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*A Literary Practice for Crises of  
Ecologies: Tim Winton, Timothy  
Morton and the writing of the  
Hyperobject Global Warming  
in(to) Eyrie*

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### ABSTRACT

*What can literature do, more specifically what can the novel do, to enable resistance and renewal amid the forces of ecological crises in which the human is radically entangled? As a contribution to Deleuzian and new materialist literary criticism, this paper outlines a conceptualisation of possible modes of literary practice for crises of ecologies (global warming, mass extinction, planetary degradation and associated crises of agency). This paper goes on to focus on global warming and the practice of writing the posthuman. Bringing together Timothy Morton's 2013 work, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, and Tim Winton's 2013 novel, *Eyrie*, a provocation is offered*

*and explored—that the non-and-more-than-human can write a novel—and a discussion is undertaken of the potential for literature to cultivate ecological sense. With regard to this literary cultivation of ecological sense, it is argued that Winton's intensive writing in *Eyrie* has the potential to attune readers differently to the material force of global warming and its effects upon subjectivity.*

### KEY WORDS

*Deleuze, new materialism,  
literary practice, crises  
of ecologies, posthuman,  
ecological sense, fiction,  
Winton, Morton, Eyrie.*

1 – Selected works by writers who attend to matters of materiality and to the material ‘work’ of art and literature, among many other matters, include Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (Deleuze, 1988b, 1990, 1993, 1997, 2000, 2003, Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1986, 1987, 1994; Guattari, 1995, 2000), Timothy Morton (2007, 2010, 2013), Karen Barad (2007), Jane Bennett (2004, 2010), Brian Massumi (1995, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2009, 2011), Rosi Braidotti (2002, 2011, 2013), Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2012a, 2012b, 2014), Dana Phillips (2003, 2013), Stacy Alaimo and Susan Hekman (2008), Stacy Alaimo (2010), Vicki Kirby (1997), and Andrew Pickering (1995). While they by no means stand alone in their conceptualisation of such writing practices, Deleuze (1997, 2003), and Deleuze and Guattari (1986, 1994) were prominent influences in the conception of this paper; in particular their numerous works that explore the intensive registers and affective qualities of writing and art. With regard to resonances (and differences) between Deleuze and Guattari, and other theorists, see Anna Gibbs’ (2015) conceptualisation of writing as practice of resistance and affective method (‘a kind of writing that aims to create and make rather than simply to critique’ p. 224). Gibbs’ chapter contributes to ideas of the intensive qualities of literary practices operating in advance of our coming to meaning. While ranging more broadly in her piece, Gibbs engages with writing as affective attunement to, and resonance with, ‘the energies of the world’ (p.228), and with Henri Meschonnic’s, Henri Lefebvre’s, Vilem Flusser’s, and others’ notions of rhythm as an affective quality of writing (p.233) and as a practice of resistance in a world where the potentials for creative rhythms have been contracted (p.229).

## INTRODUCTION

*Apart from the ideological presumptions that literary theory often loves to tease out of texts, apart from the reflected images of the human, apart from the recognizable complexes of the unconscious, what else subsists in and with the text, the story, the poem, and the novel? (Bourassa, 2002, p. 69)*

What modes of writing might productively respond to crises of ecologies: to the damaging entanglements of global warming, mass extinction, planetary degradation, capitalism, the human, and the non-and-more-than-human? By engaging with Deleuzian, Guattarian and new materialist approaches to subjectivity, ecology, and ethics, and related conceptualisations of the work of literature, <sup>1</sup> we can conceptualise non-representational and intensive modes of literary practice. These practices have the potential to enable subjective resistance and renewal amid crises of ecologies by cultivating ‘ecological sense’. This literary cultivation of ecological sense encompasses the invigoration of readers’ and writers’ ‘affective athleticism’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 172), namely: fostering a sense of those forces of Life that we often ignore, deny, or otherwise find imperceptible; <sup>2</sup> improving our capacities to perceive the agency of the non-and-more-than-human world; radically reconfiguring our sense of our subjective interdependencies with all that is non-and-more-than-human, and, consequently, of our potential agency amid capitalism and ecological crises; attuning us to the ways in which we shape crises and, through them, denude Life and our lives; augmenting our

capacities to perceive the traumatic affective flows of both capitalism and ecological crises; and gesturing toward the potential to pursue unsanctioned subjective trajectories amid these crises.

This paper works with only one of these modes of literary practice—writing the posthuman—although it cannot avoid traversing and being traversed by other modes. To undertake this work, Timothy Morton’s (2013a) conceptualisation of hyperobjects and Tim Winton’s (2013) novel *Eyrie* are brought together in order to access the hyperobject global warming, to explore a provocation—that the non-and-more-than-human can write a novel—and, thereby, to enquire as to the potential for Winton’s novel to cultivate ecological sense.

## WRITING THE POSTHUMAN

*In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 249)*

It is, perhaps, by exploring the interconnectivity and the exteriority of subjectivity, that writers can access non-anthropocentric expressions of Life. For example, by losing the human and turning toward the posthuman subject (Braidotti, 2013), a writer might bring us (and bring us to) a new world of vital materiality. A posthuman inspired literature might attune us to the dependence of our subjectivity upon nonhuman forces that we have a limited capacity to control (including ‘vibrant matter’ Bennett, 2010);<sup>3</sup> to our non-unitary existence in non-and-more-than-human, material-discursive relations (Barad, 2003, p. 822); and to the flaws in our beliefs that we

2 – I capitalise ‘Life’ here to indicate what lives beyond and through the human. Our ‘lives’ or ‘life’ or ‘living’ without capitalisation suggests the particular experiences of Life we undergo.

3 – In short, ‘vibrant matter’ relates to the notion that nonhuman ‘things’ express forms of agency (that they are not simply inert resources for human use) and that the world is constituted by more-than-human assemblages that express potentials not dependent upon humans (though often in relation with them); not arising from some transcendent power, but immanent to the relationships entered into via those assemblages.

4 – Jonathan Roffe (2005) summarises the Deleuzo-Guattarian concept of a multiplicity as follows:

A multiplicity is, in the most basic sense, a complex structure that does not reference a prior unity. Multiplicities are not parts of a greater whole that have been fragmented, and they cannot be considered manifold expressions of a single concept or transcendent unity (p. 176).

Deleuze (1988a) and Deleuze and Guattari (1987) utilise this concept extensively in their writings, not least with respect to writing and to subjectivity. They note (1987), for example, that 'each multiplicity is already composed of heterogeneous terms in symbiosis, and that a multiplicity is continually transforming itself into a string of other multiplicities, according to its thresholds and doors' (p. 249) and that 'each individual is an infinite multiplicity, and the whole of Nature is a multiplicity of perfectly individuated multiplicities' (p. 254).

5 – Molar implies the notion of the unified, stable, solidified, fixed and rigid being, subject to dominating concepts that pre-shape it and constrain what a body might become (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

possess some prior and separable essence, and exist independently of all that is deemed 'not human'. Such literature might populate the world with radically porous bodies; blur distinctions and categories, and replace the individual or the one with intensive multiplicities or the always more than one.<sup>4</sup> It might attune us to our posthuman subjectivities, namely: to our radically relational condition; to the non-and-more-than-human relationships into which we enter and through which we change; and to the rich, monstrous strangeness that is Life and our self. Such literary practices could engender, in writers and readers, a degree of reorientation of our ethical frames: and cultivating our perceptual sensitivity to the interdependencies of our flourishing with the flourishing of others.

It is, for Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1994, p. 293), the injections of art into the everyday that can enable the chaos and difference of the world to resonate with and transform the molar capitalist individual;<sup>5</sup> drawing us into becomings which involve greater perceptual intimacy with the Life we erroneously think we hold at a distance. Literature can map the productions of posthuman subjectivities amid the forces of crises of ecologies. It can tune us in to the agency of matter; to the material reach of the intensities associated with capitalism, and to the psychical, social and environmental implications of our interconnectedness. Posthuman literary cartographies, such as those we find in Tim Winton's *Eyrie*, might track the paths of discarded waste products and chemicals back to, and through, the human; convey the unavoidable and continuing intimacy we have with our abject matter: including excrement, bodily fluids, animal by-products and so on

(Kristeva, 1982, p. 3), and express the unimaginable scope of the agency of hyperobjects like global warming (Morton, 2013a) to shape and re-shape us.

### **THE HYPEROBJECT IN EYRIE**

*He could feel it pressing hot and breathless against the glass doors in the distance. Or perhaps that was just the weather. (Winton, 2013, p. 11)*

*You have to wonder whether your poem about global warming is really a hyperobject's way of distributing itself into human ears and libraries. (Morton, 2013a, p. 175)*

How is it, then, that the non-and-more-than-human might write a novel? Tim Winton's 2013 novel *Eyrie* and Timothy Morton's (2013a) conceptualisation of hyperobjects, and in particular the hyperobject global warming, suggest some answers.<sup>6</sup> Set in a decidedly post-apocalyptic-feeling Fremantle, in a country ravaged by capitalism, *Eyrie* follows the similarly ravaged Tom Keely's ruined life (and body) and his fateful attempts to participate in family, to connect with and protect the 'strange' child Kai, and to fashion himself a meaningful subjectivity from the remnants. *Eyrie* engages with abjection (McCredden, 2014) and loss—of identity, of self, of agency, of collectivity and community, of place, of habitat, of ecology, of health, of memory—and with absence, fragility and violence. Whilst there are continuities in Winton's literary concerns to be found in *Eyrie*—the West Australian coast, family and community, religion and the paths to redemption among them—it is also

6 – Among the many recent contributions relating to the ways in which hyperobjects inhabit literature (and vice versa) are Catherine Diamond's (2016) on Stephen Emmott's theatre, Timothy Morton's (2013b, 2014) on art more broadly and on Victorian literature, Alexa Weik von Mosser's (2014) on Dale Pendell, Courtney Traub's (2016) on contemporary American experimental fiction, Brad Tabas' (2015) on horror fiction, Bradley Fest's (2016) on Don DeLillo and Reza Negarestani, and Chris Washington's (2015) on Romantic literature.

evident that *Eyrie* embodies a harsh reshaping of Winton's literary approaches to writing the vitality of Nature or the non-and-more-than-human world.

Endangerment and extinction and planetary degradation comprise substantive strands of the narrative energy running through *Eyrie*. And yet, global warming and climate change are hardly mentioned directly. This ostensible absence is interesting given Winton's well-documented concerns with environmental issues (Anandavalli, 2008; Ben-Messahel, 2006; 2013; Crane, 2007; Galvin, 2000; O'Reilly, 2010; Winton, 1997, 1998). Shouldn't *Eyrie* have been Winton's 'global warming' novel? One response to this question is that global warming pervades the novel if we seek out its intensities.

*Eyrie* pulses with the force and agency of the non-and-more-than-human world beyond the sentient being. The sun (its light and its heat) carries apocalyptic force: unrelentingly assaulting and invading bodies. We could conclude that Keely's parlous physiological and psychological condition leaves him unbearably exposed to the sun, or that his condition influences his experience of the qualities of the world 'around him', and thereby focus our reading of the work solely upon the human as the matter of concern. However, the sheer repetition and intensity of the violence of the sun in Winton's writing should at least open up a tentative line of thought concerning an intensive reading of *Eyrie*: that the felt force of the nonhuman is 'beyond anything that the booze could induce' (2013, p. 6). We might go so far as to argue that global warming has a hand in writing *Eyrie*: that 'nonhumans are dictating the script' (Morton, 2013a, p. 175). This would, no doubt, appear to be a curious reading, although it may still be productive and it may

well illuminate the potential for literature to cultivate qualities of 'ecological sense'.

Timothy Morton (2013a) offers a cartography of the unmappable-in-its-totality hyperobject. He argues that in concerning ourselves with hyperobjects, we experience radical perceptual issues and we are compelled to think ecologically. Global warming, as are all hyperobjects, is unrepresentable but nonetheless materially real. It is massively distributed in time and space and always withdraws its entirety from our perceptions. Nevertheless, global warming is viscous, sticky, intimate, penetrative and inescapable. It is nonlocal, in that we do not perceive the object in its totality, although its affects are intimate and local. It is also temporally undulating in that its massively extended duration undoes our capacities to conceptualise its time, and its forces remake time rather than operate within some container called Time. We encounter global warming as material phasing: it becomes perceivable in patches, or selectively, and these patches index the existence of the hyperobject but they are not the hyperobject: they are the sensory indices of the hyperobject. Global warming also expresses interobjectivity, in that it produces becomings in relations with other objects or bodies. These becomings are 'inscription events' that produce transformations and phenomena, and the human and the non-and-more-than-human become 'living textbooks on global warming' (Morton, 2013, p. 88). Knowledge becomes onto-epistemological and material-discursive.

Morton's (2013a) conceptualisation of hyperobjects provides a frame through which *Eyrie* can be engaged with as a vehicle for expressing the forces of global warming.<sup>7</sup> Global warming,

7 – These are ideas which, despite Morton's grounding in Object Oriented Ontology and his distancing of his work from strains of new materialism, cohere in many affirmative respects with Deleuze and Guattari's (1994) work on affect and with ideas of material agency (Bennett, 2010; Iovino & Oppermann, 2012a).

as hyperobject, pervades the novel: intensively unavoidable; massively distributed; unrepresentable in its totality, and violently, malignantly and indifferently permeating pages and bodies: human and non-and-more-than-human. While global warming is withdrawn in *Eyrie*, in the sense that we don't get (or get to) it directly and it isn't really attended to as a whole object in the narrative, we find that literature and art do not have to talk directly about the object to carry its agency and forces. This is, perhaps, unavoidable if we entertain the material capacities of hyperobjects outlined by Morton: 'Art and architecture in the time of hyperobjects must (automatically) directly include hyperobjects, even when they try to ignore them' (2013a, p. 109). Also, if we accept that hyperobjects are unrepresentable in their totality (that 'our discourse and maps and plans regarding those things are not those things', (p. 133)), then an intensive/affective approach to the sense of such things is 'truer' to their persistent deceit; namely, that we can never perceive them whole nor without their interobjective affects. How, then, does *Eyrie* bring us (or bring us to) a sense of the hyperobject, global warming? How do things become, as Kai, the child in *Eyrie*, refers to his own condition, 'hot in the temperature' (Winton, 2013, p. 23)?

*How, then, does Eyrie bring us  
(or bring us to) a sense of the  
hyperobject, global warming?*

### **SUN, LIGHT, HEAT**

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For Morton, global warming is present but never to hand: 'always disappearing behind the...sunburn' (2013a, p. 146). To connect with the hyperobject, global warming, via *Eyrie*, we might map the force of the sun, its light and its heat. They are inescapable, viscous, penetrating, and violently transformational: the nonhuman indices of the hyperobject 'but not the hyperobject as such' (2013a, p. 152). By turns, in *Eyrie*, the sun scalds (pp. 4 & 374), sears (pp. 8 & 420), scorches (p. 145), burns (p. 131), kills (p. 14), roasts (p. 26), fucks us (p. 158), beats us (p. 57), bakes (p. 36), cooks (p. 245), blasts (p. 264), staves heads in (p. 387), parches (p. 223), drills (p. 302), damages (p. 400), brands and blinds (p. 15), digs into our eyes (p. 242), overwhelms, and leaves bodies cowering (p. 11).

Heat is ever-present and moves with its own agency. We read that 'heat rolled down from the ranges in waves' (Winton, 2013, p. 239); 'There was no relief from the heat, his [Keely's] sense of entrapment' (p. 362). The heat is thick and viscous and cloaks the body: 'the hot, clothy air' (p. 154); 'He swam the hot air' (p. 423). Heat denudes bodies: it blotches (p. 10), smothers (p. 14), withers (p. 241), entraps (p. 362), bakes (p. 304), superheats (p. 201), deforms (p. 203) and makes them fester (p. 159). Keely feels the heat 'shrink his throat and cause flares at the edge of his vision' (p. 241). It turns the wind into a 'desert wind', which carries dust and gravel to flay bodies (p. 8) and to ravage the land (p. 239).

Light in *Eyrie* is not an affirmative force of illumination, revelation and clarity. It bathes and penetrates bodies like the atomic energy flare at Hiroshima: 'so intense that they couldn't quite see' (Morton, 2013a, p. 49). It is 'the most viscous thing of

all, since nothing can surpass its speed' (p. 32) and Keely cannot escape its zone of influence when he ventures out of his apartment during the daytime. Light in *Eyrie* is 'vicious', 'hideous', 'acid', 'blinding', 'hot', 'searing', and 'impossible' (Winton, 2013, pp. 6, 14, 15, 196, 396, 420 & 423).

Sun, light and heat penetrate and violate bodies. Winton's writing combines the material and the discursive to convey the capacity of the three to assault, penetrate and affect the body. The 'pitiless' sun, 'blinding' light and 'brutal' heat contract Keely's affective capacities: they slow him down, reduce his energy; leave him wounded and disoriented; dehumanise him. When Keely first confronts these forces outside the Mirador tower, the alliterative, assonant and consonant paragraph carries the sensation of these forces felt by the porous body:

*...the street branding, blinding, breath-sucking.  
Acid light plashed white underfoot, swashing wall  
to wall, window upon window, and he waded in it  
a moment, tilting spastic and helpless, so suddenly  
porous and chalky it was all behind his eyes in an  
instant, fizzing within his skull until it rendered  
everything outside him in flashes and flickers.  
No gentling tones out here, only abyssal shadows  
or colours so saturated they looked carcinogenic.  
Keely glimpsed, gasped, fought off the dread and  
gimped on gamely. (Winton, 2013, p. 15)*

The language pulses, sizzles, flows, breaks against us, invades and occupies us, contracting the capacities of our and Keely's body as we stumble, with him, through the paragraph. Indeed, we might find ourselves caught up in the paragraph, so tricky does

reading through it become, while, at the same time, the 's' and 'sh' pull us onwards. The body and mind are exposed to, and violated by, the constantly threatening sun and light. Together, sun, light and heat's corporeal affects deterritorialise the body and contract 'the conditions of possibility for the human mind' (Morton, 2013a, p. 85), and we find Keely walking out 'like a halfwit into a bushfire' (Winton, 2013, p. 14), and, later, his body and mind in ruins: 'addled, livid, dizzy, butting his head and turning circles' (p. 120).

These objects are the 'insupportable' (Winton, 2013, p. 11) machines driving becomings in *Eyrie*. They are malignant, although not intentional. They are indices of the hyperobject finding ways to 'strafe and penetrate the physical body at every opportunity' (Morton, 2013a, p. 85). These objects 'leave [their] traces in your flesh, traces that alter your DNA' (p. 51) and this is a material, not a discursive or linguistic, experience of pain and trauma. Keely is the poem of the hyperobject. Morton captures the idea: 'lifeforms themselves are poems about nonlife, in particular highly dangerous entities that could destroy life' (p. 52).

Nor do these entities only affect and contract the capacities of the human subject; they participate in the manifestation of global warming in water scarcity, in drought and in the conditions of the land. Dust, gravel, malevolent winds—'More hellish updraught, than pastoral uplift' (Winton, 2013, p. 8)—parched land, ravaged plains and bushfire haze, are indexes for global warming lurking and phasing into the narrative as transformer of bodies. The reach of global warming (its 'horrifyingly complex tentacles' (Morton, 2013a, p. 71)) expresses itself in patches throughout the novel: drought-deadened land, reeking rivers, superheated cars, sunburnt faces. The sun, light and

heat pulse upon the bodies in the novel and these are aesthetic events that materially index the ‘invisible presence of the hyperobject itself, which looms around us constantly’ (p. 76) and which inhabits and shapes us. The sun, light and heat are never the background in *Eyrie* but then nor are they the foreground. Rather, they are enmeshed with the other bodies we follow through the narrative: Keely, Gemma, Fremantle, birds, cars, fish, water, gravel, and so on. These bodies express the boot print of global warming; they are ‘crisscrossed with interobjective calligraphy’ (Morton, 2013a, p. 88). And yet, global warming, the hyperobject that encompasses these objects, phenomena or becomings, remains withdrawn. Morton (2013a, p. 77) writes that, ‘In the mesh of interconnectivity, the sieve through which hyperobjects pass, smaller things become indexes of the hyperobjects inside which they exist’. Keely, Gemma, Fremantle, birds, cars, fish, water, gravel and so on are always and all irretrievably inside global warming: at once the body and the material memories of the hyperobject.

### **Winton’s Writing and the Cultivation of Ecological Sense**

*Now the objects take revenge, terrifyingly huge, ancient, long-lived, threateningly minute, invading every cell in our body (Morton, 2013a, p. 115).*

This analysis of the materiality of the hyperobject in *Eyrie* is not offered with the objective of indicating some literary intent on Winton’s part. The exploration does, though, expose an intensive register in the novel. It seems undeniable that Winton’s writing conveys a

sense of the transformative penetration of bodies by nonhuman agents. Morton (2013a) also gestures toward the qualities of such transformations. Hyperobjects, he argues, ‘force us into an intimacy with our own death (because they are toxic), with others (because everyone [every body] is affected by them), and with the future (because they are massively distributed)’ (p. 139) but not with the hyperobject in its totality. In *Eyrie*, global warming performs a nonhuman story. It is an intensive ‘being in its own right’ but not, Morton notes more generally, something that a human can ever fully acquire as an ‘object of knowledge’ (2013a, p. 172). However, Winton’s writing encourages what Morton might call a ‘tuning to the object’ (p. 174). We might go so far as to suggest that the novel expresses a ‘collaboration between humans and nonhumans’ (p. 174). Winton may not have tried to write the forces of global warming through *Eyrie*—this writer has not enquired of his intent—but the novel does fuel a sense that a literary practice for crises of ecologies may be entirely unable to avoid those forces.

Engaging with *Eyrie* (writing or reading it) also offers a collaboration whereby ecological sense can be cultivated: what Morton refers separately to as ‘an attunement to the demonic force coming from the nonhuman and permeating us’ (2013a, p. 175). The nurturing of ecological sense, here, is not a being made to think, unless we consider thinking to be done with the body. It involves material, intensive transformations. *Eyrie* does not carry the fantasy of a harmonious, calming, stable Nature in relation to which we cultivate our ecological consciousness and to which we reconnect. Rather, *Eyrie* expresses the force of nonhuman objects with which we are irreducibly interconnected, and which drive

transformations or becomings that are not necessarily pleasurable; albeit, these diminutions do not preclude such transformations in perceptions being affirmative experiences. Perhaps, then, Winton's literary practice for crises of ecologies entails an unavoidable collaboration with the non-and-more-than-human hyperobject that cultivates the reader's (and the writer's) attunement to a Life that, in part, constitutes, but also surpasses, permeates and produces, the human. Such encounters with literature, despite their painfulness, suggest potential for renewal: not least through the cultivation of the reader's sense of the forces of ecological crises at work.

Is it too much to suggest that *Eyrie* has the potential to change our sense of 'world'? Our sense, if we had one before *Eyrie*, of a delineable, controllable, perceivable, secure, and stable 'world', is ruined by the hyperobject. We cannot represent it and envelop it into our image or rational understanding of the way things are. This transformative, sickening, deadly thing, upon which we cannot close the cognitive gap but with which we are intimately enmeshed and within which we always exist, is beyond our control. It is a 'genuine nonhuman' entity that is 'not simply a product ... of a human gaze' (Morton, 2013a, p. 199). Winton's writing enables us to sense the trauma that flows from the phasing penetrations of the hyperobject, but what it is remains beyond what we can ever imagine. It expresses itself upon bodies differently, and the horror in this is that what the hyperobject can do is never closed. There is humility to be found in embracing this state of affairs and, perhaps, such humility is also a quality of ecological sense that Winton's writing cultivates.



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