Anticipatory Materialisms in Literature and Philosophy, 1790–1930

Edited by
Jo Carruthers · Nour Dakkak · Rebecca Spence

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"*Anticipatory Materialisms* is a judicious collection of essays, and an important intervention in a rapidly developing field. The volume does not seek to debunk new materialist approaches, but it does raise an occasionally skeptical eyebrow at the claims to "newness" that have driven so much of the excitement around the term. The collection identifies an important gap in the available histories of the term, which tend to leap from selected early modern thinkers to the posthuman turn. Situating itself in the long nineteenth century, and covering a wealth of topics from walking to feeling, from sound to soil, *Anticipatory Materialisms* restores a fundamentally literary and interpretive dimension to our understanding of materiality. Here the nineteenth century emerges as the period that *thought* the relationships of matter, force, and agency with great subtlety. "New materialism" has become something of a buzzword in the theoretical humanities, and this volume is an important tool for helping us to see through the hype to its necessarily historical and material substance."

—Colin Jager, *Professor of English and Director of the Center for Cultural Analysis, Rutgers University, USA*

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Foreword

From Epicurus to the Enlightenment, Spinoza to neuroscience, the concept of materialism has a venerable history. If it informs the thought of the greatest English political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes, it also permeates the work of the finest British moral philosopher, David Hume. In the shape of Utilitarianism, blended from time to time with a dash of Comtean Positivism, it provided an increasingly secular nineteenth century with a robustly anti-metaphysical brand of ethics and politics. A quite different current of materialism sprang up in Continental Europe in the 1840s, and one century later was to become the official creed of a third of the population on the planet.

From Balzac to Arnold Bennett, this style of thought was not without its literary implications. There are some evident affinities between philosophical materialism and literary realism, and by the time we arrive at *fin-de-siècle* Naturalism, we have what purports to be full-blooded scientific poetics. With science increasingly in the ascendency, literary art had the choice of either beating or joining it. If Tennyson and the Pre-Raphaelites took the former path, George Eliot and Émile Zola opted for the latter. All the same, the relation between culture and materialism remained an uneasy one. Rather as scientists tend to be spontaneous materialists, so literary types tend to be spontaneous idealists, since if you spend your time dealing with meanings and values, it is easy to assume that these things conduct a life of their own at an aloof distance from their material surroundings. On this view, the source of ideas is to be found not in practical forms of life but in previous ideas. Culture in middle-class society thus comes to develop an Oedipal relation to its progenitor (material labour), disdaining

its lowly parentage, severing the bond between them and indulging in the fantasy that it sprang fully formed from its own loins.

To this extent, art and philosophical idealism would seem to make more obvious bedfellows than art and materialism. That idealist current of thought enters English literature with Coleridge and passes as a rich aesthetic heritage to Arnold, Ruskin, Morris, Pater, Wilde and others. Meanwhile, on mainland Europe, a less literary version of it runs from Schiller to Heidegger—one in which the very notion of culture, as the unique spirit of a People, begins to assume increasingly sinister political overtones. By the twentieth century, literary criticism in the Anglophone world has come to manifest an idealist or quasi-religious resistance to existing material reality, now conceived of as an unholy *mélange* of industrialism, technology, secularism, democracy, utility, suburbanism, possessive individualism and the mindless acquisition of commodities. In the United States, a covertly theological rejection of this civilisation can be found in the New Criticism, while in Britain the chief proponents of such a critique are T. S. Eliot and F. R. Leavis. Both men are metaphysicians: the one an Anglo-Catholic, the other an exponent of Lawrentian vitalism.

One might note, however, that the stable from which Leavis and his acolytes emerged (the Cambridge English School) also produced a critic with a claim to be the first materialist practitioner of the trade in modern England: I. A. Richards. His equally materialistically minded student, William Empson, presented the world with one of the most stunning critical classics of all time, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, at the age of 24. Four decades later, Cambridge was to witness the arrival of Raymond Williams, whose *Culture and Society 1780–1950* fought the cultural idealists on their own patch. Williams, along with some fellow members of the 1950s New Left, was convinced that culture was too vital a concept to be surrendered to the aesthetes and Elioticians, and nowhere was its presence becoming more obtrusive than in the media. Culture was no longer simply a realm of spiritual values but a set of material institutions—a capitalist industry in which it was possible to observe at close quarters the relations between qualities of experience and forms of ownership.

Sometime later, Williams was to extend this inquiry into what he called cultural materialism, which looked not simply at the finished literary product but at the material modes by which it was produced, disseminated and received. As one who moved from a Welsh village to an English university town, he was also interested in the materiality of the place and the natural environment. It is to this aspect of this thought that one of his most

pioneering works, *The Country and the City*, bears witness. Yet cultural materialism was only one vein of materialist thought in the 1970s, given the tidal wave of cultural theory which broke over the Western world in those years. For the first time since the 1930s, there was also a suggestive, sophisticated body of criticism from the historical materialist camp. In the wake of student militancy, the US civil rights movement, a series of staggering rebuffs for Western colonialism and a sharpening of the class struggle in the age of Reagan and Thatcher, Marxist criticism was back on the agenda.

Closely allied to it was a brand of feminist materialism, which raised questions not only of identity but of the relations between class and gender, the genealogy of the family, the history of patriarchy and the nature of domestic labour. What one might call a semantic materialism also burst upon the scene, as post-structuralists took to insisting on the materiality of the signifier. Rather as Marxism regards the most magnificent works of art as having their foundation in toil, so it was possible to see the most noble or momentous of concepts or signifieds as dependent on a set of arbitrary marks on a sheet of paper. Julia Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, as the inscription within the language of bodily or unconscious impulses, represented on the aspect of the materialist turn in linguistics. Indeed, this was the era in which the body came triumphantly into its own, both in feminist theory and in the later work of Michel Foucault. What one might call a somatic materialism moved increasingly to the fore, determined to disprove Nietzsche's declaration that it was the body above all which defeated the philosophers. With the rediscovery of the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, the riotous, libidinal, carnivalesque body added a new dimension to what one might call a corporeal criticism. There was also a revival of psychoanalytic criticism, not least with the school of Jacques Lacan, which in classical Freudian style saw the roots of subjectivity as lying in the transactions between the infant's body and the adult bodies around it.

Not much of this was to survive postmodernism. Some of these narratives proved too grand for its taste and some of its theorising too demanding. In a late capitalist world in which what mattered was fluid, pliable, mutable, diffuse and adaptable, the blind recalcitrance of the material—the way it thwarts our desires and resists our designs upon it—was not quite what the dominant ideology wanted to hear. For a period in which everything from waterfalls to pancreatic cancer is culturally constructed, the sheer givenness of matter becomes mildly scandalous, and as far as the body goes must be flouted at all costs by tattooing yourself from head to

toe. Matter must be clay in one's hands, to be pummelled and remoulded to suit your desire; this is true whether one is speaking of the constant self-reinventions of celebrities or the neo-conservative project to re-create the world in the image of Western capitalist democracy.

One of the limits of the so-called new materialism is that it tends to take the pain out of matter, knocking the stuffing out of it by converting it into a vital, protean, mercurial, free-floating force. It is materialism for the post-modern age. The materialist philosophy of a Condorcet or Diderot involved taking a stance on the deceiving, exploiting and subjugating of human beings, which is also of course true of Marx. It is hard to see any equivalent politics stemming from the new materialism. It is neither the kind of materialist thought which transformed a large sector of the world in the twentieth century, nor one which is easily at home with the more demonic face of the matter—the brute, meaningless, potentially lethal side of Nature and humanity, a vision which Frederick Engels, for one, would most certainly have approved. Yet unless humanity exercises a certain command over Nature, whole nations are likely to sink beneath the waves. It is easier to denounce dominion over Nature in Bloomsbury than it is in Bangladesh.

Materialism has confronted a number of different adversaries. In the Enlightenment, it seized intellectual sovereignty and turned its formidable weapons against both prince and prelate. Marx mounted an assault on the more mystificatory aspects of German idealism, while the scientific rationalists did battle with the conservative traditionalists. The new materialism of our own days is in revolt against the culturalists and constructivists for whom all referring to Nature is insidiously "naturalising". But very little under the sun is new, not least the new materialism, which has more than an echo of the *Naturphilosophie* of Schelling; this absorbing collection of chapters returns over the head of that current to those authors in the nineteenth century who knew much of this already. In doing so, it demonstrates the remarkable versatility of the concept of materialism, which can encompass tourism, the interaction of subjects and landscapes, the mind-body relation, the materiality of textual production, the materiality of listening and a good deal more. Running through this volume is a common conviction—the belief that whatever else we are, we are sensory lumps of matter and that any more sexy or glamorous projects we may pull off are authentic only if they hold this truth steadily in mind.

Lancaster, UK Terry Eagleton

Acknowledgements

The ideas that have shaped this collection started as a conversation between the editors. We recognised an alignment in our research that focused on a critical attentiveness to materiality in literature that had many resonances with new materialism and related theories. This conversation developed into a symposium, *Anticipatory Materialisms*, which was held in Lancaster, UK, in March 2017. The event fostered a fertile interdisciplinary environment for tracing the various and exciting iterations of materiality in literature and philosophy prior to the material "turn", as well as forming the basis for this collection of chapters. We express a deep gratitude to all those who spoke, attended and supported the symposium, particularly Nicola Bishop, Mark Knight, Andrew Mitchell and Frank Pearson, and to Lancaster University Graduate College for providing the financial support that allowed us to hold the event.

We are incredibly grateful for the intellectual generosity, support and time of our colleagues in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Lancaster University. In particular, we would like to thank Philip Dickinson, Roger Ebbatson, Kamilla Elliott, Joel Evans, Michael Greaney, Keith Hanley, Mark Knight, Liz Oakley-Brown, Sharon Ruston, John Schad, Catherine Spooner and Andrew Tate. We also express our thanks to the anonymous reviewers who offered such thoughtful and valuable responses to earlier versions of the chapters. Our gratitude goes to the editorial team at Palgrave Macmillan, especially Millie Davies, Ben Doyle and Shaun Vigil, for their affability, responsiveness and patience.

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Finally, we would like to express a debt of thanks to our respective families and friends who have offered so much support and encouragement.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Jo Carruthers, Nour Dakkak, and Rebecca Spence

This collection of chapters—as its title suggests—attends to literature and philosophy from the long nineteenth century that engages with the material world in a way that anticipates or pre-empts the kinds of debates now being offered under the umbrella term of "new materialism". *Anticipatory Materialisms* aims to draw attention to the lively debates about the agency and force of matter taking place within the literature of the Romantic, Victorian and Modern periods that are under threat of being overlooked or overwritten by the claim of newness inherent within the recent turn to materiality. Our title is intended to signal both an engagement with new materialism and a statement of resistance to its claim—explicit or implicit—to innovation.

Talk of a "material turn" has been increasingly prevalent across the arts and humanities over the past two decades. Discussions have revolved around an apparently new steer in philosophical and critical writings, away from a Cartesian relegation of the physical world and towards an increased

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attentiveness to the material world as semi-autonomous, self-governing and self-organising. This "new materialism" (purposefully) evades finite definition. Indicated in our own choice to pluralise the term in the title of this volume, it includes a range of schools, movements and disciplines, and is associated with a range of figures including Jane Bennett, Gilles Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz (2004), Tim Ingold, Karen Barad and Bruno Latour. The label loosely points to recent approaches that pay close attention to the physical processes and interactions between nature, corporeality and the material world. Its stimulus lies in re-evaluating human-world relationships by highlighting the role of the nonhuman in reaction to what has been seen as an oversight in structuralism's and poststructuralism's attention to linguistic and semiotic meaning. While deconstruction's often misrepresented mantra, "*il n'y a pas de hors-texte*" (there is no outside-text), was often taken as an assertion of there being no extra-linguistic reality, so a crude summation of new materialism's position reveals the other side of the coin: there is nothing—not even sentience—without matter.

We do not attempt in this introduction to offer an exhaustive, or even thorough, overview of new materialist philosophies and writings, excellent versions of which can be found elsewhere (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2000; Ellenzweig and Zammito 2017; for critiques see Eagleton (2017) and briefly Žižek (2014, 15)). Instead we offer here an outline that aligns with the purposes of this collection: to trace the strand of new materialist thought that this volume seeks to redress, to unearth "monist thought" or attention to material agency in philosophical and literary writings that predate the so-called material turn, and to highlight their prevalence in the long nineteenth century.

What is striking about new materialism's choice of nomenclature is its obvious self-declaration of novelty. The claim is iterated in scholarly work that makes explicit attempts to specify, and in turn justify, the "newness" of the field. Part of the declaration of newness is a conscious distancing of this "new" attention to matter from the "old" historical materialism of Marxist theory that has been so dominant in English literary studies for decades and especially so since the latter half of the twentieth century. But beyond the distinction to materialism proper, there is a self-conscious claim to exception within many new materialist philosophers and critics. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost write in their collection, *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*, that "we nevertheless persist in our call for and observation of a new materialism, […] because we are aware that unprecedented things are currently being done with and to matter, nature, life, production, and

reproduction" (2010, 4). Yet Coole and Frost simultaneously acknowledge that many of these contributions "draw inspiration from materialist traditions developed prior to modernity or from philosophies that have until recently remained neglected or marginalized currents within modern thinking" (2010, 4). Rick Dolphijn and Iris van der Tuin nuance the relation between the new and old in their edited collection, *New Materialism: Interviews and Cartographies*, writing: "It is in the resonances between old and new readings and re-readings that a 'new metaphysics' might announce itself" (2012, 13). While the editors foreground that a "new metaphysics is not restricted to a here and now", the scope of their project is such that the volume offers "re-readings" of a handful of precedent philosophical thinkers including Spinoza, Bergson, Whitehead, William James and Edmund Husserl. They offer what they call a "new reading of the monist tradition", approaches to the world that advocate a unity to existence, for which they acknowledge a long but neglected history, "overcoded by dualist forms of thinking" (van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2000, 154).

The editors of both volumes on new materialist thought are well aware that they are writing into a history of attention to materiality that goes back centuries. Many writings on new materialism acknowledge a rich history of materialist *philosophical* thinking, to the neglect of other forms of aesthetic expression. (Indeed, Ellenzweig and Zammito argue that "sensitivity to matter's lively properties was even more developed and widespread in earlier traditions" (2017, 5) in their exploration of philosophical works.) Where such works have been recognised for their (overlooked and neglected) attention to the agency of the material world—albeit in ways that are considered antecedent or preliminary in comparison to more recent philosophical interventions—the complex engagement with agential materiality in literary works has received less notice. This collection aims to begin addressing such an oversight not by mapping new materialist thinking onto antecedent works, but by attending precisely to contemporaneous expressions of materiality's agency as well as interrogating the specific resonances between "old" and "new" writings on materiality. As such, this collection attempts to read forwards, rather than backwards.

The narrative trajectory of new materialism, even when peppered by acknowledgement of antecedents like Lucretius, Spinoza or Nietzsche, is familiarly teleological: dualist thinking subjugated matter and recent philosophy has revolutionised our approach to the world and the human by revealing the depth and complexity of the world's network of forces. But

this is too neat a story, which pushes aside the debates, conflicts and strands of thinking that assembled alongside the strong voice of dualist thinking. The chapters in this volume testify to the ways in which literary, philosophical and scientific thinking across the long nineteenth century has often been deeply invested in the agency and forces of matter. The volume seeks to demonstrate that the dominance of dualist models did not impede debates about human-world relations or the life of materiality beyond humanity. It shows instead how literature of the period attends to the agency of both humans and nonhumans, as well as the inter-relations and "intra-action" (Barad 2001, 89) between them, expressing precisely the variations and complexities of processual embodied activity. By exploring the agency of the human and the nonhuman, the chapters in this collection observe the embodied and simultaneously active and passive human responses to objects and things in a way that acknowledges the liveliness of matter. In doing so, a broader aim of this volume is to redress the relative negligence of attention to the aesthetic writings of the long nineteenth century in new materialist writings. We seek to demonstrate how the cadences, rhythms and affective qualities of literature, as well as the sensuous, somatic experience that exists in sites of writing and reading—how linguistic *expression* (rather than representation)—have and continue to play an active role in shaping our relationship with the matter of the world. The literary as a privileged site of affective expression is noted, merely in passing, by the geographer Nigel Thrift writing that to access the working of affect within cities, "it is necessary to resort to the pages of novels, and the tracklines of poems" (2007, 171).

New materialist philosophies inevitably set themselves in opposition to approaches to the material world wherein nature is considered a predictable, inert substance, passively responding to the organising efforts of humanity. Especially in the era of the enlightenment and colonialism—the period covered by the chapters in this collection—humans were celebrated as world-makers, presuming and practising manipulation and control of a world represented as made up of inactive matter (and too often inactive humans as well). In such frameworks, nature depends on the gaze and care of humanity, it is something always known through the prism of subjectivity and therefore shaped by, constructed through, and dependent upon such subjectivity. As Ellenzweig and Zammito note, "New materialism takes the privilege of the human—with its supposed marks of exception in rationality, subjectivity, and agency—to have been the ideological supplement that the humanities have contributed to the juggernaut of capitalism, techno-

science, and political domination" (2017, 1–2). New materialism rejects this privilege to instead champion the agency, dynamism and power of nonhuman matter in ways that have extensive implications in terms of the very conceptualisation of the human-nonhuman binary itself.

Marxist thinkers of the agency of material-human relations have long understood human society and culture through their material relations. Critics such as Jason W. Moore (2015) and Jason Edwards (2010) argue for the continuity of historical and new materialism in which recent innovations are extensions into the greater complexities of global and ecological practices. What differentiates materialism from its newer manifestations is that whereas historical materialism lays claim to being one of the most influential political philosophies as well as interpretive frames of the past century, the political commitments of new materialism are markedly less specific (see Ellenzweig and Zammito 2017). New materialism does not ascribe to an exact politics or ethics and instead part of its strategy of relegating human agendas is that it attends to the less predictable forms and forces of matter that lead to no certain or mappable outcome. For new materialists, materiality is always a process and always in process: the things and objects of the world are constellations of energy and vitality.

While not allied with any definite political understanding of the world, the self-proclaimed innovations of new materialist thinking nonetheless point towards its "radical" political stimulus, albeit unattached to any specific politics. As Dolphijn and van der Tuin write, "new materialism produces a revolution in thought by traversing modernity's dualisms" (2012, 115). New materialism is most often aligned with an ecological ethos, attending to the responsibilities incumbent upon humanity in a world configured as a dynamic processual character of networks and relations between the human and nonhuman. In the works of writers like Jane Bennett and Donna Haraway, the realisation of the natural world's autonomy, to "natureculture" (to use one of Haraway's many neologisms, Haraway 2003) demands a reconsideration of human precedence. Attention to the generative powers and affective forces of matter necessarily offers an alternative and reduced model of humanity's position and status in a world of matter.

While the new materialist insistence on material agency negates a sense of human supremacy, this relegation of the human rarely amounts to dismissal, with few new materialists dismissing the place of the human entirely. Instead, as William E. Connolly asserts, in such frameworks the human is perhaps better thought of as being displaced from being "the fundamental ground of things". Connolly goes on:

> [W]e accept the idea that only humans reflect deeply upon mortality and the place of the human estate in the cosmos. But we resist the tacit judgement that this frees us from thinking about the complex relations between the human estate and a host of nonhuman processes with variable degrees of agency. It, rather, accentuates the latter need. (2013, 400)

While rarely reversing the human-world hierarchy, the relationship between subjects and objects is nonetheless adjusted in new materialist discourse. As Haraway straightforwardly articulates the assumption behind attention to matter, "No species, not even our own arrogant one pretending to be good individuals in so-called modern western scripts, acts alone" (2016, 159). Jane Bennett, Bill Brown, Karen Barad and others work from an assumption, like Haraway (2015), that relations between humans and nonhumans are co-productive in ways that depart from predetermined ideas about the nature of such relations. What these writers share is a commitment to the realisation that different interactions between humans and the material world by no means follow standard and calculated exchanges or performances as part of a causal or predictable set of networks and studied relations. Expressions that we may intuitively assume to be the outworkings of a sovereign individual will are revealed to be the products of spatial, temporal networks of a range of equally agential actants (see Latour 2005). To recognise the vitality of the self-governing and self-determining possibilities of matter alters the way we approach the world and how we engage with it.

The new materialist world is a complicated one, not merely in its tracing of networks of affect and effect but also in the entangling of human and nonhuman. In the introduction to *Vibrant Matter*, Bennett acknowledges the paradox inherent in any attempt by humanity to conceptualise or articulate the autonomy of the nonhuman: "I will try, impossibly, to name the moment of independence (from subjectivity) possessed by things, a moment that must be there, since things do in fact affect other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power" (2010, 3). Bennett—like many other writers tackling the same paradox—is adamant that such moments of independence from human consciousness *exist*, yet such moments are impossible to pinpoint exactly, given that we are bound by the conditions and prominence of our own subjectivity and being. In a similar vein, Bill Brown explains how, when objects stop functioning the way humans expect them to, they start acting in an unidentifiable realm

that lies outside human perception (and indeed, linguistic representation). For Brown, things

> lie both at hand and somewhere outside the theoretical field, beyond a certain limit, as a recognizable yet illegible remainder or as the entifiable that is unspecifiable. Things lie beyond the grid of intelligibility the way mere things lie outside the grid of museal exhibition, outside the order of objects. (Brown 2001, 5)

For Brown, acknowledging our partial comprehension of the world is an admittance of human limitation that nonetheless opens up the possibility that things exist beyond human awareness. Yet, this awareness equally reveals the impossibility of extricating the lives and movements of subjects and objects from each other, a point that Terry Eagleton addresses in the first chapter of *Materialism*, when he tackles the idea of autonomy and determinism in human and nonhuman relations:

> To be self-determining does not mean ceasing to be dependent on the world around us. In fact, it is only through dependence (on those who nurture us, for example) that we can achieve a degree of independence in the first place. (2017, 14)

Such questions of agency and autonomy lie at the core of new materialism and attention to the agency of matter has far-reaching logical implications. To assert the nonhuman's capacity for action, and indeed the *always* active role of the nonhuman, is not only to recognise the degree to which human subjects are dependent on the autonomous vitality of matter, but to put under pressure the very notion of identifying human from nonhuman agency. Over the past two decades, then, the centrality of the human in such exchanges has been radically questioned in ways that appear revolutionary and unprecedented in a long history of humanism (that has been ascribed to postmodern as well as modern thinking, van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2000, 159). New materialism's relation to humanism is by no means unproblematic, then, standing accused at times of the distorting action of anthropomorphism in which matter is ascribed human, agential personhood.

New materialism is indebted to a wide range of writers and disciplinary influences and has been heralded as an intrinsically interdisciplinary, and even counter-disciplinary force (labelled "transversality" in Braidotti

2013, 123, and van der Tuin and Dolphijn 2000, 159). For decades now, attention to the agential force of matter inspired by the vitalist philosophy of Deleuze (himself drawing on Spinoza and Bergson among others) has been the subject of discussions in an astoundingly wide range of disciplines and schools of thinking. These include the writings already discussed as well as others attentive to materiality and the agency of matter that may not normally fall under the label of "new materialism" including feminist theory (including Alaimo and Hekman 2008; Braidotti 2013), non-representational theory (NRT) in Human Geography (see especially Thrift 2007; Wylie 2002; Dewsbury 2002), Mobility Studies associated with the geographers Peter Merriman and Tim Cresswell (2011) and the sociologist John Urry, Tim Ingold's writings (especially 2007) from the discipline of Anthropology and actor-network theory in Sociology (Latour 2005). It is to this array of thinking that literary studies itself has turned to as a resource for thinking through the materialities and human-world relations expressed and explored in poetry, prose, drama and film. The chapters included in this collection exemplify the kind of cross-disciplinary conversations that have invigorated literary studies in recent years. While in conversation with debates about agential materiality evident in these many disciplines, the chapters here foreground the ways in which an understanding of an agential, forceful materiality was already being variously and widely explored.

Some of these theoretical approaches to the vitality of matter attend self-consciously to everyday human experience while others place world and human on a level-playing field. Approaches such as phenomenology and affect theory are fundamentally humanist in their celebration of human knowledge. Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg explain in *The Affect Theory Reader*: "Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon" (2010, 1). Understanding human experience as a passage of affective and interrelated relationships gives it primacy as both an actor and an expression of such relations. Still, non-representational theories prompt an engagement with the world beyond anthropocentric perception. As Bennett and others have contested, nonhumans have a life of their own outside human consciousness. One theory that has especially highlighted the nonhuman as an active element in human-world relations is actor-network theory (ANT), which raises questions about human agency by claiming that humans and nonhumans are equal actants in shared networks. In turn, this levelling of activity allows for the identification of "an association between entities

which are in no way recognisable as being social in the ordinary manner, except during the brief moment when they are reshuffled together" (Latour 2005, 64).

This collection is by no means the first to attend to materiality in literary works that precede the material "turn"; indeed, something of a "materialist moment" has been taking place across literary scholarship over the past decade. Much important work has been done that spans the length and breadth of literary epochs. Recent book-length publications include such titles as Brian Gastle and Erick Geleman's collected essays *Later Middle English Literature, Materiality, and Culture* (2018), Gerard Passannante's *The Lucretian Renaissance: Philology and the Afterlife of Tradition* (2011), Jonathan Goldberg's *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations* (2009) and Natania Meeker's *Voluptuous Philosophy: Literary Materialism in the French Enlightenment* (2007), to name a few. Yet new materialism's association with posthumanist theory, as in the writings of Richard Grusin (2015) or Rosi Braidotti (2013), perhaps explains why literary inquiry into long-nineteenth-century materialisms has been less forthcoming. This reticence is perhaps, in part, due to the spectre of the enlightenment and the perceived attendant shift to a dominant rationalism from the eighteenth century onwards. However, with recent publications such as Amanda Jo Goldstein's *Sweet Science: Romantic Materialism and the New Logics of Life* (2017), Benjamin Morgan's *The Outward Mind: Materialist Aesthetics in Victorian Science and Literature* (2017) and Nicholas Dames's *The Physiology of the Novel* (2007), it appears as though this oversight is beginning to be redressed, at least in terms of charting the complex, uneven terrain between scientific materialism and literature of the long nineteenth century.

As we hope is clear, this collection does not seek to debunk the new materialist approach—the drive and far-reaching span of the project is itself a signal of its value. And indeed, it is arguable that this flurry of recent publications (our own included) would not have been undertaken without the pervasive stimulus of new materialist thought. New materialism has prompted these scholarly unearthings of earlier attentions to material agency, which have in turn served to illuminate the matter of literature in exciting ways. Yet there remain many marginal, neglected and yet distinctively material elements within literary, philosophical, aesthetic and scientific thinking that predate the twenty-first- or late-twentieth-century "turn" that are yet to be explored. As we have suggested, one