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## Communication and Feminist New Materialism:

Methodologies to understand the continuum between matter and discourse

**Abstract:** The relationship between literature and social networking sites (SNS) is a material context in which authors and readers merge into each other to create a literary communicative process that transforms contemporary politics. The aim of this paper is to analyse the communicative process by investigating the continuum between matter and discourse from a new materialist approach. From social sites, we can understand how elements, such as readers, authors, context, novels, culture and digital platforms, “intra-act” (Barad 2007) to create an affecting/ed communicative process. We propose feminist new materialism as a theoretical terrain that helps to reconfigure politics and communication in order to build a methodological framework for contemporary feminist politics and theory related to Literature. Using a digital genealogy and the theory of new materialism, we identify communication in literature as a trapping force in which different elements intra-act with each other and become indivisible. Affecting/ed communication is a dynamic conceptualization, a literary activity in which active agents participate in creative spaces for future social changes.

**Keywords:** Novel, co-creation, facebook, Feminist New Materialism, communication.

### Kommunikation und Feminist New Materialism: Methodologien zum Verständnis des Kontinuums zwischen Materie und Diskurs

**Zusammenfassung:** Literatur generiert im Kontext Sozialer Netzwerke einen literarisch-kommunikativen Prozess, in dem Autor\*innen und Leser\*innen ununterscheidbar werden, sich verbinden – einen Prozess mit politisch transformativer Kraft. Ziel dieses Aufsatzes ist es, diesen kommunikativen Vorgang zu analysieren, indem das Kontinuum zwischen Materie und Diskurs aus der Perspektive des New Materialism betrachtet wird. Aus der Betrachtung Sozialer Netzwerke können wir verstehen, wie verschiedene Elemente, z.B. Leser\*innen, Autor\*innen, Kontext, Romane, Kultur und digitale Plattformen „intra-agieren“ (Barad 2007) und dabei einen affektiven (affecting/ed) kommunikativen Prozess hervorbringen. Wir schlagen vor, die theoretische Grundlage des feministischen New Materialism als Hilfsmittel zur Neukonfigurierung von Politiken und Kommunikation zu nutzen, um zeitgenössischer feministischer Theorie und Politiken in Bezug auf Literatur ein methodologisches Gerüst zu geben. Indem wir uns digitaler Genealogien und der Theorie des New Materialism bedienen, identifizieren wir Kommunikationsprozesse in der Literatur als eine fesselnde Kraft, durch die verschiedene Elemente miteinander in Beziehung gesetzt und untrennbar verbunden werden. Affektive (affecting/ed) Kommunikation ist eine dynamische Konzeptualisierung, eine literarische Aktivität, bei der aktive Akteur\*innen in kreativen Räumen an sozialen Veränderungen teilhaben.

**Schlagwörter:** Roman, Co-Gestaltung, facebook, Feminist New Materialism, Kommunikation.

More than thirty years ago, Adrienne Rich (1986: 217) warned feminist theorists of one of the most important premises for the kind of research that we do: “if [theory] doesn’t smell of the earth, it is not good for the earth”. Currently, the political of New Materialism has been under intense scrutiny for being considered at times vague, at times nostalgic (Hemmings 2011). Nevertheless, considering that theory and practice should always be two sides of the same coin it looks like not enough critical, or rather empirical research following the approach of the Feminist New Materialism might be more suitable than former research approaches for achieving this objective. Feminist New Materialisms are an ethic-onto-epistemological trend of knowledge that attempts to intervene in different socio-cultural structures, that highlights unequal distributions of power through a monist approach, and that escapes from dualistic approximations to knowledge creation and circulation (van der Tuin 2015; Rogowska-Stangret 2017; Colman 2010).

When we think about contemporary society and current constructions of subjectivities, the area of social networking sites (SNS) comes to the forefront almost inescapably. SNS have become part of our daily basis to share and find specific information (be it personal preferences or professional interests). On these spaces/relations in the SNS, Feminist New Materialism is a matter of politics, a matter of location because of that looking for “genealogies of surprising futures” (van der Tuin 2015: 59) through an ‘agential realism’ (Barad 2007).

Thinking through the theoretical framework of agential realism in this context means a referential change in the object of study, a difference in the ontological configuration of the subjects to activate “a politics of the process” (Grosz 2005), instead of a politics of the results. This means that this analysis will focus on the relations between the different subjects through affinities and through the same affective forces that generate the processual ontology of communication, will obtain a series of differential patterns that produce differences in their relations. The application of new materialist politics situates empowering patterns outside of the relation between research and researcher while intra-acting with this relation. SNS are increasingly studied as digital interventions in society and culture at large. Therefore, taking into account that structures of power are changing towards a representational neo-liberal context (as it has always been), but renewing their mechanisms, and in trying to look for the political in New Materialism through constructions of subjectivities.

In this article, we propose Feminist New Materialism as a theoretical terrain that helps to reconfigure politics and communication in order to build a methodological toolbox for contemporary feminist politics and theory related to Literature. To situate the theory construction and materialization of politics (Haraway 1991), we chose Toni Morrison. She was the first black woman to obtain a nobel prize for “Beloved” while, at the same time, two of her books (precisely “Beloved” and “The Bluest Eye”) can be found in the top ten list of banned books at North American public institutions in the last ten years. We address the relationship between Literature and SNS as a real context in which authors and readers merge with each other to create a literary communicative process (Revelles-Benavente 2014) that transforms contemporary politics.<sup>1</sup> A literary