the 31st of August 2018 (email: workshop.literature.matters@gmail.com). Poster presenters can also apply for a travel stipend that covers accommodation for the whole duration of the workshop (3 nights). In order to apply for this stipend, shortly outline your educational status & research and describe your material needs and merits. We will be awarding 10 travel stipends. Recipients will be notified by the 10th of September 2018.