Contemporary Australian Novels and Crises of Ecologies

by

David S Harris

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Deakin University

June 2017
I am the author of the thesis entitled *Contemporary Australian Novels and Crises of Ecologies* submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This thesis may be made available for consultation, loan and limited copying in accordance with the Copyright Act 1968.

'I certify that I am the student named below and that the information provided in the form is correct'

Full Name: **David Sydney Harris**

Signed: **Signature Redacted by Library**

Date: **October 23rd 2017**
I certify the following about the thesis entitled *Contemporary Australian Novels and Crises of Ecologies*, submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

a. I am the creator of all of the whole work (including content and layout) and that where reference is made to the work of others, due acknowledgement is given.

b. The work is not in any way a violation or infringement of any copyright, trademark, patent, or other rights whatsoever of any person.

c. That if the work has been commissioned, sponsored or supported by any organisation, I have fulfilled all of the obligations required by such contract or agreement.

d. That any material in the thesis which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by any university or institution is identified in the text.

e. All research integrity requirements have been complied with.

'I certify that I am the student named below and that the information provided in the form is correct'

**Full Name:** David Sydney Harris

**Signed:** [Signature Redacted by Library]

**Date:** October 23rd 2017
For Vera & Ray

“One is always the index of a multiplicity: an event, a singularity, a life…”

(Gilles Deleuze)
Table of Contents

Abstract .................................................................................................................................................. 1

Introduction ........................................................................................................................................ 2

Chapter 1 – Crises of Ecologies ........................................................................................................ 13

Chapter 2 – Literary Hopes and Delusions ..................................................................................... 50

Chapter 3 – Other Trajectories ......................................................................................................... 73

Chapter 4 - Tim Winton's *Eyrie* .................................................................................................. 118

Chapter 5 – Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* ............................................................................... 187

Chapter 6 – Janette Turner Hospital's *Oyster* .............................................................................. 262

Conclusion .......................................................................................................................................... 330

References .......................................................................................................................................... 343
Abstract

This thesis is concerned with what contemporary Australian novels can do amid Crises of Ecologies. Crises of Ecologies involve the entanglements of climate change, mass extinction, planetary degradation and capitalism with crises of agency and of subjectivity: Indigenous and non-indigenous; human and non-and-more-than-human.

To conceptualise literary practices for Crises of Ecologies, I draw upon Deleuzo-Guattarian and New Materialist ontologies, epistemologies and ethics, their comportments towards ecology, sense, and Crises of Ecologies, and the literary practices towards which they already gesture. I focus upon three intensive literary practices: writing the posthuman, writing affect and becomings, and minor literature. I argue that these practices carry potentials to cultivate our sensuous attunements to our critical states of affairs (our ecological sense) and to enhance our capacities to relate, resist and renew amid them (our powers of acting, or living). I explore these literary practices and their capacities for transformation via three contemporary Australian novels: Tim Winton’s Eyrie (2013), Alexis Wright’s The Swan Book (2013), and Janette Turner Hospital’s Oyster (1996).
**Introduction**

There is no return to nature, but only a political problem of the collective soul, the connections of which a society is capable, the flows it supports, invents, leaves alone, or does away with.

(Deleuze, 1997, p. 52)

This thesis is concerned with contemporary Australian novels’ work amid Crises of Ecologies. Drawing upon Deleuzo-Guattarian and New Materialist thought to conceptualise what literature can do, I pursue intensive\(^1\) trajectories for “the socio-political functions of literature and its reception” (Clark, 2015, p. 190). I do not propose that literature will solve our collective “wicked” problems (Morton, 2016, pp. 36-37), nor offer ways out. Rather, I conceptualise intensive literary practices that carry potentials to cultivate sensuous attunements to our critical states of affairs (our ecological sense) and enhance capacities to relate, resist and renew amid them (our powers of acting, or living (Deleuze, 1988b)). I offer studies of three contemporary Australian novels that inform and enrich these initial conceptualisations and affirm their potentials. This introduction expands on this work and the thesis structure, and addresses matters of scope.

---

\(^1\) For Deleuze (1994, p. 222), intensity shapes relations and transformations; the intensive field is the home of sense, experience and the source of thought.
In Chapter 1, I observe that we are entangled in Crises of Ecologies: global warming; mass extinction; planetary degradation; crises of agency and subjectivity; and, in Australia, though not only here, long-running annihilations of Indigenous peoples and country. Capitalism and colonialism, and we too, are agents of these crises. Some of us fear there are no ways out: no unproblematic technological-scientific, commercial, or government solutions; no cures; only chronic continuance for humans and non-and-more-than-humans. I map these Crises via a survey of thirty-two Australian novels published since the 1980s. This knotted-together contextualisation-cum-literary critique serves also to temper reservations expressed publicly about the degree of engagement by contemporary Australian novelists with these Crises, but it does not answer questions as to the efficacy of that engagement.

In Chapter 2, I consider efficacy: the contemporary academy’s hopes for literature’s affirmative work amid Crises of Ecologies, and challenges to these hopes. Current critical thought on the work of literature in this context is as vibrantly unresolved as the Crises with which it engages. It is possible, though, to discern shared hopes that literature can critique and re-constitute our conceptions, perceptions, representations and imaginaries: of the Human, of Life/ecology, of Being(s), and of relations. There are also common expectations that literature can reorient ethics and enhance our capacities to adapt to, mitigate, reverse, or avoid, the impacts of Crises of

2 I use ‘non-and-more-than-human’ to indicate that non-human Life (organic and otherwise) is not lesser than the human and should not be viewed anthropocentrically, and to help differentiate this idea from uses of the Deleuzian (1983) concept of the nonhuman (impersonal desire, forces and flows).
Ecologies. However, there are also acknowledgements of the perceptual and representational complexities associated with ecological writing and literary efficacy amid these entangled, disruptive, and deranging Crises (Clark, 2012, 2015; Morton, 2007b, 2010b, 2013a, 2016).

As one response to these issues, I explore the potentials of intensive literary practices. In Chapter 3, I conceptualise literary practices that carry potentials to cultivate ecological sense and enhance our powers of living. To do this, I embrace what I will refer to as Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist comportments towards ecology, sense, and Crises of Ecologies, and the literary practices towards which they gesture. I begin by thinking ecology (or Life) and sense differently.

We can conceptualise and perceive Life as processual, relational, and immanent. Life involves dynamic, varying productions and syntheses of lives—individuations (Deleuze, 2004, p. 86)–via intensive relations between bodies, not the transcendentally pre-determined relations and productions of prior beings (presumed to include identities, organisms, subjects, signs). While we might commonly consider Life as stratified and patterned, it is also capable of de-stratification, lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 3), and new connections: indeed, for Deleuze, “creativity comes first, then routinization” (Protevi, 2012, p. 250). Humans are not separate from Life (or

---

3 I do not claim New Materialist thought for Deleuze. This terminology is shorthand for the fruitful transversal relations/resonances between Deleuzian, Guattarian and New Materialist thought.

4 These are not only human bodies but all corporeal and incorporeal phenomena entering into and arising from relations.

5 Lines of flight are trajectories taken, entailing changes in nature and capacities, the forming of new connections, and entries into new dimensions of existence with new potentials.
Nature). Life is not anthropocentric. Rather, Life’s always collective productions occur across entangled physical, biological, psychical, and social registers, and (re)constitute worlds populated by “beings of totally different scales and kingdoms” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 238).

Embracing this onto-epistemology opens us up to new Life practices amid “a field of new connections, creative and novel becomings that will give one new patterns and triggers of behaviour” (Protevi, 2012, p. 258). Ecology involves questions of what bodies can do and become amid forces working to limit the answers.

In this thesis, I also adopt relational and processual conceptualisations of sense, as our trans-faculty attunements to the universal and irreducibly intricate relational field (Poxon & Stivale, 2014, p. 73) in which Life’s productions arise. Sense is not bound to judgement or orthodoxy (common or good sense (Deleuze, 1994, p. 33)), nor to a thing’s referential function (Williams, 2008). Sense has to do with what passes between relating bodies, how their powers of living vary, and their perceptions of those encounters and variations (Deleuze, 1997, p. 25). A process ontology that focuses upon affects—bodies’ capacities to have intensive effects upon each other, and their experience of those effects (Deleuze, 1988b)—is not circumscribed by reason. Sense becomes thinking-feeling (Massumi, 2015, p. xi): “thinking is not a natural exercise but always a second power of thought, born under the constraint of experience as a material power, a force” (Semetsky, 2005, p. 90). Thinking expands to enfold all faculties, challenging their limits (Deleuze, 1994, pp. 137 - 146), and allowing for their transformations. New sensations are experienced that cannot be reliably
articulated or categorised but are real nonetheless. Sense, then, has to do
with an awareness of the particularity of encounters rather than their being
repetitions of the same. We cannot know the world by relying upon what we
came to know before.

For Deleuze (1997), literature is part of Life: carrying it, and contributing
to its dynamic and continuous variation; making sense in our encounters
with it. It is in this context that I make the central claim of this thesis: that
certain literary practices infuse literature with affirmative potentials amid
Crises of Ecologies. Literature can cultivate ecological sense: fostering our
sense of those forces of Life that we often hold at some distance, ignore,
deny, or otherwise find imperceptible; encouraging our attendance to the
agency of the non-and-more-than-human world; reconfiguring our sense of
the subject and of our subjective interdependencies with all that is non-and-
more-than-human, and thus of our common vulnerability and our potential
agency amid capitalism and ecological crises; enhancing our attunement to
the ways in which we shape Crises and, through them, denude Life and our
lives; and (re)invigorating our capacities to perceive and engage with affect
as a vital register of existence (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 172), across
which health can be nurtured and harm can be done. Following Deleuze
(1988b) and Guattari (1995, pp. 7,13,19), we might think of subjectivity as a
work of art; of a life as comprising continuous aesthetic renewals; and of art
and literature as active participants in lives. I argue that literary cultivations
of ecological sense enable the pursuit of creative, mutually beneficial,
subjective renewals; resisting the violence and diminishments of Crises of
Ecologies.
In Chapter 3 I outline three literary practices with potentials to cultivate ecological sense: writing the posthuman; writing affect and becomings; and minor literature. Writing the posthuman (Braidotti, 2013) involves writing lives after we realise we are not separable from—or over and above—Life, we are immanent and open to it. Posthuman literature attunes us to matter's agency and unbounded material reach, and to the qualities and implications of our material permeability and interconnectedness. Our sense of the vitality of the world and of its sensitivity to our actions is expanded and intensified (Barad, 2007; J. Bennett, 2010; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

Writing affect provides for an attunement to other registers across which Life moves, bodies relate, and powers of living transform. Literary affects are important to thought: they rupture the sensible; they revitalize expression and drive becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 256); and they offer access to worlds to which we are de-sensitised – worlds still to be created. Writing affect involves us in and allows for affirmative transformations and encounters amid Crises. We also improve our apprehension of the damaging affects that nourish capitalism and colonialism, and can access other trajectories for living along which we might outwit/outpace these power apparatuses (R.G. Smith, 2015). Writing affect is writing becomings-other. Such writing can be ethically generative: cultivating sense beyond the Human, or at least exposing us to, and encouraging our perceptions of, intensities that humans do not own. Literary becomings carry potentials to cultivate our sensitivity to the traumatized non-and-more-than-human bodies moving amid Crises, and to the interdependencies of our flourishing with the flourishing of those bodies. As we fold with (unfold from) the non-and-more-
than-human, Life and our lives open out to the new. Minor literature (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986) involves a political writing that employs expression to resist oppression and the forces of Crises, and to call out to (re-potentialise) a collective that did not exist beforehand or that has been broken (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 345). Minor literature unsettles dominant (Majoritarian) concepts, language, and figurations—Nature, Human, Aboriginal, and Animal, for example—that perpetuate Crises. It might also enable us to come to terms with Crises—even the most dire existential prognoses (Braidotti, 2013, p. 83; Collings, 2014)—and to renew our capacities to imagine other pathways for relations (Bogue, 2007, pp. 98-99) and other worlds. I note, in the Australian context, that there are potentially affirmative resonances between Indigenous ontologies-practices and the conceptualisations of Life/ecology and cultural practices discussed here. In Chapters 1, 2, 3, and 5 I consider the prospects these resonances hold for Crises of Ecologies, ecological sense, literary practices, and non-indigenous scholarship on Indigenous writing.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6 I explore literary practices for Crises of Ecologies and their potentials to cultivate ecological sense in three contemporary Australian novels: Tim Winton’s Eyrie (2013), Alexis Wright’s The Swan Book (2013), and Janette Turner Hospital’s Oyster (1996). These studies expand upon the modest (albeit, recently, growing) amount of critical work occurring at the nexus between intensive literary practices, Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist thought, and studies of the efficacies of contemporary Australian novels amid Crises of Ecologies.
In Chapter 4 I observe that *Eyrie* starkly conveys tragic trajectories for Life and lives amid capitalism: the ruin of the human and the non-and-more-than-human, and the withdrawal of the promise of meaning, religion, family and community. Nonetheless, I argue that reading only for negation and loss risks leaving readers with an unassimilable traumatic burden of destruction, absence, and isolation. Winton’s literary practices in *Eyrie* carry potentials to cultivate ecological sense and offer painful affirmations, specifically: immersing readers in a dark ecology (Morton, 2007b); producing intensive cartographies of the vulnerable posthuman (Braidotti, 2013), and of the agentic non-and-more-than-human (particularly, global warming as hyperobject (Morton, 2013a)); writing traumatic affect and becomings-child and -bird (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); and employing an intensive, contagious, and resistant (a minor) writing style.

In Chapter 5, acknowledging the importance of attending to the ethics of my non-indigenous scholarly encounter with Indigenous literature, I argue that Alexis Wright’s literary practices resonate with the philosophies engaged in Chapter 3 and inform and enrich—rather than follow—the literary conceptualisations advocated in that chapter. Wright’s (2008b) expectations for the political work of writing, *The Swan Book*’s immersion in/expression of Indigenous onto-epistemologies and ethics, and the refusal of her writing style to settle, combine to underpin the novel’s potentials to cultivate ecological sense and enhance Indigenous powers of living. The novel engages directly with Crises of Ecologies: Indigenous and non-indigenous. Its stories involve readers in acts of resistance to attempted annihilations: of peoples, country and culture; of the forces of expression to
which Indigenous peoples attend in country; and of the subjective trajectories Indigenous peoples might pursue. *The Swan Book* is also a work of tending or custodianship: a calling-forth and repotentialising of Life that nurtures, is celebrated by, and is under the care of Indigenous peoples. Wright stories the health and irreducible relationality of peoples and country, and her style revitalises the sovereignty of expression critical to Indigenous lives.

In Chapter 6, I argue that Hospital’s writing in *Oyster* entails an exposure to other modes of relation, other orders of resistance, and other trajectories of renewal amid the forces that work to close Life down. Hospital’s passionate, porous, material poetics cultivates a sense of the persistence of relations despite a community’s efforts to “seal itself off from the world” (Hospital, 1997, p. 243). Hospital writes Life and the productions of subjectivities across other registers: not only as processes involving human minds, discourse, and language, but also as involving non-and-more-than-human agencies (the Fuckatoo, opals, heat, and water) and impersonal, nonhuman intensities that shape subjectivities: affects. Hospital’s affective and continuously varying style and form leave readers suspended and without judgement, sensuously opened to the new and the unknown.

I conclude this thesis by returning to the findings of these three studies and recapitulating the contributions this thesis makes to knowledge. I critically consider the research pathways that might arise from the work herein: in particular the complexities that accompany scientific-empirical studies of the potential efficacies of the literary practices explored in this
thesis. I also attend briefly to the implications this thesis has for intensive reading practices for Crises of Ecologies, not only writing practices.

A few comments on the scope of this thesis are appropriate to complete this introduction. Limiting my studies to contemporary Australian novels is not based upon a belief that the potentials of literary practices for Crises of Ecologies cannot be found elsewhere: whether in other novels, other periods, other countries, or other forms of writing. With regard to the thought upon which my thesis draws, I do not dive deeply into or attempt to calm the myriad differences agitating the waters of the deep well that is Deleuzian, Guattarian, and New Materialist concepts. While I acknowledge their differences, I attend chiefly to the ways in which these different thinkers come together productively. With regard to the contemporary Australian novels studied, I have not corresponded with Winton, Wright or Hospital to understand their literary intentions, nor their literary practices. I have, however, studied their publicly available statements on these matters. Also, while I acknowledge the possibilities for the ideas in this thesis to enter into productive research dialogue with the fields of scientific and empirical studies of literary experience—possibilities LeMenager (2012, p. 574) notes more broadly—my work is not empirical in the ways these fields might define it.\(^6\) It is speculative, exploratory, experimental and only empirical in the Deleuzian sense: attending to what becomes from encounters with Crises of Ecologies, Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist thought and contemporary novels, while not presuming these encounters define all that

---

\(^6\) Scholars in this field include Caracciolo (2016); Jacobs (2017); Oatley (2012); Zunshine (2015).
is possible. I acknowledge that this thesis could intersect with work on educational/pedagogical practices amid Crises of Ecologies. It may, for example, be of use in the design and implementation of curriculum by educational bodies (including teachers) and institutions across a number of disciplines, not least literary studies. However, I do not pursue these possibilities in this thesis. With regard to the conceptualisations of literary practices offered here, I do not presume them to be comprehensive. Rather, they are gestures toward ways of conceiving of practices and I fully anticipate that others will be found, and that the ways in which those outlined are used will vary. In this regard, the proposals of this thesis are not offered as solutions to the literary efficacy problems discussed in Chapter 2, nor in opposition to the literary practices critiqued in that chapter. They move, instead, along other, never entirely separable, trajectories. Most importantly, I reiterate that the pursuit of literary practices for Crises of Ecologies is not driven by a presumption that literature can save the human or the non-and-more-than-human. Rather, this research involves the pursuit of difference through literature: via ways of writing and reading that carry potentials to enhance our powers of living on the only planet in which we can find ourselves.

---

7 I acknowledge the wealth of pedagogical trajectories considered in Teaching Climate Change in the Humanities (Siperstein, Hall, & LeMenager, 2017).
Chapter 1 – Crises of Ecologies

We all live, in Pickering's words, “in the thick of things,” even though the scientific and everyday stance of “detachment and domination” blocks this recognition. (Alaimo, 2012, p. 489)

My concern with what contemporary Australian novels can do—and how they might do it—arises from our entanglements in Crises of Ecologies that seem to begin and end with us and that may not afford any tolerable ways through or out (Collings, 2014; Kolbert, 2014; Rockstrom et al., 2009). These Crises shape Life’s futurity—transforming biosphere, geosphere, atmosphere, and hydrosphere, the non-and-more-than-human and the human—and they encompass, exceed and are exceeded by climate change (Haraway, 2015, p. 160). They provide a material-discursive milieu for the work of this thesis, and this chapter maps three of their constitutive qualities: first, that we (humans) are entangled in multiple ecological catastrophes of our own making (enveloping the non-and-more-than-human), that these crises are, in their turn, entangled with each other, and that they are inescapable; second, that capitalism is an expression and agent of these catastrophes; and, third, that capitalism creates crises of agency and the contraction of the trajectories along which Life—and we—might pursue

resistance and renewal. This mapping also attends to Australia, corrects notions of ecological crises as contemporary, and acknowledges Indigenous crises—violence done to peoples and country—persisting over centuries. To produce this map, I knot together qualities of Crises of Ecologies and contemporary Australian novelists’ works. This knotted-together contextualisation-cum-literary-critique serves to temper reservations expressed about the degree of engagement by contemporary Australian novelists with these Crises, but it does not answer questions as to the efficacy of that engagement. Accordingly, it constitutes only the first step towards framing the primary question of this thesis.

In 2002, Hughes-d’Aeth observed an “absence of writing which has addressed […] ‘the limits of liberal ecology’ (238). Also notably absent” he wrote “has been a measure of reflexivity in Australian novels that deal with environmental themes” (p. 21).⁹ In 2005, Potter acknowledged—and took issue with—a related thread of criticism:

[that] literary fiction has been pointedly accused of lacking in engaged and insightful ecological discourse, trailing ‘way behind’ other fields in the eco-humanities, such as history and politics, in ‘all respects’ of activism and insight […]. In the face of pressing environmental concerns, let alone a host of social and political

⁹ Noting Julia Leigh’s novel The Hunter as an exception.
imperatives, Australian fiction, we are being told, has lost its sense of ethical urgency. (2005b, para. 1)

Potter also noted Modjeska’s (2002, p. 208) diagnosis of a crisis in fiction: “Why are so few people writing novels about the lives we are living right now, here in Australia”. In 2014, White relayed—and also contested—similar opinions:

In Australia, texts reflecting climate change have also been somewhat sparse. […] Stephen Wright commented on “the conservatism and timidity of Australian fiction – which is also by more than implication, the conservatism of Australian publishers” (n.p.), and wondered why we aren’t fully conscious of the shadow of Indigenous dispossession and climate catastrophe. (p. 143)

In 2015, Trexler noted—and also contested—Heise’s argument “that literature [presumably, this includes Australian literature] and criticism had yet had limited success in addressing climate change” (2015, p. 18). Huggan (2015a) also feared that the debate on the efficacy of the novel resembled a “conversation going nowhere”, although his paper does suggest some directions:
there seems to be little consensus on what a good […] novel] might look like, while the dialogue is not helped by a deadening prescriptivism that sees the social realist novel as locked into the values of bourgeois individualism, the apocalyptic novel as duty-bound to explore the “inexorable planetary disaster [that is currently unfolding] around us,” and speculative fiction as mapping formulaic routes to alternative futures that are already embedded within the present. (p. 87)

In responding to these critiques, I note that concern with human-environment relations and damage are not new to Australian literature. While there exists a thick literary thread of engagement with the continent as alien, strange, forbidding, adversarial and unsettling (Brady, 1999; Devlin-Glass, 2008a, p. 53; Hughes-d’Aeth, 2009; Rawlings, 2009, p. 134), scholars also note lively lines of affirmative literary attunement to Australian ecologies and to human impacts, spanning the twentieth century and earlier (Bonyhady, 2002; Brady, 1999; Hughes-d’Aeth, 2005, 2007, 2008; Rawlings, 2009; Robin, 2008; Tyas, 1995). A brief survey also suggests that ecological concerns are readily found in contemporary Australian novels and that they include and go beyond damage to the environment. Indeed, Huggan (2015a), Huggan and Tiffin (2015), Hughes-d’Aeth (2002), Potter (2005b), Trexler (2015), and White (2014) count among those making cases for such literary concerns. Furthermore, studies of contemporary Australian novelists’ engagements with aspects of Crises of Ecologies have increased
in recent years, particularly since 2011. Studies address Coetzee\textsuperscript{10}, de Pierre\textsuperscript{11}, Egan\textsuperscript{12}, Faber\textsuperscript{13}, Flanagan\textsuperscript{14}, Grenville\textsuperscript{15}, Hooper and Astley\textsuperscript{16}, Hospital\textsuperscript{17}, Leigh\textsuperscript{18}, Malouf\textsuperscript{19}, Mears\textsuperscript{20}, Pilkington\textsuperscript{21}, Scott\textsuperscript{22}, Tsiolkas\textsuperscript{23}, Winton\textsuperscript{24}, and Wright\textsuperscript{25}, as well as surveying Australian writers and climate change (Jordan, 2014). In this context, the survey below, of thirty-two Australian novels published since the 1980s,\textsuperscript{26} combines non-literary with literary engagements to map out our Crises: climate change, mass

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Barrett (2014); Danta (2007); Deyo (2013); P. Dickinson (2013); Hallemeier (2013); Ley (2010); Neimnne and Muhaidat (2012); Patton (2004); Paula (2012); Rohman (2014).
\item Weaver (2011).
\item Hayles (2015).
\item Dillon (2011).
\item Deyo (2013); L. A. White (2012); Wiese (2014).
\item Huggan (2015a).
\item Potter (2003).
\item Callahan (1997); Davies (2000a); Dunlop (2010); Herrero (2006).
\item Bartosch (2016); Brewer (2009); Crane (2010, 2012); Kerridge (2002).
\item Archer-Lean (2014); Grogan (2014); Mikkonen (2004); G. J. Murphy (2010).
\item Nyman (2014).
\item Klein (2016).
\item Armellino (2007); Brewster (2012); Coralie (2008); Slater (2001, 2005, 2006); Hughes-d'Aeth (2016).
\item Cummins (2015).
\item Ashcroft (2014); Birns (2014, 2015); Harris (2015); Huggan (2015a).
\item Barras (2015a, 2015b); Daley (2016a); Devlin-Glass (2007, 2008b); J. White (2014).
\item The selected novels are: Steven Amsterdam’s *Things we Didn’t See Coming* (2009); Thea Astley’s *Drylands* (1999); Murray Bail’s *Eucalyptus* (2005); James Bradley’s *Clade* (2015); Peter Carey’s *Bliss* (1996), and *The Tax Inspector* (1991); JM Coetzee’s *Elizabeth Costello* (2003); Richard Flanagan’s *The Sound of Hand Clapping* (1997), and *The Unknown Terrorist* (2012); Kate Grenville’s *The Secret River* (2005); Janette Turner Hospital’s *Oyster* (2005); Dorothy Johnston’s *Maralinga My Love* (1988), and *One for The Master* (1997); Mireille Juchau’s *The World Without Us* (2015); Julia Leigh’s *The Hunter* (2011); Gabrielle Lord’s *Salt* (1990); Andrew McGahan’s *The White Earth* (2004); James McQueen’s *Hook’s Mountain* (1982); Elliot Pertman’s *Three Dollars* (2011); Kim Scott’s *Benang: from the heart* (1999), and *That Deadman Dance* (2010); Christos Tsiolkas’ *Dead Europe* (2005); George Turner’s *The Sea and Summer* (1987); Sam Watson’s *The Kadaicha Sung* (1990); Archie Weller’s *Land of the Golden Clouds* (1998); Michael Wilding’s *Pacific Highway* (1982); Tim Winton’s *Blueback* (1997), *Shallows* (1995), *Breath* (2009), and *Eyre* (2013); and Alexis Wright’s *Carpentaria* (2006a), and *The Swan Book* (2013).
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
extinction, planetary degradation, Indigenous ecological crises, colonialism and capitalism as agents of crises, and associated crises of subjectivity and agency. It concurs with what this growing body of scholarship implies: that contemporary Australian novelists are engaging substantively with Crises of Ecologies.

Climate change—mass extinction—planetary degradation

There is overwhelming scientific confidence in, and public awareness of, the relationships between human actions, global warming, and climate change. However, global warming related transformations are accelerating, and the prospects for decisive restorative action are in crisis (Parr, 2013). Thinkers, including Baird Callicott (2016), Chakrabarty (2009), Colebrook (2012a, 2012b, 2014a; 2015), Flannery (2015), Haraway (2015), Latour (2009, 2014a, 2014b, 2015), and Morton (2013a), note that climate change entails epistemological, ontological, and ethical crises now and to come. Human and non-and-more-than-human bodies are experiencing transformations and pain; albeit, for too many of us, the pain in which we are implicated is not (yet) ours to feel. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2013) tracks global warming and offers prognoses for our possible futures, but the damage to come is often beyond scientific

predictive capabilities; so complex and open are the systems to which climate change draws our attention. And, while we may well all say that we are and will be in it together, the burdens of Crises are and will not be borne equally (Braidotti, 2017, p. 18; Probyn, 2016, p. 12). For much of Humanity, climate change’s material expressions remain distant, can be avoided (for now), or are barely perceptible on the body. While some can already corporeally sense climate change, many cannot, or do not wish to: it is almost outside what can be thought. What is already here and to come are difficult to imagine via conventional human notions of body, duration, subjectivity, the social, and world. There are derangements of scale (Clark, 2012)—spatial and temporal, material and discursive—associated with climate change and the human actions causing it. These derangements defeat our attempts to come to terms with the effects our living has on Life, not least because the responses required reach down the scales to our most habitual, seemingly inconsequential, actions (Clark, 2012; Morton, 2016).

Turner’s (1987), Amsterdam’s (2009), Winton’s (2013), Wright’s (2013), Juchau’s (2015) and Bradley’s (2015) novels span a period of growing scientific and public awareness of anthropogenic climate change (Black, Hassenzahl, Stephens, Weisel, & Gift, 2013, p. 1148). Turner, for example, imagines a water-inundated, post-greenhouse Australia progressing towards an ice age. Thirty years after publication, Turner’s novel reads as uncannily prescient of the forces at work, of the dangers of denial, and of

29 See Nixon (2011, p. 5) on “slow violence”.

19
what are now, for some, familiar threats to Life. Willed ignorance remains at the core of these crises: “Refusal to believe is our surety that disaster cannot happen – at any rate, not today. And, every time, it does” (p. 24).

Wright’s *The Swan Book* is set in an Australian future in which global warming inflicts violence upon people, place, and all Life. For Bella Donna—a climate change refugee—global warming’s forces have been devastating:

She looked startled, as though she had been asked to describe the inexplicable, of what happened to people affected by the climate changing in wild weather storms, or the culmination of years of drought, high temperature and winds in some countries, or in others, the freezing depths of prolonged winters. (p. 25)

Countries have disappeared; refugees lost at sea in their millions; and lives exiled and annihilated: “Ice-covered lakes dried up where the swans once lived [...]. Trees stopped measuring the season and died slowly in ground bone dry several metres deep” (p. 72). Hubristic humans have “sacrificed the whole earth” (p. 12).

Observations suggest that via global warming (Urban, 2015) and other acts, humans have initiated the earth’s sixth mass extinction event (Barnosky et al., 2011; WWF International, 2016). Humans have for centuries been “co-opting resources, fragmenting habitats, introducing non-native species, spreading pathogens, [and] killing species directly”
(Barnosky et al., 2011, p. 51). Although, for many humans, mass extinction is conceivable in the abstract, it is too often imperceptible: like climate change. For contemporary Australian novelists, violence to non-and-more-than-human creatures and mass extinctions include and exceed whales and tigers. For example, Scott’s That Deadman Dance (2010, p. 281) and Winton’s Shallows (1996) attend to violence to whales conducted in the interests of profit or preserving community heritage: “But what about the whales? // Maybe we fished them out. // But no one could know for sure” (Scott, 2010, p. 298).\textsuperscript{30} Winton immerses readers in industrial whaling’s horrors:

Down at the flensing deck, a long ramp running into the bloody shallows, a whale was being winched up, hooks through the flukes of its tail, chains and cables moving, taut, noisy. Men […] in gumboots and bloodied singlets. Plumes of putrid steam lifted from the sheds where boilers and furnaces and generators roared […] men went to work with their hockey sticks and sliced deep into the glistening, black blubber and proceeded to whittle the grey body down. […] Steadily, bloodily, the sperm whale was dismantled like a salvaged vessel. (1996, p. 32)

\textsuperscript{30} Hughes-d’Aeth (2016) notes that Scott attends to whaling as a realm of collectivity and affirmation for settlers and Indigenous peoples (p. 28).
Leigh’s *The Hunter* (2011) re-animates the extinct Thylacine and our consciousness of its history via the story of *M*, a mercenary employed to find and kill the last tiger and harvest its biological *assets*. *M* reflects on that “two-legged fearsome little pygmy, the human hunter” (p. 31) precipitating extinctions. Coetzee (2003), Juchau (2015), Winton (2013), and Wright (2013) also engage with other creatures’ fates: factory farmed animals; bee colony collapse; unhomed and slaughtered birds; and countless drowned, frozen and parched species, including homo sapiens.

While there is compelling scientific evidence that humans are marking and transforming the earth materially and systemically (Rockstrom et al., 2009), I cannot adequately represent the overwhelming scope of planetary degradation (including pollution, waste, resource scarcity, habitat damage, genetic mutation, and related sickness and death), nor the varying scales of its expressions.31 I can, however, observe that waste, as the material shadow of goods and services, is central to capitalism and to the cultures with which it is entangled (Muecke & Hawkins, 2002, p. x). It is now difficult to conceive of planetary locations entirely unaffected by human agency (Aronson, Thatje, McClintock, & Hughes, 2011, p. 101) or untouched by human garbage: whether that waste has broken down into smaller parts (Andrady, 2011; Talsness, Andrade, Kuriyama, Taylor, & vom Saal, 2009; S. L. Wright, Thompson, & Galloway, 2013), or remains in its original form.

---

31 Among the myriad published studies, Australia-related studies include Cowan and Evans (2010); Edwards (2013); Lowe (2014); Pike, Croak, Webb, and Shine (2010); Reisser et al. (2013); and Senior, Nakagawa, and Grimm (2014).
As producers and consumers, we want to hide our waste away, avoid its impurities, control it, and ignore the implications for others (Falasca-Zamponi, 2011, pp. 3-4; Hawkins, 2004). Muecke and Hawkins (2002) argue that “expelling and discarding […] is fundamental to the ordering of the self” (p. xiii). But we cannot avoid waste; it returns to us. We are profoundly implicated with it (Muecke & Hawkins, 2002, p. xiv). It transforms non-and-more-than-human and human lives. The novels surveyed often use the imagery of waste and degradation for characterisation: the ruined subject. In Winton’s Eyrie (2013), for example, the idea of the self and of Life as no more than waste seems to extend to family, work, consumer goods, cars, and religion; all no more than denuded, cast-off capitalist resources. However, novelists also attend directly to planetary degradation: with a sense of loss, with notes of complicity, and with gestures toward damage returning to humans. Winton writes, “Attractive isn’t it, lost beauty?” (2013, p. 216). For Amsterdam (2009), Astley (1999), Carey (Pollak & MacNabb, 2000, p. 78), Flanagan (1997), Turner (1987), and Winton (2013), the city is a source of sickness and development makes it sick. In Eyrie, Fremantle is choked with detritus (pp. 119, 120, 158), the dynamic ocean of Winton’s prior novel, Breath (2009), becomes an ocean of waste, and Eyrie’s protagonist, Tom Keely, becomes a ruined part. The swamp in The Swan Book is the ocean’s kin: a wasteland (pp. 18, 58, 391), entangling swans, people, “decaying plastic, unwanted clothes, rotting vegetable matter or slime that bobbed, wanami diesel slick […]” (p. 36).

Industrial capitalism is commonly positioned as the root cause of pollution and degradation. Perlman (2011, p. 167) implicates heavy industry, while
Wright (2006a) and Winton (2013, pp. 5, 6, 193) single out mining. Carey (Pollak and McNabb 2000), Jose (2005), Flanagan (1997, p. 23), Johnston (1997, pp. 23, 30), Leigh (2011), and Wilding (1982, pp. 1-3) attend to logging and forestry damage, and to the threatening returns of industrial pollution to humans. Already inhabiting a toxic coastline, Wilding’s narrator observes that, in the forest, “The bulldozers clear out everything indiscriminately” (p. 108), while Leigh’s M “[...] is about to drink the [creek] water when it occurs to him that it might be poisoned by nearby properties; it might even have run through the log dump” (2011, p. 9).

Read against the measures of geological time, humans might be likened to a virus colonising the earth (Braidotti, 2005/6). We participate in libertarian projects of resource consumption and destruction, and the apotheoses of these projects—the declaration of the Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2011) and the triumph of global Capital—paradoxically double as their nadirs. With a rising global population (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2013) we have reason to fear the end of oil (Paul Roberts, 2004), conflicts for water (Munk Ravnborg, 2004; UNESCO, 2012), and the depletion of resources critical to conventionally defined human progress and survival. Drought and water scarcity permeate the novels surveyed, including Drylands, The Swan Book, The Sound of One Hand Clapping, Eyrie, The Hunter, Oyster, Carpentaria, and The White Earth. Writers’ concerns encompass Australia’s precarious

32 Winton also writes of wheat farming, which Hughes-d’Aeth (2007) describes as “the cause of the destruction of most of the ecological fabric of south-western Australia” (p. 59).
33 LeMenager (2012) observes that there are great challenges in imagining alternatives “even as we recognise its [oil’s] unsustainability” (p. 61).
fresh water supply and the damage to water supplies of human actions and climate change. In numerous works, dust prevails, not agricultural plenty. Astley’s town, Drylands, is the tenuous, drought-devastated home to farmers: their cattle transformed into stumbling corpses (1999, p. 111); the land a dust bowl (p. 135). Water, so necessary to serve the agricultural lifestyles upon which colonial Australia relied, is scarce, and the place transmits “unspeakable gloom” (p. 24). Farming earth unable to support it serves only to worsen the health of that land. Hospital’s outback Queensland of Oyster seems worse: “there were children […] who had never seen rain.” (1997, p. 3). Bradley (2015), Juchau (2015), Lord (1990), Turner (1987), Winton (2013), and Wright (2006a, 2013) are among the novelists writing Australia’s complicated relationships between scarcity and dangerous overabundance: humans and global warming bring both too much and too little water.

**Capitalism: an agent of crises**

Capitalism’s entanglements with ecological crises are undoubtable. For Guattari (2000, p. 6), capitalism is the “motor” of anthropogenic planetary damage. More recently, Latour (2004, 2011), J.W. Moore (2015), Parr (2013), and others have explored capitalism’s ecological entanglements. The Anthropocene (Steffen et al., 2011) is the dominant term now proposed to convey the relationships between earth system transformations and the
forces of the human and modern capitalism;\textsuperscript{34} transformations which are neither solely geological (Dibley, 2012), nor solely non-and-more-than-human. There is a devastating eco-logic (Guattari, 2000, p. 44) to capitalism. Privileging economic value, psychically naturalized (Malabou, 2008, p. 53), and with all things appearing immanent to it (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 11), capitalism expands its processes and axiomatics in order to deal with complexity, diversity, hybridity and plurality, and to better suit the cultural norms of contemporary mass democracies (Lucarelli, 2010, p. 120). The potential for lives that do not serve Capital is contracted (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, pp. 28-29; Lazzarato, 2004) and all Life risks (re)constitution as resource to be mined (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 61-62; Cooper, 2008, p. 9).

For Deleuze and Guattari (1983, pp. 3-4), capitalism’s discursive forces and semiotic regimes convince us of our safe separation from the world we consume and damage. Capitalist consciousness is cultivated. We are persuaded that there are boundaries between capitalist systems: production, distribution, consumption and disposal. We are also convinced that these boundaries map to equally undeniable separations between Human and Nature. Alas, there are no independent spheres or circuits, and, worse, Life is often violated by attempts to produce separations. Braidotti (2002) considers the distinguishing of the animal from the human to be one violent imprint of capitalist consciousness. Asserting the animal’s otherness—as tool, technology, material, metaphor, labour (Braidotti,
and separating ourselves from it, underpins its (ab)use. Coetzee (2003, p. 111), Perlman (2011), Wilding (1982), and Winton (2013) explore a willed ignorance that we might associate with capitalist consciousness. As the grandfather in Amsterdam’s Things We Didn’t See Coming assures us, “‘Everything will be fine until it’s not. Then we can worry’" (p. 24).

Everything challenging capitalism, attempting to differ, is axiomatised: recoded onto economic value. Where that which differs is not stigmatized or made an enemy, it is turned into a consumable good, commodified, and assigned a market niche (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983; Genosko, 2002, p. 235), including earth systems and earth system risks: the heralds of crises. Financial markets (insurances, derivatives, structured investment products) recode earth system risks we might associate with Crises of Ecologies, (re)positioning them as managed economic bodies (Dibley, 2012, p. 146).

Capitalism, it seems, separates us from danger and enables the fantasy that we can be both pro-capital and green (Morton, 2010b, p. 110). Characters in the novels surveyed are subjected to forces that axiomatise, financialise and marketise resistance. In Three Dollars, for example, Tanya—Eddie’s partner—wants to explore the crises of capitalism in her academic thesis and Paul, her banker-friend, immediately claims her work—values it—for the “fear of fascism market”. He concedes: “‘There is, I’ll admit, probably a fortune to be made by the people who write these searing warnings of the next global catastrophe” (p. 141). The co-option and axiomatisation of conservation are also important in The Hunter (Crane, 2012, p. 107). Paradoxically, M’s job is to kill—the last thylacine—in order to conserve—profit opportunities.
Winton’s novels consistently express a visceral distaste for big business, greed, “dealing” (2013, p. 82), and the exclusive pursuit of profit. *Eyrie*’s withered protagonist, Tom Keely, expresses a splenetic hatred for “diggers and dealers” (p. 141) and a dark cynicism towards consumerism, and towards money as an entirely negative force. Money “soothed all wounds” (p. 68) if we settled for work without any other redeeming features; it “talks” but has nothing “interesting to say” (p. 70); it funds mining “propaganda” that muffles the voice of environmental campaigns (p. 118); it suggests an absence of conscience (p. 208); it defines all things (“Cricket, he said. What’s that about? // Money, I guess” (p. 257)); it encourages violence to acquire it (“They want money. Otherwise they’ll fuck us up” (p. 265)); although it resolves nothing (“money would hardly be sufficient now” (p. 405)).

Often ironically, contemporary novelists place capitalism, big business, failed government, and the wealthy at the root of damage to psyches, bodies, and societies: to humans and the non-and-more-than-human. In *Carpentaria*, *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, *Three Dollars*, and *Eyrie*, logging, mining and resource companies stand in for capitalism, while in *Drylands*, *The White Earth*, *Things We Didn’t See Coming*, and *Eucalyptus*, agriculture often appears as darkly ruined/ruinous, not as unproblematic nostalgia or elegy object. *Carpentaria*, *Three Dollars*, *The Hunter*, and *Pacific Highway* portray capitalism as shadowy, alien, untouchable, and distant, yet also global and omnipresent: able to surveil, impinge upon, and intimately shape Life. For example, while multinational capitalist power in *Carpentaria* is, no doubt, foolish, arrogant, ignorant and careless, it is also
invasive and intent on surveillance: tapping into local Aboriginal people’s words, reshaping words for consumption by “the multinational mining people”, and beaming them across the globe “before you have even had a chance to end your sentence” (p. 99). Wright connects surveillance to the enforcement of control—“It could cast a security net over the whole social reality of Desperance” (p. 441)—and the threat of appropriation of local knowledge: “They lock em up all the information inside for them own eyes only” (pp. 158-159).

Capitalism exhibits mythical, religious, cult-like qualities in *The Hunter*, *Oyster*, *Eyrie*, and *Three Dollars*. For example, Hospital’s (1997) *Outer Maroo* combines cult and capital to produce a control society that has, at its heart, the pursuit of transcendence and wealth. Capitalism and religion traverse each other to recode and control desire, and religion becomes monetised. To be rich is to be saved. The genesis of Life is the genesis of wealth (p. 324). Wealth and salvation are fused together in the narration of Oyster’s first “manifestation” (p. 309) in *Outer Maroo*. Biblical allusions and scriptural stylings attach themselves to references to “hard-earned cash” (p. 328), to property, to getting “rich” (p. 330). Oyster’s mesmerism, the draw of wealth, the desire for opals, and the chance of redemption from apocalypse, combine to seduce. As foot-soldier of the corporation, *M (The Hunter)* embraces the centrality of capitalism to his life and to all Life and, at times, claims Life to be immanent to him, and, thereby, to capitalism. He contemplates his apotheosis:
tells himself that he is the only one: The only one, I am the only one. This thought grows light in him, incandescent. All the energy of the sun runs through him and into the earth; he is the source of all animation. (p. 167)

Contemporary novelists portray capitalism as violent and mad: as destructive, exploitative, pillager (Carpentaria, Eyrie, The Sound of One Hand Clapping, The Hunter, and Pacific Highway); as violent, psychopathic, and Kafkaesque/Orwellian in its logic (The Hunter, Oyster, The Sound of One Hand Clapping, Carpentaria, and Pacific Highway); as systemically corrupt (Eyrie, Things We Didn’t See Coming, and The Hunter); as repressive (Carpentaria, Eyrie, The Secret River, Oyster, and Things We Didn’t See Coming); and as tied to animal atrocities (Elizabeth Costello). In Carpentaria, when local people, such as Will Phantom, protest or resist, they are run out of town or shot at (pp. 172-173). In Pacific Highway the confident, unsettling, and strange reverse logic of the capitalist powers-that-be undergirds bizarre claims about the value of ecological destruction: “If you use the polluting by-products of industry instead of just dumping them, they can have all sorts of beneficial functions. Cleansing fog – wipes the beaches clean in a matter of seconds” (p. 115). For Wilding’s narrator, capitalism is monomaniacal, exploitative, destructive “evil” (pp. 142,156).

Capitalism is adaptable. Its crises are the engines of its “health” (Aryal & Massumi, 2012, p. 75), not its demise (Guattari, 2000, p. 32). For Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 152), repeated disruptions are “all the misfirings and
failures in a system that is constantly reborn of its own disharmonies”. With the qualified exceptions of *Carpentaria*, *Oyster* and *The Sound of One Hand Clapping*, capitalism’s dominance is preserved in the novels surveyed. In *Three Dollars*, those who profit from capitalism are convinced that it is not in crisis, and does not present one. Paul assures Tanya that “You’ll find it hard to convince anyone [...] that there is anything faintly resembling a crisis here” (p. 140). Indeed, it is not Paul who experiences the crisis but those who, it seems, are destined to be excluded. Similarly, in *Eyrie*, Australian’s believe themselves immune to global financial crises: “at home hardly a ripple. Endless reserves of mining loot. Safe as houses” (p. 54). And while, conversely, Wilding’s narrator suggests that capitalism “will eliminate itself, of that there is no doubt”, there is an admission that “we do not know how long it will take” (p. 153). Meanwhile, *M (The Hunter)* imagines Capital’s immortal, monstrous, corporate Gorgons regenerating when attacked: “chop one head off [...] and another will grow” (p. 19).

**Crises of agency**

If we are not the capitalist subject—and many empty variations are available—then we are excluded and in crisis. Indeed, even the capitalist subject is in crisis, or “at a critical juncture” (Lorraine, 2011, p. 155). The novels surveyed involve transformed characters, stripped of their agency: whether or not they resist, embrace, or are excluded by, capitalism. We find
among them Winton’s Keely and Stewie (2013); Astley’s Jim and Benny, and Brice (1999); Leigh’s M (2011); Hospital’s Outer Maroo residents and the captives at Oyster’s Reef (1997); Perlman’s Eddie and Tanya, and Paul and Gerard (2011); Scott’s Harley and the Nyoongar people, and Coolman and the colonisers (1999); Amsterdam’s Angel and the agents of government (2009); Flanagan’s Bojan Buloh and Helvi (1997), and his Sydney pole dancers, socialites and celebrities (2012); and Wright’s Pricklebush and swamp peoples, and Stan Bruiser and Warren Finch (2006a, 2013). These crises of agency are shaped, not least, by the entangling forces of identity, consumption, affective capitalism and biopower, informationalisation and resourcification, and inequality and oppression.

Capitalism proliferates identities and uses notions of individualism (desire to be different or the same) to assert control (Hardt & Negri, 2000, pp. xii-xiii). Wishing to stand out, the capitalist individual ends up unable to live freely (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Guattari, 2009, p. 215). Amsterdam (2009), Flanagan (2012), Hospital (1997), Leigh (2011), Perlman (2011), Scott (1999), Winton (2013), and Wright (2013) are among those writers concerned with the intersections of capitalism and identity. As Perlman’s Eddie recalls ironically, we develop empty expectations: "she, like me, had just finished high school and was waiting to see which faculty at which university would metamorphose her into a solid pay-as-you-earn citizen" (p. 32). Flanagan’s The Unknown Terrorist explores addiction to the cult of

---

35 Hughes-d’Aeth and Nabizadeh (2017) refer to ‘foreclosed agency’ (p. 440).
identity. We read about Jodie, a "pole dancer to whom the body mattered and who, at nineteen, was already a Botox junkie" (p. 5). How we look is central to the zeitgeist: "She [the Doll] had an open, oval face. It was exactly the wrong face for our age" (p. 6). The Americanisation of subjectivity progresses as the Doll's Australian half-brothers mouth Americanisms and dress "like two fat rappers" (p. 8).

Consumerism impoverishes the vitality of the subject like drug addiction (Reber, 2012, p. 84), commodifies the commodity seeker, and drives ecological damage. The idea of the individual spoilt by freedom of choice hides a contraction of subjectivity if, after Deleuze and Guattari (1983, p. 28), we consider freedom to be the opening out of opportunities for relations beyond what the market offers. Robinson (2013, p. 667) and Braidotti (2013, p. 61) see consumer identity as a bulwark of system stability: directing desire towards consumption not resistance; and limiting choices to those important to capitalism’s continuation. Indeed, in mass consumption cultures dominated by visual experience (Hetherington, 2007) and nurtured by the media (Killmeier, 2012, pp. 75-77), capitalist subjects define themselves by their pursuit of more and new goods and services. Their desire produces those goods and services rather than simply existing as a product of them (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, p. 11; Morton, 2000, p. 125; 2007b, p. 111). For many, there is no longer any outside of the workplace (Lazzarato, 1996; Marazzi, 2008; 2011, p. 51). Ways of life become modes

36 See also Braidotti and Dolphijn (2015, p. 19).
of employment and subjectivities other than the “consumer-producer” are subject to erasure (Lazzarato, 2004, p. 203; Stiegler, 2014, p. 43).

Clough (2010), Massumi (2002a, 2015), Aryal and Massumi (2012), and Lazzarato and Jordan (2014) count among those analysing capitalism’s use of techniques of expression that work on pre-rational responses. As forces for subject formation, affects move outside of / beyond the abilities of the subject to think (rationalise) them and, thereby, to control the results of encounters with them. By marshalling the flows of affect, capitalism informs the directions that Life/lives can take: augmenting or diminishing bodies’ capacities to enter into affirmative relations (Clough, 2010). Anderson (2012), Clough (2010) and others consider affect to be critical to the operations of biopower (Dreyfus, Rabinow, & Foucault, 1983, pp. 126-142). Namely, affect contributes to the shaping of consumers and producers (Picard, 2013) who can reliably perpetuate capital accumulation without significant resistance, including contemporary immaterial labourers who are ostensibly sheltered from traditional Fordist, workplace biopower deployments (Lazzarato, 1996; Virno, 2004).

Affective strategies naturalise capitalism in the bodies and minds of citizens and drive acceptance of its inevitability (Aryal & Massumi, 2012, p. 76) as our best and only possible social, economic and political world (J. Byrne & Martinez, 1989; Fukuyama, 1992; Zizek, 2008, p. 37). Central to

37 Rabinow and Rose (2006, pp. 203-204) suggest the forces of biopower are increasingly associated with the interests of Capital in value creation and capture via humans; traversing race, reproduction and genomic medicine (p. 204). Calarco (2016) includes animals (p. 13) and plant life (p. 15).
The continuance of the way things should be is the encouragement of fear of alternatives, and of an attraction to the need for stability and to the idea that stability is guaranteed by the capitalist model of competition and consumption (Barthes, 1972; Catherwood & DiVanna, 2008; Murray & Chesters, 2012). Flanagan’s *The Unknown Terrorist* connects the production(s) of consumerism with fear, terrorism and the desire to protect the modern “civilisation [...] under attack” (p. 31). The media transforms the character of the Doll into a figure of fear and hate and, as terrorist, she becomes a modern consumer commodity, demanded by the public. She tells her friend, Wilder:

‘People like fear. We all want to be frightened and we all want somebody to tell us how to live and who to fuck and why we should do this and think that. And that’s the Devil’s job. That’s why I’m important to them, Wilder, because if you can make up a terrorist you’ve given people the Devil. They love the Devil’. (p. 166)

A more quotidian function of affective capitalism is to drive consumption (Clough, 2010; Reber, 2012; Wendling, 2012). Amsterdam (2009), Carey (1996),38 Coetzee (2003), Flanagan (2012), Hospital (1997), Perlman (2011), Tsiolkas (2005), Winton (2013), and Wright (2013) are among those writers engaging critically with consumerism. Although he is not immune,

Perlman’s Eddie narrates a sustained critique of the cult of consumption. Subjectivity, he observes, has come to be defined by “trivial […] obsessions” (p. 93) with material possessions. Possessions are what “a man is, both to the world and to his wife” he observes, and “no one could be fairly blamed for seeing it that way” (p. 13). Identity is tied to consumption and Perlman employs the language of escalating addiction:

It might start with a vase but it progresses to china dinner services or silver cutlery and soon you are contemplating a personal loan to knock down one of the many walls you are having trouble paying off in order to install a brick fireplace because other people’s lives seem so augmented by having one. (p. 131)

Notions of self-made subjectivity are important to television’s reinforcement of the consumptive objectives of capitalism (Clough, 2010; Lazzarato, 2004, p. 190; Ouellette, 2014). Workers in media and television shows become affect commodities and transmitters: promoting consumption as a pathway to our desired selves. Television personalities/participants embody and pursue the features of paradigmatic capitalist subjects. In The Unknown Terrorist, the Doll and her colleagues’ aspirations are media-saturated with “the idea of beautiful women as cadaverous children” (p. 6). Growing up and guided by television shows, the Doll also believes that by renovating her apartment, “changed as miraculously with it would be the
Doll’s life” (p. 57). In *Three Dollars*, an advertising break during a hospital drama presents a man “resembling one of the television doctors” and expressing self-entrepreneurship’s allure:

[he] had come upon the ten points which distinguished successful people from the rest of us. He had managed to get these points down onto six cassette tapes […]. Some of those people happened to be near his swimming pool and were willing to testify to the beneficial effect these tapes had had on their lives. Previously they were us but now, after owning these tapes, they were them. (p. 244)

Beyond the media, some line workers are trained to transmit affect via facial expressions and body language (Lukács, 2010; Negishi, 2012). In *Eyrie*, affect workers are sad bodies. We might be reminded of Negishi’s (2012) Japanese affect workers—trained to smile—in Winton’s supermarket cashier’s “limp smile of boredom” (p. 17) and in his “fresh and endlessly replaceable” (p. 18) Fremantle charity workers. In *The Unknown Terrorist*, Flanagan connects trained affective responses, sex workers’ bodies, consumption, and money. The Doll’s job involves the routinized, repetitive and predictable transmission of lust affects. She knows how this affective power connects sexuality to the movement of money:
the Doll tried to entice them to tip, to persuade them that they
needed to see what it was that a woman had beneath her knickers
[…] but everything the Doll did, every word she said, every gesture
she made, everything she revealed and the many more things she
so carefully hid, all of it, she told herself, was about the money, to
get and to keep money, for all the things that money could buy and
for all the things that money made her feel. (p. 34)

Affective capitalism returns us to identity. Rather than constituting a realm of
expanded freedom of choice and self-creation, affective capitalism shapes
our sense of self, places boundaries around the available aspirational
selves, and monetizes being. The proliferation of mass subjectivities
(Guattari, 2000, p. 50), and the affective charges attached (attaching us) to
those subjectivities, drive production and consumption (Lewis, 2013, p.
451), which, in turn, feed into ecological damage.

As capitalism expands and runs out of earthly space and resources from
which economic surplus is extracted, attention turns to humans and the non-
and-more-than-human as profitable biological or informational resources
(Clough, 2010). The privileged human falls victim to a “unidimensionalizing
value system” (Braidotti, 2013, pp. 61-62, 71; Guattari, 2000, p. 30) and all
Life becomes resource for Capital (Cooper, 2008; Hardt & Negri, 2009;
Lazzarato, 2004, p. 205). Affect and biopower support this turn to new
sources of value exchange (Fumagalli & Lucarelli, 2011). Leigh (2011),
Scott (1999), and Wright (2006a), are among those novelists engaging with
the resourcification and informationalisation of Life under capitalism and colonialism. For example, Leigh—Thylacines as biotechnological assets—and Scott—colonial eugenics and assimilation—engage with the forces of control and repression. As Crane suggests (2010, p. 118), whether it is to be cloned or utilised genetically for commercial-military enterprise, or saved, the Thylacine in *The Hunter* has been entirely subsumed into Capital. In *Benang*, as colonial pastoralism delineates and orders country, colonists attempt to *scientifically* delineate, separate, and breed out Nyoongar people. Harley reads the “Captions to the photographs [of his people]; full-blood, half-caste (first cross), quadroon, octoroon” (p. 26). This photographing, categorising, and filing system at Chief Protector, Auber Neville’s office informationalises Nyoongar bodies and enables racism; processes that Clough (2010) deems central to the health of advanced capitalism.

Inequality, control, exploitation and exclusion are pivotal to capitalism and the shaping of subjectivities. Just as capitalist States sanction and control the available consumerist subjectivities, they also deny subjectivities that threaten accepted norms, and exclude those with whom they cannot cope, those whom they seek to exploit (D. S. Byrne, 2005), and those who are surplus to Capital’s requirements (Kennedy, 2005). Billions live in poverty, deprivation and exclusion: our “surplus humanity” (Davis, 2006). They are locked out of gains in wealth and living standards (Piketty & Goldhammer, 2014; W. Robinson, 2013), regardless of their proximity to holders of monetary wealth: in the global South (Davis, 2006), the North (Iceland, 2013; Seymour, 2013), and Australia (Saunders, 2011). Amsterdam (2009), Flanagan (1997, 2012), Grenville (2005), Hospital (1992, 1997), Perlman
(2011), Scott (1999), Tsiolkas (2005), Turner (1987), Winton (2013), and Wright (2013) are among the novelists engaging with issues of inequality, oppression, and exclusion (and resistance). McCann (2010), for example, notes that Tsiolkas offers glimpses of a “dislocated global underclass” in *Dead Europe*. Likewise, Turner's (1987) future Melbourne society is bifurcated into the haves (Sweet) and the have-nots (Swill): constituting ten and ninety percent of the population respectively. Furthermore, Wright’s withering critiques of persistent oppression in *The Swan Book* (2013, p. 50; Zable & Wright, 2013, p. 29) return us to the need for any mapping of Crises of Ecologies to attend to the experiences of Indigenous peoples and country.

**Indigenous Crises of Ecologies**

The rape of our land and people violated our relationship with the ruwe.\(^{39}\) Our ability to care for our self and land diminished. The dispossession of the naked peoples and the Raw Law\(^{40}\) is mirrored in the environmental devastation visited upon the ruwe. (I. Watson, 2015, p. 21)

---

\(^{39}\) Watson defines ruwe as “the territories of the First Nations Peoples” (p. 10).

\(^{40}\) Raw Law, Watson argues, is pre-existing Indigenous law practiced before and since colonisation.
In *Carpentaria*, Alexis Wright’s narrator talks of “two centuries full” of defeat (p. 407). For more than two-hundred years, Australian colonial-capitalism’s “dual war”, on Indigenous peoples *and* on country (Rose & Robin, 2004; I. Watson, 2015),\(^1\) has produced and perpetuated profound ecological devastation (T. F. Flannery, 1997; Griffiths & Robin, 1997; Horton, 2000; Lunt, Jones, Spooner, & Petrow, 2006; Reynolds, 1987, 1989, 2001, 2006, 2013; Rose, 2004; Rose & Robin, 2004). The colonial-capitalist *project*, initially agricultural in expression, entails a domination of the human and the non-and-more-than-human, and its core practices are often entirely unsuited to the Life of the Australian continent (Gill, 2005; Griffiths, 2001; Heathcote, 1987).\(^2\) Irene Watson (2015) writes of colonisation as ongoing genocide and the expression of ‘muldarbi’ (demon spirit). Many colonisers possessed and expressed Eurocentric, anthropocentric, ‘civilising’, rationalist mindsets (Arthur, 2002; Coralie, 2008; Rose, 2004; I. Watson, 2015). Mindsets that were bolstered by notions of *Terra Nullius* (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2013, pp. 257-259), *Vox Nullius* (Heiss, Minter, & Jose, 2008, p. 2), and Darwinian survival of the fittest; by capitalist axioms of trade and acquisition; by religion, science (and pseudo-science), and European concepts of law (Coralie, 2008, p. 52) and denial of...

---

\(^1\) Haraway (2011, para. 6), after Rose, writes of country, “as a multidimensional matrix of relationships: ‘it consists of people, animals, plants, Dreamings, underground, earth, soils, minerals, waters, surface water, and air…. All living things are held to have an interest in the life of the country...those who destroy their country destroy themselves’ (Rose 153-54). Furthermore, countries are not equivalent, interchangeable, abstract; country is materially and semiotically distinctive, each with its own human beings created for that country and responsible for it through the generations”.

\(^2\) Morton (2016) locates agrilogistics at the Anthropocene’s heart.
the existence of Indigenous law (I. Watson, 2015); all wrapped in outback mythologies (Gill, 2005; K. Myers, 2013), and, often, a sense of alienation from country: “settler fright. Scrub. Scrub-scare! It was alien, spiky, unwelcoming. To them, anyway” (Astley, 1999, p. 182). An “ethnocentric contempt for an ‘inferior’ race” (Coralie, 2008, p. 52) underpinned denials of Aboriginal humanity, along with claims of “savageness” (I. Watson, 2015, p. 7), unfitness to care for the land (Chatwin, 1988, p. 62; Tiffin, 2010, pp. 89-90), animality—“‘You might as well bloody bark, mate…’” (Grenville, 2005, p. 144)—and childlike lack of agency (p. 141). Benny Shoforth, an Indigenous character in Drylands, names it: “[T]hat master-race assurance” (p. 189). Colonial violence toward peoples and country was also rationalised by and perpetuates an onto-epistemological error (Rose, 2004, pp. 188-189): that there is some separable Nature, without agency, that can be distinguished from the Human. These mindsets informed the drive to control, instrumentalise and ‘resourcify’ country, and render passive, silence, and sweep aside Indigenous voices.


While Herrero (2014) suggests that Grenville’s The Secret River explores and defamiliarises aspects of the colonial mind, the novel also attends to the material overwriting of peoples and country: to physical and mental colonisation; to battles against Nature; to the separation of Human and Nature; and to acquisition as progress. Colonisers imposed European form on country (Brady, 1999, p. 141), hoping to access a sense of belonging and control. Sal Thornhill, for example:

had longed for trees: real trees, she insisted, with proper leaves that fall off in Autumn […]. A person was entitled to draw any picture they fancied on the blank slate of this place. […but] In spite of her care the garden did not thrive. (pp. 318-319)
Taming Nature is central to identity construction: “Chopping, clearing, building, he [Grenville’s protagonist, William Thornhill] was discovering a new William Thornhill, though: a man who could labour against wilderness until it yielded up a dwelling” (p. 160).

It has been argued that Indigenous fiction engages differently with notions of ecology (Brady, 1999; Brewster, 2010; Devlin-Glass, 2008b; Ravenscroft, 2012; C. E. Rigby, 2013). Indigenous knowledge practices commonly embrace: dynamic notions of deep, cyclical time pervading the present (I. Watson, 2015, p. 17); accumulated intimacy with local and always, already vibrant bodies (composing environment, landscape, nature, or space); understandings of irreducible human and non-and-more-than-human relationality and co-dependency for future sustainability; and the continuous collective expression (the practice, performance, and re-embodiment) of these qualities through cultural production or world-making.43 Ceremony—the performed repetition of relations with land, including story-telling via song, dance, movement, painting, and writing—is oriented toward the enactment and the repotentialisation of Life rather than its representation (Christie, 2015; Rose, 1996; I. Watson, 2015, p. 36).

Employing these expanded, transversal onto-epistemologies of continuity (Grieves, 2009; Muecke, 2004; 2005, pp. 89-92; Rose, 1996, 2012b; I. Watson, 2015), contemporary Indigenous writers attend closely to the ways in which human violence to country cannot help but transmit enduring

43 Christie’s (2015) perspective on Yolnu knowledge practices informed this summary.
violence back upon the human—bodily and spiritually—and vice versa. Kwaymullina (2016) writes that,

since all that would be defined in a linear sense as “past, present and future” is contained within the networks of relationships that comprise an animate reality, I understand the consequences of individual actions to radiate out across these relationships and hence have the potential to hold up or tear down all that was, is and will be. (p. 439)

A gap opens up between non-indigenous and Indigenous knowledge of country (Brady, 1999, p. 145; Gleeson-White, 2013, p. 1) when country is known/lived as a vital and vibrant text to be read, sung, danced, painted, and cared for, which cares for us, and which is continuous with people. In their novels—and elsewhere—Scott (1999, 2010; Zable, Bradley, Scott, & Munkara, 2011, pp. 57-58) and Wright (Brewster, 2010, p. 92) express Indigenous onto-epistemologies (cosmologies) of interconnection; break down notions of separable Human and Nature or non-and-more-than-human (Muecke, 2009); and articulate the ongoing urgent need for care for damaged, though still vital, country and peoples. In Carpentaria, the miner’s conceptualisations of Nature—as separate and instrumental resource that can be controlled and exploited and upon which acts of violence are justified—is contrasted with a cosmology “laden with its own creative
enormity” (p. 1). The serpent dreaming,\(^{44}\) and the ontological continuity of Nature and the Human—“It is about there being no difference between you and the movement of water” (p. 3)—are contrasted with coloniser conceptualisations of our relationship with the non-and-more-than-human: “‘If you can’t use it, eat it, or fuck it, then it’s no bloody use to you!’” (p. 35).

The swamp in *The Swan Book*—a future Indigenous detention camp, and, ostensibly, a ruined place—is a continuation both of the past and of the present violence: “And it’s still happening” (Zable & Wright, 2013, p. 29). Harley, in Scott’s *Benang* (1999), conveys the multiplicity of Indigenous peoples’ connections to country:

> it is not really me who sings […] through me we hear the rhythm of many feet pounding the earth, and the strong pulse of countless hearts beating. […] the creak and rustle of various plants in various winds, the countless beatings of different wings, the many strange and musical calls […]. (p. 7)

---

\(^{44}\) Irene Watson (2002) writes of the dreaming as “the creative processes which created the natural world and which seeks to continue the cycles of life” (para. 47) and, importantly, as continuously embodied in all Life and living practices. Dreamings come from a time and “place of lawfulness, a time before, a time now, and a time yet coming to us. A time when the first songs were sung, as they sang the law. Laws were birthed as were the ancestors - out of the land and the songs and stories recording our beginnings and birth connections to homelands and territories now known as Australia. Our laws are lived as a way of life: they are not written down as the knowledge of the law comes through the living of it. Law is lived, sung, danced, painted, eaten, walked upon, and loved; law lives in all things” (para. 16).
Harley’s perceptions fold together violated humans and the non-and-more-than-human:

We hummed along the black top. On either side of us trees, dying, turning white. Once there were many, many more of them, and they were alive, and they drank the rain and returned it to the sky. Now their roots shrivelled in salt water and – thus betrayed – they raised bare and brittle limbs to the sky. (p. 7)

Human and tree become indiscernible or continuous by virtue of the language of “limbs” and “alive”, the notion of so many being lost, and anthropomorphised gestures toward betrayal. Country and people are turning white: a reference to Australian assimilationist policies and eugenics.45

Anthropogenic global warming is bound up with colonial-capitalism and, together, they expose every body to crises. In engaging with climate change, The Swan Book stands apart from the contemporary Indigenous fiction surveyed. Global warming’s devastating forces and colonial-capitalist violence are entangled. Wright evokes apocalyptic events and her imagery folds together the human and the non-and-more-than-human world: countless climate refugees are lost, though they are not all Human: swans

45 Hughes-d’Aeth (2016) observes that “in the end, the logic of settler colonialism is eliminationist” (p. 27).
become “gypsies” (p. 15); trees die “slowly in ground bone dry” (p. 72); finches flee; deer are frozen into “statues of yellow ice” (p. 17); and turtles crawl “away to die” (p. 16).

Indigenous and non-indigenous fictions engage with Australia’s partially broken “great silence” (Stanner, 1969) about our colonial past and present violence. Moreover, perpetrator denial, forgetting, and the always inadequate su/repression of memory (Haraway, 2011) connect Indigenous and non-indigenous Crises of Ecologies. The novels surveyed do not evade the damage done; the culpability for that damage; the importance of naming the “smell” of death which Scott’s Harley detects in Benang (Birch, 2004, p. 152; Scott, 1999, p. 9); the eventual uncovering of what William Thornhill, in The Secret River, tries (and fails) to bury (p. 316). Decades ago, Kevin Gilbert suggested that violence continued “to scar and affect the thinking” (Healy, 1988, p. 83). More recently, Tony Birch (2004) suggests that Indigenous fiction, including Benang, presents Indigenous traumas and crises as anything but closed: neither by processes of revelation, nor by coloniser gestures of regret and reconciliation. Flanagan (1997) and Wright (Devlin-Glass, 2008b, p. 406; A. Wright, 2013) dwell upon exclusion, forgetting, silence and the past’s capacity to breach willed ignorance. In Hospital’s Oyster, we read of Outer Maroo as a metonymic outback town: tabernacle for forgetting, including the history of violence toward Aboriginals (Fraile, 2011). We find Ethel, a Murri46 woman with a memory for a past still returning, and the “Old Fuckatoo”, an airborne presence that brings with it

46 Indigenous peoples of Queensland and New South Wales, among whom there are numerous cultural/language groups.
the sense of things to be revealed: “that suggested ... but no one wished to think about what it suggested” (p. 4). Following the thoughts of Coralie (2008, p. 69) and Plumwood (2002a, p. 22), there exists, perhaps, a three-fold problem: our dis-attunement or constructed “deafness” toward our colonial history, our ecological damage, and our non-and-more-than-human interconnections. Kwaymullina (2016) asks, “is there truly a silence? Or is there a failure to hear?” (p.440).

This necessarily limited survey of Crises of Ecologies and contemporary Australian novels is important to this thesis in two ways. The exploration of contemporary Australian novelists’ literary engagements—with entangled ecological crises (Indigenous and non-indigenous), the eco-logical violence of capitalism, and the denuding of agency (Human and non-and-more-than-human)—complements and expands upon existing (recent) scholarship, and constructs a platform from which to launch the focus of this thesis. That is to say, while this survey explores these novels’ engagements with Crises, it does not address efficacy: the potential for these works to make a difference, or, as Modjeska puts it, the potential for “the imaginative exchange of fiction [...] to have] subversive freedom to create another order of truth” (2002, p. 219). Accordingly, Chapter 2 orients the focus of this thesis toward efficacy, with a critical overview of the contemporary academy’s expectations for the work of literature amid Crises of Ecologies.
Chapter 2 – Literary Hopes and Delusions

Hopes for the work of literature

[How do we tell such a story? (Latour, 2014a, p. 3)

[An overinvestment in the power of cultural representations, of the social importance of art and literature, becomes an understandable ethical temptation. (Clark, 2015, p. 196)

Theoretical and critical discourses on the work of literature amid Crises of Ecologies are as vibrantly unresolved as the Crises with which they engage. Scholarship constitutes and traverses many mobile, varying, dialogical, neological, and increasingly imbricated disciplines, among them: ecopoetics, biosemiotics, ecofeminism, feminist ecocriticism, material feminism, and sexuality/gender (‘queer’) ecocriticism; postcolonial-ecocriticism, as well as studies of Indigenous philosophies and practices;

47 See Bate (2000); Nolan (2014, 2015); Rigby (2004a, 2004b; 2016).
bioregionalism; animal studies; eco-cosmopolitanism; Frankfurt school ecocriticism; climate change studies; catastrophe and ecophobia studies; extinction studies; Anthropocene Studies; ecological affect studies; place and spatiality studies; environmental History and geography; environmental Justice ecocriticism; ecophenomenological ecocriticism; new nature writing; eco-historicism and ecocriticism of historical literary production; posthuman and embodiment studies; ecocritique, including negative and dark ecology; new materialist/ material

54 See Biro (2011); Morton (2007b, p. 13); Soper (2011).
59 See Bristow (2015); Goldberg (2015); Houser (2014); LeMenager (2012); Weik von Mossner et al (2014); White (2012).
61 See Cromwell and Levene (2007); Levene (2013); Penny Roberts, Johnson, and Levene (2010); Robin (1998, 2008, 2013); Robin, Griffiths, and Sherratt (2004); Robin and Steffen (2007);
63 See Adamson, Evans & Stein (2002); Myers (2005); Reed (2009).
64 See Westling (2011, 2014a).
68 See Morton (2007b, 2010b); Rigby (2004a).
ecocriticism;\textsuperscript{69} and the trans-disciplinary concerns of the environmental humanities.\textsuperscript{70} It is possible, nonetheless, to discern accords across these disciplines’ interdependent conceptualisations of the work of literature. First, literature’s capacities to critique and re-constitute conceptions, perceptions, and representations of the nature of the Human, of Being(s), and of Life and relations, including ecological crises. And second, literature’s capacities to reorient/renew ethics and better equip readers to adapt to, mitigate, reverse, or avoid the impacts of Crises.\textsuperscript{71}

Buell (1995) suggests that environmental crises are “of the imagination” (p. 2)\textsuperscript{72} and that one response is to re-imagine our relationships with nature. Rigby (2015) refers to literature cultivating “our ability to think ecologically”, to it giving the voices of all Life at risk “a better chance of being heard”, and to the need to transform how we read. Literature, she argues, should express an eco-social ethos, and help us to “remember […] the earth by attending to the interconnections that link all aspects of human culture, including the production and consumption of literary and other kinds of texts, to other-than-human entities and processes” (p. 126). Zapf (2016) also argues for literature as an affirmative participant in what he calls cultural ecology: a relational body possessing “transculturally effective ecological


\textsuperscript{70} See Bergthaller et al (2014); LeMenager (2014); LeMenager and Foote (2012); Robin (2008); Robin and Steffen (2007).

\textsuperscript{71} This framing echoes expectations for humanities teaching practices in Siperstein et al. (2017, pp. 21-22).

\textsuperscript{72} Also Huggan and Tiffin (2015).
potency” (p. 5) which informs our capacities for “sustainability” and transforms culture.

Scholars propose that literature can cultivate attention, engender new knowledge, and inspire new ethics via which we discover and embrace accountabilities and become actively responsive. For Kerridge, literature’s work is to “confront, convince and inspire large audiences” to change (2013, p. 356); engendering transformations in ethics and in the destructive living and acts of oppression and violence that shape so many human and non-and-more-than-human experiences. Murphy (2014) characterises climate change writers as working towards a “great awakening” (p. 162), and, as Johns-Putra notes, encouraging readers “to move from denial to ‘recognition, acceptance, and the will to act’” (2016, p. 274).

Anthropocentrism and dominant notions of the human subject (eurowestern, Enlightenment, Cartesian, Christian) are deemed instrumental in the genesis, expansion, and intensification of Crises of Ecologies (Braidotti, 2013; Latour, 2004; Plumwood, 2002b). Literature, it is argued, can participate in the overcoming and reconceptualising of ontological givens (Garrard, 2011; C. E. Rigby, 2015; K. Rigby, 2015). Readers become aware of our entanglements with that which many still believe to be separate: the non-and-more-than-human, and Crises of Ecologies. Similarly, Clark (2015, pp. 104, 192) and Kerridge (2013, p. 365) acknowledge expectations that literature might awaken readers—or remove our blinkers—to our destructive instincts and habits. Bergthaller et al (2014) propose that we become more aware of our “environing” practices—how we
materially shape(d) the world)—and, thereby, develop “greater 
reflexivity and a deeper understanding of human beings and their varied 
relationships” (p. 268). They write of the necessity to reveal violence arising 
from our anthropocentric “blind spots” (p. 265)—produced in part by how 
and what we write—while Kerridge (2013) calls for literary forms capable of 
“revealing what conventional forms obscure” (p. 361). Literature unsettles 
our attachments to binaries—Nature/Culture, Human/Animal, 
Object/Subject, and Matter/Discourse (Barad, 2003, 2007; Braidotti, 2002, 
2013; Haraway, 1997, 2003; Morton, 2007b)—and to the positioning of the 
non-and-more-than-human (and indeed many humans (Braidotti, 2013, p. 
63)) as a separable and “infinite body of matter” available for economic 
value creation (Macfarlane, 2016, para. 30). These literary potentials also 
encompass responses to ecophobia (Estok, 2011): the notion that nature is 
a fearsome object; a loathed and dangerous thing that can only result in 
pain and tragedy if left in control. For Estok (2014), literary engagements 
with ecophobia can play a part in revealing and demystifying “what it is 
about nonhuman agency that evokes such strong resistance” (p. 130) and in 
cultivating apprehension of our unavoidable and irreducible immersion in it. 

Beyond this myth-busting, literature holds potential to enrich readers’ 
awareness of Life’s vitality: re-constituting the non-and-more-than-human as 
active rather than passive matter; as agentic rather than entirely malleable 
in our human hands; as unpredictable and indeterminate; and in productive 
and non-linear relations with us. Jane Bennett (2004, 2010), Rose (2013), 
and Plumwood (2010) count among those acknowledging art’s potential to 
re-enchant and re-enspirit the material and, thereby, recuperate our
apprehension of—and renew our ethics regarding—the agency and the value of the non-and-more-than-human, including, though not limited to, the animal (Alaimo, 2010, 2016; Calarco, 2016; E. Flannery, 2015, p. 143; McFarland, 2014). Rigby (2013) argues that literature can bring us (to) non-and-more-than-human voices that have been silenced, although, she cautions, such effects are not characteristic of the “eurowestern literary genre of the novel […which] is predominantly inter-human” (pp. 131-132). LeMenager (2012) notes the work done by Zunshine and others on literature’s potentials to cultivate empathy for all manner of others via informing our theories of mind: “literary forms prompt us to imagine, as communities, a world otherwise” (p. 575).

In keeping with ideas of material agency, and with her insights into the transcorporeality of being, Alaimo (2012) writes that the perpetuated “scientific stance of [Human] distancing and mastery [in relation to the non-and-more-than-human…] must be supplanted by more complicated models of entanglement and emergence” (pp. 489-90). While I return to these ideas in Chapter 3, I note here that literature can participate in a re-conception of the imbricated Human, not only in its decentering. Writers and readers can engage in exercises in humility: “to overcome anthropocentrism” (Garrard, 2012, p. 202) and human attitudes of “mastery and possession” (Serres, 1995, p. 23) towards the non-and-more-than-human, and to support environmental justice. Subjectivity is reconceptualised as enmeshed with, or as the dynamic folding of, non-and-more-than-human bodies and their forces. Notwithstanding the necessary illumination of our continuing complicity in epidemic acts of violence towards animals, Human/animal
distinctions are displaced (Calarco, 2016, p. 8) and common qualities and vulnerabilities (Alaimo, 2016, p. 12), even indiscernibilities, are explored. Writers and readers become immersed in the multiplicity, strangeness (Morton, 2010b), toxicity (Alaimo, 2010), and “polyphonic song” of the damaged earth (Bate, 2000; C. E. Rigby, 2004a, p. 437), and torn from our presumed position of ascendant separation. Such literary reconstitutions and reorientations of being and of bodily relations hold prospects for heightening readers’ apprehension of our mutually entailed vulnerability amid Crises of Ecologies.  

The work of de-naturalising the world, and reconstituting and reorienting knowledge of Crises of Ecologies, goes further than the revitalisation of the non-and-more-than-human and its imbrication with the Human. Literature is also implicated in enabling an ethics of networked complexity and, therein, a coming to terms with Crises that operate across multiple, spatio-temporal scales. Heise (2008), for example, contends that literature can contribute to cultivating our “sense of planet” (p. 21) and of interrelated global/transnational forces operating beyond the local, though always felt intimately, shaping us and the places we think we know. Ethical actions, Heise contends, can, therefore, only be based upon an apprehension of the local-and-more-than-local networked relations within which those actions take place. The possibilities for literature, here, are at least twofold: first, to convey the “mutually constitutive” deterritorialised relations that encompass the local and the global (Ray, 2009, p. 879), thereby enabling attentiveness.

---

to global phenomena (in particular risks) that are expressed intimately; and, second, to inspire a sense of accountability to the (often distant) bodies entangled in those relations.

Literature, then, is involved in the work of revealing, resisting, navigating and transforming the entanglements of qualities of Crises of Ecologies with socio-material oppressions: sexual, racial, species, phyla-related, and otherwise existential. Importantly, we find feminist/female theorisations, critical studies and practices of cultural production as precursors to (and advancers of) many of the conceptualisations of this work (Gaard, 2010; Oppermann, 2013, p. 28). Ecofeminist thought often focuses on working toward sexual and environmental justice through literary critiques: of “master narratives of domination”, including the “categories of gendered human and nonhuman bodies” (Gaard et al., 2013, p. 3); of the forces producing gender and their shaping of ecological agency and relationships; of discourses of subordination, including feminisations and otherings of women and the-non-and-more-than-human; and of reproductive injustices, including overpopulation and the effects of ecological crises on reproduction. This work also involves literature that enables explorations of affirmative potentials still available to those who are reduced to identities. Ecofeminism recognises the varying, contextually particular expectations and potentials for the writer and reader amid Crises of Ecologies. On this matter, Kerridge (2013) notes that, in the colonial context, literature is a vehicle via which those silenced (or who choose silence) find expression. Writing, he argues, enacts and enables resistance to “historical ideologies
legitimating the oppression of women and those legitimating the heedless
everification of natural environments” (p. 369).74

Banerjee (2016) contends that literature can express an “activist
aesthetics” (p. 194) amid post-colonial/neo-colonial Crises of Ecologies.
Literature establishes the relations between colonialism and ecological
violence, and readers’ connections with the suffering of temporally and
geographically distant and proximate others. Garrard (2011) also notes (with
some caution) that Reed (2009) sees literary texts as acts, and enablers, of
political advocacy in colonial contexts, making visible where violence to
people and places go “hand in hand” (pp. 53-54). Nixon (2011) affirms
literature’s potential to reveal or attune readers to the “slow violence”
excerpted upon bodies amid Crises of Ecologies, via “devising iconic symbols
that embody amorphous calamities as well as narrative forms that infuse
those symbols with dramatic urgency.” (p. 10). In an interview with Kumar
(2011, para. 4), Nixon asks, “In an age that genuflects to the divinities of
spectacle and speed, how do we take seriously the forms of environmental
slow violence that are deficient in instant drama but high in long-term
catastrophic effects?”. For Nixon (2009), literary acts of human and non-
and-more-than-human “witnessing” such violence and its impacts can
restore agency to violated bodies. He concurs with Banerjee’s observation
that literary revelations and critiques, of the entanglements of colonial-

74 See E. Flannery (2015, p. 140); Gaard (2016); and Bergthaller et al. (2014, p. 271) on “writer-
activists” and environmental and social justice.
capitalist cultural-ecological damage, can be delivered with aesthetic and political force, while avoiding explicit didacticism (p. 449).

Kerridge (2013) concurs with Clark that literature has the potential to “imaginatively [explore] the futures that may arrive” or that already are with us (p. 350) and Bergthaller et al (2014) suggest that mapping (writing) our acts of “environing” might “make it possible for us to imagine alternatives” (p. 272). Suffering from “crisis fatigue”, Glotfelty (2016) argues for (non-fictional and fictional) “narratives of ecological restoration offer[ing] a creative path of hope that can inspire effective action from the grassroots and provide an antidote to crippling despair” (p. 177). Albeit, others suggest that literature might also instil in readers a fear, not of nature, but of the future (and the present); issue a warning of loss; or engage in apocalyptic attempts to shock people to change. Robert Macfarlane (2016) writes that “Art and literature might, at their best, shock us out of the stuplime [sic]”, the “outrage-outage”, and the incapacitations produced by the overwhelming aesthetic force of the Anthropocene (para. 20). Literature might cultivate an ethics more appropriate to our state of affairs and to our future “increasingly common” eco-catastrophes (K. Rigby, 2015, p. 142). It might not signal ways out but, instead, prepare us for our entanglements (Collings, 2014; Kingsnorth, 2013), cultivating non-anthropocentric conceptions/perceptions of Life, and, perhaps, opening us to the notion of a world without the human (Colebrook, 2014a).
And “delusions of self-importance” (Clark, 2015, p. 198)

It is difficult for literature to accommodate the paradoxes of Crises of Ecologies: their inaccessibility and strange intimacy; their unrepresentability and unavoidable material-discursive presence. One classical idea of the work of art, including literature (Carroll, 1999, pp. 20-23), is that it can bring readers closer (reconnect us) to an alienated Nature, and, no doubt, this could apply also to Crises of Ecologies. However, philosophers, theorists and critics (including ecocritics) acknowledge the difficulties with representational literary strategies in this regard (Gifford, 2008; Morton, 2007b; Phillips, 1999, 2003, 2013). They question writers’ capacities to effect a reconnection of reader and the non-and-more-than-human through descriptive prose or poetry, by evoking the things of Nature, or the atmospherics or ambience of the outside/environment (C. E. Rigby, 2004a).

Indeed, Rigby (2015, p. 140) is not alone in noting the risks of relying upon assumptions that human writing can disclose the world; such reliance serving to perpetuate our hubristic reliance on the privileged capacities of the human to know the world.

Deleuze (1994) offers a compelling critique of representation which is directly relatable to writers’ and readers’ difficulties in capturing Life and Crises. For Deleuze, representations are mediations and maskings, fantasies and fixings (pp. 7, 17-19, 191, 264). They hide Life’s infinite complexity and they gesture, instead, towards identity, analogy, opposition and resemblance (p. 29). These operations of the rational mind risk blocking our access to the vitality and the vibrancy that flows behind the concepts we
create, and to what flows beyond “the limits of the organised; tumult, restlessness and passion under apparent calm” (p. 42). If Life is processual, and not static, then representations risk fixing the aspects of the world that are represented and, thereby, closing off the prospect of something new happening.

Morton (2010b) suggests that “ecological thought” embraces non-identity and the non-definitive character of Life, such that there are no clear delineations for self or objects (p. 8). Closer inspection of the world yields greater complexity, strangeness and singularity as well as imbrication, enmeshment and accountability: “And yet there is not nothing; there is not even nothing”, Morton concludes (2007b, p. 78). Consequently, representational approaches to truly conveying Life’s material complexity risk unmaking or dissolving literature. Nor can we hope to represent a concept that is not materially real beyond its cultural construction (in this case, Nature), and expect that representation to connect us more fully to something that was not there in the first place (Morton, 2007b; Phillips, 2003, p. 161).

In representational attempts to bring us closer to Crises of Ecologies and the non-and-more-than-human, literature risks re-affirming anthropocentrisms and implicitly validating the destructive relations shaping Crises. The very notion of an inside and an outside, of separation, is fundamentally important to the genealogies and cartographies of ecological damage. As noted in Chapter 1, the initiating error is to assume some disconnection between Human and Nature, rather than an interconnection
or ongoing and unavoidable relationality. Moreover, representation risks perpetuating notions of separation by virtue of its intent to capture something. In order to represent, something must be negated, something must be held in opposition to that represented, when what is there is, in truth, un-representable. Furthermore, where it seeks to re-inscribe differences between things—and even where it purports to be a work of reconnection as it does so—Art remains rooted in the idea of opposition and separation and, thereby, still gestures toward the idea of our condition being one of alienation from the world (Morton, 2007b, pp. 22-23). As I discuss in Chapter 3, one of Morton’s (2007b, 2010d) proposed responses is for literature to work with/on our strange estrangement in the world, rather than demystifying or reconnecting us to it; helping us to see Life and our Self—our “no-self”—anew (2007b, p. 175).

Literature, it appears, is both in crisis and flush with potential amid Crises of Ecologies. While Zapf (2016) confidently proclaims that “the enormous ecocultural potential of imaginative literature […] is just beginning to find the attention […] that it deserves” (p. 11), for others, high hopes seem risky. Garrard (2012) notes Clark’s challenge for literature: to “convey […] the seriousness, and the elusiveness, of global environmental crisis” (p. 243). In his work on the Anthropocene, Clark’s (2014) problematisations of representation have a familiar ring: irreducible material-discursive entanglements; our inability to adequately gauge the scales at which our actions and their effects operate; and the interconnections across existential

75 See Colebrook (2013a, 2014a); Morton (2013a).
registers that derange and outstrip Humanist conceptions of world and Life.\textsuperscript{76} Garrard (2012) suggested that this is why so “few serious works of literature, especially fiction or poetry” were written about climate change (p. 238).

Clark (2014) writes that, while literature might well break down Humanist binaries, “What was once the nature/culture distinction becomes the incalculable interaction of imponderable contaminated, hybrid elements with unpredictable emergent effects” (p. 80). He wonders how, in the Anthropocene, we are to think and write “almost everything at once” (2015, p. 78). After Clark, Flannery (2015) asks:

\begin{quote}
how do writers and artists respond in representational terms to the ‘unimaginable’ scalar proportions of anthropogenic climate change and environmental degradation? […] The urgency and scale of the nature of humanity’s relationship to its planetary environment in the contemporary moment, then, force an acute sense of both ontological and epistemological crises. (pp. 149-150)
\end{quote}

Some \textit{Anthropocenic} literary scholarship still conceives of the problematics of literary efficacy in representational terms—of finding an image that gives meaning, or a unitary vision that makes climate change

\textsuperscript{76} Bergthaller et al (2014, p. 265) comment upon “the mind-bending ambiguities forced upon us” (p. 265).
visible (Macfarlane, 2016, para. 26) —while others recognise the errand, couched in representational terms, as quixotic (Clark, 2010; Morton, 2013a). Literature faces the not necessarily negative challenge of engaging readers amid these Anthropocenic disruptions: with qualities of Crises that move beyond our con/perceptual grasp; with the limits to (and the illimitability of) our Humanity; with the warping and breaking of modes of cognition and sense-making once deemed reliable (Clark, 2012, 2015); and with the “short-circuiting [of] recognition” (Colebrook, 2014a, p. 25).

Clark (2015) cautions against making “bizarre” claims for literature (p. 196). He recommends scepticism in the face of those who might “ascribe an implausible amount of power to cultural representations, as if these and these alone had decisive agency in how people live and act, produce food, use resources, and so forth” (2014, p. 77). Indeed, and particularly in relation to Crises of Ecologies, there exists a gap between expectations for literature’s work and the evidence that it does such work. While the fields of scientific and empirical studies of literary experience are expanding, work on how literature changes minds, ethics and behaviours specifically in respect of Crises of Ecologies, is in its early stages. Other attributional temptations also need qualifying: all manner of forces participate in subjective and socio-material transformations, including, and stretching well beyond, novels and their audiences.

77 See Bortolussi and Dixon (2003, 2015); Burke and Trosclair (2017); Caracciolo (2016); Danta and Groth (2014); Jacobs (2017); Herman (2000, 2013); Popova (2014); Zunshine (2006).
We might argue that literary efficacy is, at least in part, a function of diffusion. Garrard's (2010) “Horton hears a Who problem of ecocriticism – is anyone listening?” (p. 34) applies to literature too, and Bergthaller (2014) concurs that “When policy makers and mainstream media outlets seek expertise on the environmental crisis, they seldom turn to environmental historians and philosophers, much less ecocritics” (p. 262). Nor, I suspect, do they often turn to novelists. The follies of assuming that literary intent drives literary reception are well rehearsed. The potentials a writer or literary scholar might reasonably perceive in a novel are not necessarily the work the novel will do for readers encountering it (Caracciolo, 2016; K. Rigby, 2015), and never all the work of which it is capable. Nor do encounters that transform a reader's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or capacities, make particular actions certain (Huggan & Tiffin, 2015, p. ix). Changing one’s understanding of climate change does not necessarily change how one shops or uses energy resources. Indeed, Dodds (2011) argues that psychological defence-mechanisms—‘splitting’ and dissociation—help explain why an acceptance by a reader of a link between consumption and risks to human existence does not lead to changes in behaviour (p. 44). Garrard (2010, p. 25) also notes Kerridge’s concern with “the baffling and disastrous disconnection between cognitive awareness of climate change and the generally insignificant alterations in lifestyle we seem prepared to countenance”.

78 See P. Sullivan (2002) for a succinct overview of thinkers.
Is it realistic to expect writers not only to be able to conceive of socio-politico-cultural solutions to Crises but also to then produce literary vehicles that productively disseminate the “secrets” of those solutions? Where an encounter with a novel changes reader’s behaviours, it does not necessarily follow that those changes will be sufficient and occur at the necessary scale(s), or that literature’s slow work (Bergthaller et al., 2014, p. 265) can be done in time.\(^\text{79}\) Indeed, Clark (2012) points out that the “derangements of scale” attending the Anthropocene (and I suggest Crises of Ecologies more broadly) may well diminish “the scope for the likely significance or effect of any one action by any single group” (p. 150). Clark (2015) challenges assumptions that art will have only an affirmative effect, and states that “It is hard […] to endorse here the assumption [in this instance, by Timothy Morton] that knowledge of interconnection must somehow lead to an ethic of care” (p. 189). Art, Clark contends, might well produce fear, disgust, anxiety, fatalism, and inaction rather than affirmation (p. 189).\(^\text{80}\) He also queries whether artists’ attempts to respond differently run the risk of being “recuperated” into the very “ethical and cultural agendas one would have expected [them] to question”. Narrated shocks might become “sources of pleasure” (pp. 187-189)—entertainments assigned a market niche—and not the transformative encounters written about decades ago by Deitering (1996), and Pollak and MacNabb (2000).

\(^\text{79}\) See Cohen, Colebrook & Miller (2016, p. 15), and Morton (2016, pp. 36-37).

\(^\text{80}\) Conversely, Siperstein et al. (2017) argue that despair and the undermining of self, and of the habitual upon which self might rely, might also be “a precondition for fresh thought, new habits, and rethinking the kinds of socioecological relationships that generate liveable futures” (p. 23).
Clark (2015) writes that the “institution of the novel [its very human constitution as written and read text] forms a limit both to the possible impact of climate change fiction and to the hope […] that the informed reading of it can take on a crucial role of political and social leadership” (pp. 189-190). Literature, he claims, stands at an “indeterminate threshold” because it can engender experiences of both liberation (p. 191) and “entrapment” (p. 192). It works to release us “from false modes of reality taken as a norm” (p. 191), and to have us encounter “those structural and embodied limits and stupidities in which even the most intelligent are caught” (p. 191); the effects of which might inspire inaction as well as action.

Writing on the Anthropocene, Clark (2015) asks how writers can overcome “the mode of the reader’s engagement” (p. 189) with fiction, namely the awareness that it is fiction and therefore at risk of being dismissed as no more than an imaginative representation of our Crises. When Clark expresses concern that reader expectations of “the institution of the novel” can neutralise its content (p. 189), he risks encouraging a presumption that the reader is at the controlling centre of an encounter with a literary work. While this concern might not be conventionally unreasonable, it too might risk “recuperating” the very anthropocentrism Clark worries artists might (re)produce, and limit the scope of our (re)conceptions of the agency of the work of art.

While it is understandable to harbour reservations about literature’s efficacies, it is also prudent to continue to pursue its potentials to make a difference. An absence of empirical evidence does not mean that
discussions of the potential of literature and a conceptualisation of the work it might do are without value. Nor are the trajectories literary practice can take delimited by the problematics of representation. Indeed, Kerridge (2014b, p. 380) asks “Are there forms of imaginative representation that can begin to approach the visceral experience?”, gesturing toward “more-than-representational” (Lorimer, 2008) literary trajectories.

Might writers also pursue more contextually suitable (sensitive), more-than-representational practices to respond to Crises of Ecologies? In Australia, might non-indigenous people become more open to Indigenous cultural productions (philosophy, story, painting, literature, dance, music and so on) that express and cultivate different ecological knowledges and, consequently, different capacities to engage with Crises of Ecologies? Irene Watson (2015) asserts that “there are other ways of knowing and being” (p. 146), while Alexis Wright wonders why “we are not hearing about the ancient stories of how to respect the weather?” (p. 78) and writes of the “deep knowledge” in the custody of Indigenous peoples, “some of which may be shared if it is respected, honoured and upheld” (p. 79). Birch (2016) argues for social justice via respect for Indigenous knowledges:

Greater recognition of the knowledge maintained within Indigenous communities relative to localized ecologies and the affects of climate change would go some way to addressing injustice by

81 See Brady (1999); Haraway (2011); Kearnes (2016); Potter (2017); Plumwood (1999); Rawlings (2009, p.124); Rose (2004); Rose and Robin (2004).
configuring Indigenous people globally as valuable arbiters of change rather than the helpless victims of the first World (p. 92)

Birch notes Degawan’s and Krupnik’s (2011) argument that “Their accumulated knowledge makes them excellent observers of environmental change and related impacts” (p. 93).82 A number of scholars argue that Indigenous art and thought offer, to use Rawlings’ (2009) words, a "cultural foundation to incorporate sustainability into our lifestyles" (p. 124). Others note the potentially affirmative resonances between Indigenous philosophies and non-indigenous animistic, materialist, biocentric, ecocentric, and panpsychic thought, and the necessity for non-indigenous people to develop other knowledges (Devlin-Glass, 2008a; Mathews, 2006; Plumwood, 2002b; Rose, 1996, 2004, 2008a, 2012b, 2013).

There are risks associated with calls to embrace Indigenous knowledge and, to be fair, they do not go unappreciated.83 Irene Watson (2015) raises the spectre of cultural appropriation: “we are now experiencing a new face of the muldarbi as it appropriates our culture and laws to legitimise its own unlawful identity” (p. 85). Brady (1999) warns that it “is simply not possible, nor would it be right, for non-Aboriginal Australians to adopt Aboriginal culture. This would involve a repetition of the original [and continuing] act[s] of appropriation, attempting to take possession of the culture as we took

82 See also Langton (1998).
possession of the land” (pp. 146-147). Judith Wright also notes that any such transformations would be slow: "It will take four or five hundred years for us to become indigenes; and to write poetry, unless you are an indigene, is very difficult" (Strauss 1995, p59).  

Certainly, Birch, Irene Watson, and Alexis Wright stand among Indigenous writers who argue that non-indigenous colonisers have still not learnt the value of Indigenous knowledges to their survival. While Birch argues for the necessity of engagement with “a new way of seeing” and sees potential for innovation amid climate change via such engagements (p. 97), Irene Watson (2015) expresses pessimism: “are the colonialists able to comprehend their plight when for centuries they have known us as the ‘Indigenous victim’ and they don't know how to begin to see their own losses?” (p. 88). She suggests that respectful moves towards different knowledges require an expansive renunciation of many aspects of “the colonised self” by non-indigenous people (p. 146): a stepping outside the philosophies underpinning the continuation of colonial power and of human and non-and-more-than-human genocide. Non-indigenous Australians, it appears, have our own, perhaps unbridgeable, gaps to close.  

If colonisers have not, so far, closed the gaps in ecological knowledge, and cannot hope to do so any time soon, what can we possibly expect to

84 See also Haraway (2011). Others are less optimistic about timeframes (Bignall, Hemming, & Rigney, 2016, p. 472).

85 This is not to pass over the valuable works on (re)orientations of non-indigenous relations with country (including Carter (1996), Muecke (2004, 2005, 2009), Plumwood (1999, 2002a, 2002b), and Rose (1996, 2004, 2008a, 2012b, 2013)) but to acknowledge the task’s immensity.
achieve with regard to finding responses to Crises of Ecologies? If coloniser history attests to our inability to care for country, while those who are able to care for country remain disenfranchised, dispossessed and denied agency to make a difference (Patton, 2001, 2002; I. Watson, 2015), what is to be done next and who is capable of doing it? If non-indigenous solutions to Crises of Ecologies are based upon inadequate knowledge of country, and alien concepts of knowledge as thing rather than practice (Christie, 2015), will we cause more damage? How will these solutions remain respectful: of knowledges borne by the descendants of this continent’s earliest human inhabitants: and to “the legitimacy of beliefs that have held this land together for thousands of years” (A. Wright, 2011a, p. 80)? Such questions should be profoundly discomforting for non-indigenous Australians—and, no doubt, for Indigenous people—when considering the prospects for literary responses to Crises of Ecologies amid Australia’s hardly post-colonial state of affairs. Hughes-d’Aeth (2009) gestures toward these challenges: “our literature bends with the effort of resolution” (p. 123).

In the context of these varied hopes and concerns for the efficacies of literature, I concur with Clark (2015, p. 189) that “Discussions of art, literature […and Crises of Ecologies] are at an extremely early stage”. In Chapter 3, as one response to, but not as a solution for, the issues discussed here, I propose other trajectories for literary practices amid Crises of Ecologies. Assembling Deleuze’s, Guattari’s, and New Materialists’ thought on Life/ecology, sense, and the intensive qualities of literature, I

---

86 See Harris (2015, pp. 8-9) on Tredinnick’s articulation of this problem, and Minter (2013).
explore other “socio-political functions of literature and its reception” (Clark, 2015, p. 190). These explorations go beyond Clark’s perceived “institution of the novel” and the representational problematics of literature. I argue for literature’s intensive capacities to produce the new rather than reveal the well-worn-out, and for its potential to cultivate ecological sense and augment our powers of living amid Crises of Ecologies. I also argue that Indigenous writing can inform, affirm and enrich these conceptualisations of literature’s intensive potentials.
Chapter 3 – Other Trajectories

[T]hinking with Deleuze and Guattari does not merely supplement ecocritical practice. Rather, it helps conceptualize the connection between literature and ecology in the first place and thus constitutes new practice. (Chisholm, 2011, p. 574)

Having established a substantive engagement with Crises of Ecologies among contemporary Australian novelists in Chapter 1, and outlined expectations—and problems—for literary efficacies amid these Crises in Chapter 2, I turn now to the focus of this thesis: a Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist conceptualisation of ecological sense\(^\text{87}\) and literary practices for Crises of Ecologies. I first introduce how Deleuze, Guattari, and New Materialists’\(^\text{88}\) ideas of Life, ecology, living, subjectivity, relationality, and ethics are of value amid Crises of Ecologies. I outline how these ideas inform notions of the work of literature in cultivating ecological sense, and propose three literary practices—writing the posthuman; writing affect and becomings; and minor literature—with potentials to cultivate ecological sense and our capacities for subjective resistance and renewal amid Crises of Ecologies: our powers of living. In the chapter’s final section, I argue for the contributions these conceptualisations can make to Australian and international literary critical fields, and, to explore these literary practices

---

\(^{87}\) I acknowledge Chisholm’s (2011) and Miall’s (2007) prior use of the term “ecological sense”.

\(^{88}\) See Dolphijn and van der Tuin (2012; 2010) on New Materialisms’ etymologies.
and their capacities for transformation, I propose studies of three contemporary Australian novels: Tim Winton’s *Eyrie* (2013), Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013), and Janette Turner Hospital’s *Oyster* (1996).

A Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialism

Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist ideas can be transformative: of our approaches to Life, ecology, relationality, ethics, and, thereby, the self and the other; and of our capacities to live amid Crises of Ecologies. Embracing philosophical “counter-memories” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 7) and scientific disciplines, these thinkers have in common a materially grounded, processual world-view of heterogeneity and continuity. They are concerned with immanence and the relational production of the real, and they eschew oppositional dualisms—such as Nature/culture, Human/Nature, mind/body—as points of departure for our understanding of ecology and our responses to Crises of Ecologies. While they do not reject the

---

89 This counter-memory (involving Spinoza, Leibniz, Nietzsche, Hume, Whitehead and Bergson) resists (and re-writes) the dominant vectors of Western thought shaped, for example, by Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hegel, Freud. See, for example, Deleuze on Spinoza (1988b, 1990a), on Nietzsche (2006), on Hume (1991), on Bergson (1988a) and on Leibniz (1993); Nail on Deleuze and Spinoza (2008); Robinson on Deleuze, Bergson and Whitehead (2009); and Sellars (2007) and Bell (2009) on Deleuze and Hume.

linguisticality\textsuperscript{91} of the real, language is not granted ontological and epistemological pre-eminence (DeLanda, 2006, pp. 45-46). No doubt, language intervenes in the world but it is not the only intervening force, and it is also shaped in the world.\textsuperscript{92}

Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialists seek no home in the Human or Nature because these concepts deny Life’s varied and irreducibly entangled registers. Nature, Barad (2003, p. 827) suggests, is “neither a passive surface awaiting the mark of culture nor the end product of cultural performances”. It is neither “mute” nor “immutable” and culture is not its sole change agent.\textsuperscript{93} Morton (2007b) promotes the erasure of Nature—as concept, thing, reality—if ecological thought (which entails an ethics) is to be undertaken. He asserts the enmeshed character of Life, rejecting the idea of the human and, thereby, Nature’s own interiority or separability, as “over there” (p. 1). It is not, then, a matter of reconnection, of bridging a gap, but of erasing a preconceived subject and object and replacing them with Life in its unspeakable complexity, its irreducible entanglements, and its inherent strangeness (p. 23).

Deleuze and Guattari’s (1983, 1987) appeals to machinics gesture toward the untotalisable, processual multiplicity of Life’s productions:\textsuperscript{94} their

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{91} Gadamer’s term (Schmidt, 2000, p. 1).
\item \textsuperscript{92} Deleuze and Guattari wrote expansively on language and its work (Deleuze, 1989, 1990b, 1997, 2000; Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, 1987).
\item \textsuperscript{93} See also Herzogenrath (2010a, p. 5), and Latour (2004) on ‘naturecultures’.
\item \textsuperscript{94} Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 33) conceptualise complex dynamic assemblages (structures) that do not derive from some prior essence or unity, and qualitatively vary as they conduct their relations. Everything is a multiplicity in that it is composed of many elements in dynamic relations. All things are more than one, or of the many: collective rather than separate and unified. If we consider multiplicities as intensive bodies, then we might also note that a change to the components of the multiplicity will
\end{itemize}
singularity, their transversality, their openness to transformation, and their non-linearity. Life, then, is the production(s) of continuously varying, transversal encounters between desiring-machines which are not necessarily physical entities (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983). Among machines there are "resonances, alliances, feedback loops between various regimes, signifying and non-signifying, human and nonhuman, natural and cultural, material and representational" (Herzogenrath, 2010a, p. 5). Machinic Life is neither deep nor shallow, but flat (non-hierarchical), intensive, and constructive. The living of desiring machines is not bounded by separable realms (neither subject nor object), nor by terms such as natural, artificial (Deleuze, 1995, p. 155), animal, insect, or human. Nor are there ontological priors—structures, identities, things—only processes of relations, aggregations or encounters, producing machinic assemblages which are dynamic and impermanent wholes, characterised by relations of exteriority rather than interiority (DeLanda, 2006). These relations are bifurcatory, rhizomic not linear, and causal but not teleological or determinist. We might re-conceive of Life as “an infinite sum, that is, a sum which does not change its intensive capacities. Consequently, the notion of multiplicity draws us towards the idea of the impact of changes to ecologies not solely being limited to numerical or extensive changes, but having implications for the health and intensive qualities of those ecologies (which are themselves, of course, multiplicities). The notion of multiplicity also opens up the irreducible potential for bodies to change (Roffe, 2005a, p. 177).

95 Ross (2010, p. 66) notes that, for Deleuze, desire is a productive and affirmative social force; desexualised and de-individualised; continuous and not akin to a psychoanalytic conception of desire as lack; and discharged in pleasure. Desire operates in the construction of assemblages and it is thus oriented externally and experimental.


totalise its own elements [...] Nature is not attributive but conjunctive: it expresses itself through ‘and’ and not through ‘is’” (Deleuze, 1990b, pp. 266-267). Additionally, Deleuze’s conceptualisation of the fold concerns itself with “the perception of the world as an open whole in flux and movement” (Conley, 2005, p. 201). Life’s productions are immanent to the foldings, unfolding, and refolding of matter as a single substance (Deleuze, 1993, p. 3). One implication of the fold is irreducible interconnectivity: a unity that remains multiple and in continuous transformation. Fold, then, involves a particular sense of Life, things, subjectivity and causality. Boundaries expand, become radically permeable, and threaten to become unrepresentably exterior. Conley (2005, p. 202) writes that “in Deleuze’s world, everything is folded, and folds, in and out of everything else”. These conceptualisations of continuous relationality have onto-epistemological and ethical implications, not least with regard to our irreducible accountability. Barad (2010) reminds us that “The very nature of matter entails an exposure to the other” (p. 265).98

While Deleuze and Guattari (1987) do not avoid the word Nature when thinking about matter, it is used in the conception of Life as: “an immense Abstract Machine [...] its pieces are the various assemblages and individuals, each of which groups together an infinity of particles entering into an infinity of more or less connected relations” (p. 512). Life is non-exclusionary; the outside is always and everywhere inside (Barad, 2007, p. 161). Consequently, we are challenged to reconsider what we define as

98 See also Latour (2004, p. 58).
living and not living, what does and does not have agency.\textsuperscript{99} For Deleuze (1993), Life is open and affective; comprising vectors not bounded entities; producing singularities; swarming, multiplying, growing and pullulating (p. xi). Life is emergent from the vital, relational flows of the same, self-organising matter,\textsuperscript{100} and Life’s productions are the dynamic assemblages of material and immaterial machines as singularities (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 152): as the always different. Matter possesses duration: the capacity to inhabit and move through time (Deleuze, 2005, p. 80). Matter is not dumb, mute or fixed; it is intelligent, mobile and vibrant and, to differing degrees, capable of expression: as Barad puts it (2007), an active participant in the world’s becoming.

While matter can be found in bodies, bodies need not be material in content. Rather, bodies are relationally, matter-discursively (Barad, 2003, p. 822) and affectively constructed phenomena; dynamically produced as functions of exterior forces; their productions ungoverned by any sedimented psychic interior or conventionally conceived, pre-existing mind.\textsuperscript{101} Having eschewed normative ideas of what bodies should be or what they are, Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialism turns to questions of what bodies \emph{can do}: toward vitality, affect, the unknown, potential and futurity, and away from thingness (Barad, 2007, 2012), identity (Deleuze, 1993).

\textsuperscript{99} See, for example, Braidotti (2013, p. 83), Conley in Deleuze (1993), Morton (2010b).

\textsuperscript{100} We find varying assertions of monism, radical interconnectivity and immanence in Deleuze’s \textit{Fold} (1993) and Deleuze and Guattari’s \textit{rhizome} (1987), in Barad’s entangled, agential realism and theorisation of ‘intraaction’ (2007), in Morton’s ‘mesh’ (2010b), in DeLanda’s matter-energy flows (1995), and in Braidotti’s Deleuzian posthumanism (2013).

\textsuperscript{101} See Bowden (2015, p. 78) on Deleuzian expressive agency and the imbrication of human intentionality and the non-and-more-than-human.
1994), memory, history, representation, species, and the known. Ideas of the human account inadequately for the bodies / subjectivities that are irreducibly imbricated into a world that is non-and-more-than-human; that are immanent to that world; and that are multiple, fluid, assemblages of that world (Guattari, 2000, pp. 35-36). A traditional anti-human or post-humanist decentering is necessary but insufficient. A material de/re-construction enables a better understanding of the real productions of subjectivity. As Braidotti (2006a) suggests, “The Life in me is not only, not even, human” (p. 6).

Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialism is concerned, then, with how to approach the subject and with existence beyond the still lively, dangerous, inadequate and limiting concept of the “Human”. Underneath thoughts of Humanness, we are porous, material beings; as processually exposed as any other being; not separate in our origins; not other to Life; made of the same matter; our future equally unpredictable (Haraway, 1997). We do not own the forces that shape relations and their productions: bodies are expressions of relations and the—corporeal and incorporeal—transformations they catalyse. Subjectivity is not individualism—an ego or a mind closeted from, over and above, existence—and, like ecology, subjectivity does not reach an end point, climax state, or harmony. Rather, subjectivities arise from the ongoing, creative and entangled assemblings of elements; as the collective, heterogeneous production of forces that continue to flow beyond their expression; as a series of moments through which myriad crossings occur and decelerate, or thicken; as sensuous, dynamic, transversal, entirely relational productions, irreducible to an
essence, and moving out from the varying fields in which they are produced. Genosko (2010) describes the subject as “Emergent and processual, producing and produced by multiple self-engenderings” (p. 107).

Braidotti’s (2006a) Zoe-centred egalitarianism positions the human neither at the centre, nor in control of, the unfolding of Life. Like Morton’s (2002, p. 144) subject—if he has one—Braidotti’s is a collective production; hybridised, and enmeshed in a network of interrelated material, social and discursive effects. The materialist subject lives in very much the Deleuzian minor and molecular modes (1987), as non-unitary, embodied, and emerging from the flows of intensities. For Braidotti (2013), then, the posthuman embraces other Life forms and unravels dominant concepts of subjectivity: “the subject is fully immersed in and immanent to a network of non-human (animal, vegetable, viral) relations” (2002, p. 122).102 Importantly, Braidotti is not pinning a badge of immanence, multiplicity and exteriority on humans alone, but on all Life. She scrambles subjectivities for all through “a chain of connections which can best be described as an ecological philosophy of non-unitary, embodied subjects” (p. 134).

Exploding the normative image of the embodied subject extends to its physical frame. Along with Haraway’s (1991) and Hayles’ (1999) important elucidations of the cyborg and the technologically extended Human, both Braidotti (2002, p. 124) and DeLanda (1995) assert the morphology of the body as immanent and open-ended, rather than its standing as a pre-

102 See, also, Alaimo (2010); Wolfe (2003, 2010).
condition and determinant of the shape of Life forms. Deleuzo-Guattarian
New Materialism also entails a revaluation of bodily capacities, beginning
with the assumption that human capacities are neither necessarily unique to
us, nor superior to the capacities of the non-and-more-than-human (Morton,
2010b, pp. 71-72). Indeed, to begin with the human as the measure of all
things is to miss and diminish Life’s potentials.

While, for Barad (2003), the material and the discursive are entirely
inseparable registers of the world’s becomings, for Deleuze and Guattari
(1987, pp. 261-269), the world is not only material-discursive but also
nonhuman. Bodies are haecceities: unique, impermanent, nested
aggregates of pre-personal and impersonal forces shaping their capacities
and the social world as they move (Guattari, 1995, p. 61). These ideas
encompass a Spinozan notion of being as the dynamic, relational and social
production(s) of intensive/affective (transformational) encounters between
bodies. Spinoza (2009) argued that a body’s desire—its Conatus or innate
striving—is to expand its powers of living, or affective capacities; to become
more and to increase the intensities of its encounters; to avoid painful and
seek out joyful affections. The passage of affect between bodies in
encounters shapes a body’s capacity to be different, and to make (a)
difference.

Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialism supports conceptualisations of
externally produced subjectivity and the residual character of consciousness
that run hard against Cartesian ideas of Man and mind (Hall, 2004).

103 See, also, Berressem (2009, p. 66); Braidotti (2006a, 2006b, 2013).
Adapting Spinoza’s, Nietzsche’s and Hume’s notions of subjectivity produced by relations exterior to it, Deleuze (1991) asserts that “the mind therefore does not have the characteristics of a pre-existing subject” (p. 29). Consciousness is just one expression of the subject—though a dominant one—and not the only mode of relating to/in the world. The mind, body, and what lies beyond them, and indeed what serves to compose them, can only ever be separated in abstraction. Mind is part of Life; already bound up with it; immanent to it; dynamic; and, as Braidotti (2010a, p. 212) puts it, environmentally entangled. For Protevi (2013, p. 121), our emotions and feelings are “centripetal rather than centrifugal […] the subjectivation, the crystallization, of affect”.

These re-constitutions of subjectivity do not mean that the subject is relieved of accountability for the affirmative or negative affects of its relations. Morton (2010b, p. 91) acknowledges that the ecological thought might not involve an image of the conventional human but a venture into a “subaesthetic level of being”: not pretty, difficult to love, strange the whole way down (no matter how much we excavate), without a human face, and heterogeneous to its unfathomable core. Nevertheless, Morton suggests, the idea of the “strange stranger” (p. 14) might also enliven our sense of care toward the unknowable other and our sensitivity to what produces us; to potentials for diversity and for the destabilisation of habits; and to potentials for a fuller perception of the chaos that we habitually reduce to protect our sense of order (Morton, 2010d). For Deleuze and Guattari, subjectivities become intrinsically political, precisely because they are not pre-existing; because they are materially-discursively, affectively, and
always collectively constructed;\textsuperscript{104} and because agency over a body’s transformations is dependent upon the body’s capacity to more fully perceive, and manage, the passage of affects, over and above the mind’s late and simplistic attempts to conceive of those forces (Lorraine, 2011, p. 118). Importantly, Braidotti (2006a) injects a measure of consistency into subjectivity, noting Deleuze and Guattari’s observation that our subjectivity is always escaping us and yet, at the same time, enduring as we work to develop capabilities to bear the intensities to which we are exposed through our encounters with other bodies. We might conceive of this subjective work of capability development and endurance as an aesthetics of creative resingularisation; made possible, in part, via our encounters with literature.

\textbf{Ecological sense and literary practices for Crises of Ecologies}

One creates new modalities of subjectivity in the same way an artist creates new forms from a palette. (Guattari, 1995, pp. 6-7)

A book itself is a little machine (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 4)

\textsuperscript{104} See Lloyd and Gatens (1999, p. 2) on Spinoza, and freedom as collective production.
Having regard to Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist ontologies and epistemologies, I put forward the main proposition of this thesis. If a life occurs as becomings—as perceptual and subjective transformations (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p.9)—born of sensuous, or affective, encounters, then subjectivity is an aesthetic pursuit. We might think of subjectivity as a work of art; of a life as comprising continuous aesthetic resingularisations; and of art and literature as active participants in lives (Guattari, 1995, pp. 7,13,19). Works of art do not hold a single meaning, but function in encounters with other bodies, giving truth to variation, always producing something entirely new: exemplifying difference in itself as an ontology (Deleuze, 1994). The writer, in producing a text, introduces variation into the world (and into self). The writer works against the forces blocking affirmative relations and their associated transformations, and against contractions of subjectivity: significations, stratifications, and subjectifications (Deleuze & Guattari, 1983, 1987). Literature, then, as Braidotti (2010b, p. 243) suggests of art, might operate as a defence against capitalism and, more broadly, enable the expansion of subjective pathways (p. 242): augmenting our capacities to sense, adjust to, and respond affirmatively to the ecologies and Crises of Ecologies in which we participate (2013, pp. 51-52).

Encounters with literature have the potential to lead us to “undertake[…] a radical reconsideration” of ourselves (Guattari, 2000, p. 68).

In keeping with these ideas, I propose that certain literary practices infuse literature with potentials to cultivate ecological sense: fostering our apprehension of those forces of Life that we often hold at some distance, ignore, deny, or otherwise find imperceptible; encouraging our attendance to
the agency of the non-and-more-than-human world; reconfiguring our sense of the subject and of our subjective interdependencies with all that is non-and-more-than-human, and thus of our common vulnerability and our potential agency amid capitalism and ecological crises; enhancing our attunement to the ways in which we shape Crises and, through them, denude Life and our lives; (re)invigorating our “affective athleticism” (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 172), in particular augmenting our capacities to perceive and engage with affect as a vital register of existence (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 172) across which capitalism, colonialism, ecological crises, and we, can find health and do material harm; and the reorientation of our living toward the pursuit of creative, mutually beneficial, subjective renewals amid these Crises. I conceptualise three literary practices for Crises of Ecologies: writing the posthuman, writing affect and becomings, and minor literature.

Writing the posthuman

In fact, the self is only a threshold, a door, a becoming between two multiplicities. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 249)

By exploring the exteriority of being(s), writers—and readers—might access more-than post-humanist, non-anthropocentric expressions of the non-and-more-than-human and subjectivity. By re-diagramming the
Human and turning toward the posthuman subject (Braidotti 2013), a writer might bring us (to) a new world of vital materiality. Morton (2007b) proposes writing not as distanced criticism but as eco-critique: a self-deconstructing literature, responding to problems of the Human, ecologies and representation. While, prima facie, writing need not be concerned with conventionally environmental matters (p. 194), it might work upon the dialectics inherent in our “compelling illusion[s]” (p. 54) of how the world is. Writing might collapse and render problematic the aesthetic distance that practices of ecomimesis can produce between art, critique and capitalism (p. 164). Morton (2007b) imagines a critical art juxtaposing the subject and the object in all their indeterminacy; working through and upon the ambient poetics used to render Nature in order to expose the fissures in the artifice; and playing with the impossibility of the notion of our reconciling with something called Nature. Such work would draw attention to the instability and non-neutrality of the medium through which the world is being conveyed (p. 146), and of the notions of the Human and Nature.

For Morton, ecological thought can be productive where it embraces our inability to establish some distance from Life. I suggest that Morton’s contention applies also to distancing ourselves from Crises of Ecologies. He proposes that we spend more time becoming acquainted with the complexity and non-identity of Life and the “mud” in which ourselves are

---

105 I believe my approach is consistent with LeMenager’s call for “a more interesting and diffuse human turn” (2013, p. 403).
106 Both “conjuring up a sense of a surrounding atmosphere or world” (p. 22) and “reading texts with a view to how they encode the literal space of their inscription – if there is such a thing […]” (p. 3).
107 See, also, Hughes-d’Aeth (2009, p. 122).
irredeemably immersed and mixed. Two of the practices Morton (2007b) proposes are negative ecology and dark ecology. Negative ecology suggests a literature that works with the notion of environment (ecology) as that which cannot be indicated directly; of a world of endless alterity; and of no gap between the human and the non-and-more-than-human. All is “impenetrably real […] distant […] intangible” (p. 160). Literary negative ecology works to dissolve the subject and the object, place and mind. Ambient poetics is used for the very purpose of unmasking its own deceptions; opening out and evoking a rest-of-Life that we grasp only inconsistently and in fragments. This suggests a literature of unfulfilled promises. Dark ecology suggests a literature of pain and grief in all its meaninglessness; facing the implications of the loss of self amid ecologies with which we are irreducibly entangled, and, also amid Crises of Ecologies for which we are accountable. A dark ecological literature would be melancholic, hesitant, indeterminate, bleak, and ironic: embracing the ugly, the dirty, and the monstrous that comes from the loss of Nature and from Crises of Ecologies and our inescapable immersion in all that remains. Such an embrace might not, though, be deemed negative: indeed, Nietzsche (Braidotti & Dolphijn, 2015, p. 27), Deleuze (1990b, pp. 149-150) and Collings (2014, p. 154) might acknowledge the affirmations—or amor fati—in it.

Literature has the potential to convey the vitality of matter or objects: the

---

108 Morton (2007b) proposes other practices not considered in this thesis: juxtaposition, radical ecological kitsch and ekphrasis.

109 Morton acknowledges Rigby’s (2004a) ecopoetics of negativity as precursor.
agency of things. As Barad (2003) writes of giving “matter its due”, so Jane Bennett (2010) writes of the political importance of giving “the force of things more due” (p. viii). Bennett (2010) references Deleuze and Guattari (1987), as well as Nietzsche’s guidance that literature might connect us with Life: the “monster of energy…that does not expend itself but only transforms itself […]” (p. 54). Respectively, Bennett, and Iovino and Oppermann, suggest Kafka’s Odradek (2010, p.45-47) and Conrad’s river Congo (2012a, p.81) as examples of literary engagements with the agential forces of matter. Literature has, as its resource, an infinitely differing Life, moving across myriad scales, from which it draws its forces and into which it contributes (J. Bennett, 2010; Chakrabarty, 2009; Clark, 2012; Morton, 2013b; Phillips & Sullivan, 2012). Furthermore, a literature of material agency might dwell down in Morton’s (2010b, pp. 91-92) mud and darkness, concerning itself with Life’s strangeness; with the detritus, the ugly, the excreta, and the abject from which we cannot separate; and, after Barad (2007), with the spatio-temporal, relational, impermanence of phenomena rather than with their stability and separateness. Writing the posthuman, then, might attune us to the dependence of our subjectivities upon bodies and forces that we have a limited capacity to control (Connolly, 2011, p. 793); to our non-unitary existence in non-and-more-than-human, material-discursive (Barad 2003, p. 822) assemblages;\(^{110}\) and to the flaws in our beliefs that we possess some prior essence or transcend the non-and-more-than-human. Such literature might populate the world with porous bodies;

---

\(^{110}\) See, for example, Dickinson (2007).
make the directions of flows indeterminate; blur distinctions and categories; and lose the individual in multiplicity.

Morton’s (2010b) reference to “beings who do not so easily wear a human face” (pp.91-92) and Deleuze and Guattari’s call for us to lose the face111 bring us back to a challenge for writing material vitality. On the one hand, writers risk re-inscribing and privileging the human where they use anthropomorphic tropes to convey the qualities of non-and-more-than-human encounters and agencies. Conversely, though, we might risk losing the material object—Conrad’s river, Iovino and Opperman’s (2012a) lightning bolt, Hardy’s Egdon Heath (W. A. Cohen, 2006)—entirely, though not necessarily erroneously, if we accept Life’s dissolution into Morton’s (2007) non-identitarian mud and Barad’s objectless intraactive relata. And yet, the risk of losing the subject and the object might double as a resource for the exploration of the infinite multiplicity, relational dependency and processual dynamism of what we perceive as unitary and stable things: humans and the concept of the Human among them. We might, then, find potentials in literary practices beyond literary narratives that try to get to the truth of material agency in its own right. As Probyn (2016, p. 11) observes after Abrahamson et al, it might, “be more relevant to face the complexities, frictions, intractabilities, and conundrums of ‘matter in relation’” because

111 For Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 292), the face conveys the processes and power of the structured and controlled identity attributed to the subject that determines their acceptance into or rejection from the Capitalist regime. For our purposes, the idea of the face brings us back to the centrality of the dominant image of the Human and its relationship to Crises of Ecologies.
“matter is never matter by itself” (p. 52).112

Writing the posthuman entails attunement to different expressions of space (and time) and to the relations of bodies that produce it; to our relational onto-epistemological condition and, therein, to our becomings-nonhuman; immersing us in the strangeness that is Life and our self (Oppermann, 2016). In this context, I suggest that Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) aesthetic model of smooth(ing) space is useful for developing a concept of literary practices that cultivate ecological sense. Roffe (2005c) explains that:

Smooth space is the type of space in which there are no fixed points or boundaries, and in which movement is uninhibited. In smooth space movement is therefore continuous variation. In contrast, striated space is structured and organised, creating fixed points and limits between what movements can be undertaken. As a result, there is a sense […] that the nature and construction of certain spaces forms one of the primary concerns of politics, since smooth space is by definition the space of freedom. On a more fundamental level, nature itself for Deleuze is continuous variation. Even animal species must be understood in terms of a movement of life which has been structured into localised patterns of stability. (p. 295-296)

112 Probyn (p. 104) also notes “Annemarie Mol’s (2013) directions for researching ‘relational materialities’ – not questions of agency”.

Literary productions, and smoothings, of space might operate to transform our perceptions of surfaces, linkages, and orientations; from the optical (at a distance, dominated by the eyes) to the haptic (touch and sensuous movement) (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 479). Literary smoothings immerse us in new ecologies: of flow not stasis; of singular becomings not pre-existing things; of intensive not extensive bodies; of relational, dynamic, transforming matter not fixed material forms; and of nomadic creatures not fixed in what they are, nor in what they can do. In writing smooth space, the writer pursues or tries to tap into an ecology of pure connection, hybridity, and imbrication.

Writing smooth space might throw into relief the extent to which the identity and stability of striated ideas—Human, Nature, Animal—and things depend upon the expulsion of that which does not comply with conventional expectations of how Life should be: strange encounters, difficult and non-compliant animals—*non-cute* endangered creatures (Rose & van Dooren, 2011)—indiscernible life-forms, and unfamiliar phenomena. In a novel that striates space, we might only see the habitual and predictable: already closed off as to what it does and can do. In the Australian context, this might involve representations of a seemingly featureless, alien, impenetrable bush or desert, and of its renaming and fencing off. In a novel that smooths space, we might encounter a desert, plain, salt flat, bush, space that is produced *and* productive as we move through it. Such writing might, for example, draw us into a vibrant space that we do not recognize; that we cannot observe from a distance; that swarms with life; that is indifferent
toward the Human; and that leaves us disoriented and subject to strange connections with strange creatures that defy any attempt at organic representation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 499).

Literature might map new posthuman cartographies amid Crises of Ecologies, attuning us to unbounded material agency and to the qualities and the implications of our permeability and interconnectedness. Indeed, we might consider, after Morton (2013a) and Zapf (2016), that material agency is—and always has been—a force shaping humans and human writing and that, consequently, we might usefully conceive of literary practices as relational: inescapably transmitting the expressions of the material agents of Crises of Ecologies and transforming bodies in encounters. It might, for example, express the unimaginable scope of the agency of hyperobjects like global warming (Morton 2013), shaped by and re-shaping us; or track the paths of discarded waste products back to and through humans (Wilcox, 2002); or reconnect us to abject matter (Kristeva, 1982, p. 3) (excrement, bodily fluids, animal byproducts for example); or story the entangled and transversal matter-discursive flows that constitute assemblages, including subjectivity assemblages (Iovino & Oppermann, 2012a, pp. 81, 83).

Literature that maps these cartographies also offers a critical engagement with consumerism and its entanglements in the material-discursive assemblages of Crises of Ecologies: born of human behaviours and returning to reshape human and other bodies.

There appear to be some affirmative resonances between Australian

---

113 See, also, Kearnes (2016, p. 56).
Indigenous practices/philosophies of Life\textsuperscript{114} and Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist notions of the posthuman, of the agency of matter, and of their implications for ecology. I noted earlier that Kwaymullina et al (2013, p. 4) outline Indigenous relational onto-epistemologies that collapse distinctions and suggest interdependencies between time (past-present-future), space, matter, discourse, culture, nature, Human, and non-and-more-than-human: “everything is alive, everything is related, and everything is participatory”.

Irene Watson (2015) refers to “a world of which we as humans are a part of the whole and not the whole itself” (p. 12). Land and people traverse each other so as to become irreducible into separable entities (p. 100). Consequently, Watson warns, because “Our ruwe is an extension of ourselves [and vice versa]; to take the land from us, and to develop and damage the ruwe is also to damage our relationship to country” (p. 20) and Indigenous peoples. She proffers “nakedness” as a way of conveying the inherent, unthought exteriority of being informing Indigenous living prior to colonisation, that has since been oppressed—though not extinguished—by the powers of colonisation, and which remains anathema to the colonial/Western mind: “There are no words that I have come across in our First Nations languages which describe nakedness” (p. 55). For Irene Watson, Indigenous onto-epistemologies carry “a relational approach to the natural world” (p. 146). John Law’s (2004) analyses respond to Helen Verran’s work on similar ideas and gesture toward resonances between

\textsuperscript{114} As Indigenous people express them (see Graham (2008); Grieves (2009); Neidjie (1989); I. Watson (2015); Wright (2011a)) and as non-indigenous scholars understand them (see Law (2004); Muecke (2004, 2009); Plumwood (1999, 2002a, 2002b); Potter (2015); Rose (1992, 1996, 2004, 2005, 2012b); Verran (1998; 2011); Ravenscroft (2014)).
Indigenous and Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist onto-epistemologies. For Law, Aboriginal onto-epistemologies posit no independent, separate and singular reality from the subject: “patterns of dualist separation are almost entirely absent from Aboriginal method assemblages” (p. 133). Irene Watson’s explications of Indigenous philosophies, and Law’s arguments suggest potentially enriching ways in which Indigenous and Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist onto-epistemologies might interact. These interactions involve privileging Indigenous thought and literary practices as possessing potentials to cultivate ecological sense and augment powers of living, rather than subsuming them under foreign conceptualisations of literary efficacies, as well as attending to the ways in which Indigenous writing enriches those foreign conceptualisations. I explore these opportunities in Chapter 5.

**Writing affect and becomings**

Art mobilizes ecological thinking with sensations and compositions—artistic bodies—that affect our sense of being and becoming as cohabitants of affected territories. (Chisholm, 2011, p. 585)

[C]limate pedagogy might be cast as learning to be affected by climatic and environmental change. (Kearnes, 2016, p. 56)
For Deleuze (1993, p. xiv), literature is not separated from Life; it carries and is involved with Life’s capacities for perpetual movement, metamorphosis, and emigration “from one condition to another”. Itself machinic and relational, literature can produce movement and transformation via the senses,\(^{115}\) rather than functioning as a mirror for some fixed concept (Deleuze, 1997, p. 78). Literature carries expression. For Deleuze, “expression” amounts to the open expression of forces and intensities or affects: the nonhuman. Literature possesses the capacity to change unpredictably the intensive state of a body through encounters with it, which, importantly, suggests something immanent to matter and to experience (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 39). More specifically, Bourassa (2009) notes that, for Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 182), writing carries expressions of the material qualities and forces of the world absent the human \((\text{percepts})\),\(^{116}\) along with the forces of becoming that run between and are expressed by collisions of bodies \((\text{affects})\). These qualities and forces are pre-personal, of the body, and, thereby, not easy to articulate or represent: they are “a language which speaks before words” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 10). Representation and emotions—conscious, reduced, lifeless, terminal versions of what became of those collisions—do not capture affects (Bourassa 2009, p. 19). Within a fictional narrative, affects can be the sensations one body provokes in another: the text operating as a conductor

---

115 See J. Bennett (2010); Braidotti (2002); Deleuze (1997); Deleuze and Guattari (1994); Iovino (2012); Iovino and Oppermann (2012a, 2012b); Massumi (2002a, 2011).

116 Daly and Dowd (2003) write that “A ‘percept’ differs from a perception in so far as it is a mode of capture of the sensible world which lies either below or beyond a certain threshold (which would mark the moment of closure required for perceptions to form)” and that it is via the percept that “literature succeeds in attaining the very limit of perception” (p. 165).
of the intensities transmitted and the associated transformations—or becomings—in bodies’ capacities to affect others. In addition, that text is a vehicle for intensities (affects) (Deleuze & Guattari 1994) that, in collision with other bodies (readers), always produce something entirely new.\textsuperscript{117} Words and syntax, for example, can pass into sensation; they vibrate, and these bare sensations connect with and embrace another body (the reader), resonate with that body’s sensations, before pulling away and leaving the two bodies joined by the space that forms in-between them: a bloc of sensation or a becoming in a “zone of proximity or indiscernibility” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 305).

An affective engagement with writing attunes us to other registers across which Life moves and transforms, and offers access to affects other than those that have become sanctioned and contracted human habits. Hickey-Moody (2013) explains that,

art has the aptitude to change a body’s limits. Art can readjust what a person is or is not able to feel, understand, produce and connect. […] This is, then, primarily a corporeal reconfiguration and secondly an emergent cultural geography of human feelings. (p. 88)

An affective engagement also enhances perceptions of the affects of

\textsuperscript{117} See Roelvink and Zolkos (2015) on affect, posthumanism, and the relationships between affect and sensation.
ecological crises (Houser, 2014); of the intimate interconnection of these affects with us; and of their still-traumatic effects now and to-come (Lorraine, 2011). Literature can be a political instrument, a writing machine (Bogue, 2003, p. 59): improving our apprehension of the infantilising, stratifying, facialising, and contractive affects employed to nourish capitalism; and operating upon capitalism’s power apparatus (R.G. Smith 2015). Literature gets affect moving: producing new machines whose own productions and enunciations remain indecipherable, unencodable, creative and liberatory. If capitalist subjects’ attunements, and capacities, to affect have been diminished and contracted, then literary encounters can deliver an expansionary kick-start.

Movements of affect constitute becomings: breaks in habit; the drawing of bodies into compounds of sensation that did not exist prior to their encounter with each other, and with the art work (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 175). We might, then, expect literature not just to train the passions but to articulate and transmit wholly new affects (Connolly, 2011, p. 795). Via Collings’ (2014) demands that we “embrace [unthinkable/unrepresentable future] trauma and grief themselves without reserve” (pp. 154-155) amid Crises of Ecologies, we might arrive at a literature that explores the affects and ethics of a worst that is still to come (Collings, 2014, pp. 153-154). Via Lorraine’s (2011) proposal for a literature of “limit cases”—what cannot be

119 Albeit, not their vulnerability (Abel, 2008).
represented—we might access a “truth” of experience, found in intensities and through the potential connections of those intensities to as-yet unactualised modes of being, rather than in representations/judgements of the good and bad of what happened/still happens (p. 131). The intensive qualities and the embodied experience of encounters with literature might, then, augment our capacity to know and to cope with Crises of Ecologies, and, perhaps, offer some amelioration—or accommodation—of pain: helping us find what Collings (2014) calls “not a new hope, but the capacity to affirm and endure the worst” (p. 154): to live differently than our History might wish.

With literature as vehicle of agency and affect, we are not in the world of the Human. Indeed, literature is inherently affirmative where it expresses nonhuman forces and the world of continuous variation beneath perception, or “difference in itself” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 28). As Bourassa (2009) observes, after Deleuze (1994, p. 35), the nonhuman is one way by which we come to know subjectivity “in terms of what surpasses it, undermines it, fragments it, but also in terms of what simultaneously supports its, energizes it, and holds it together” (p. 26). Affects constitute an exit from fixed subjectivities: we become molecular, non-unitary subjects open to the world’s flows. Literature becomes more than the conveyance of human emotions, qualities or feelings: as art, it becomes transhuman (O’Sullivan, 2006, p. 50) or, again as Braidotti (2013) might put it, posthuman. Of course, non-and-more-than-human bodies can affect and be affected. They can participate in becomings. The nonhuman, then, opens us out to a
collectivity spanning all living entities, by virtue of our exposure to affect—a notion that suggests other registers across which human and non-and-more-than-human relate—and, consequently, our common (though never the same) exposure to the material traumas of Crises of Ecologies.

Literary affects are ruptures in the sensible and therefore important to thought: they drive becomings and they offer nodes of access to worlds to which we are de-sensitised, which are not sanctioned, and which have not yet been created. Writing becomings suggests constructive transformations and encounters amid Crises of Ecologies rather than negation. Writing becomings opens Life out to the virtual and the new, while, as posthuman writing, it folds us intimately back into the non-and-more-than-human world. Writing becomings does not entail a deletion of the subject but a reconfiguration of subjectivity. Becomings are incorporeal events possessing material agency because they transform our perceptions of Life—to the extent that it is ever ours (Braidotti, 2006a)—and our affective capacities; in turn transforming how we can relate. In writing becomings (indeed, in writing as becoming), the creatures, subjects, and bodies that we

121 Roelvink and Zolkos (2015) note the intersections between Cary Wolfe’s work and contemporary affect theory (p. 2). LeMenager (2013, p. 409) also argues that “resilience, adaptation, and the future of humans in relation to nonhuman others and to ourselves depends upon cultivating communal affects”.

122 There exists a wealth of artistic production, theory, and criticism that engages with becomings (Bogue, 2010a; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), becomings-woman (Bogue, 2010a; Colebrook, 2013b; Griggers, 1997; Jarraway, 2012), -animal (Bruns, 2007; Danta, 2007; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Dillon, 2011; Patton, 2004; Vint, 2005), -insect (Braidotti, 2002, p. 149; Knighton, 2013), -other (Grosz, 1999), and -imperceptible (Lorraine, 2000; MacCormack, 2010; Žukauskaite, 2012).

123 Broadly speaking, for Deleuze—see, for example, Bergsonism (1988a)—one quality of the virtual is as an immanent plane of existence from which actual existence (difference in itself) is drawn, and which enables that actualisation to vary, though it is never separated from the actual. The virtual plane also varies as the actual is actualised.
create/encounter may move in the direction of familiar and classical identities but their life occurs molecularly, through blocs of sensation/becoming formed through their relations. Literary bodies undergo sensuous entries into “new levels, [and] zones of liberated intensities where contents free themselves from their forms as well as from their expressions, from the signifier that formalized them” (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, p. 13).

*Real Life* is lived in-between the dominating categories of subjectivity—Man, Woman, Child, Animal, Other—and is produced by transversal encounters with the always other.

Amid Crises of Ecologies, it matters how literature engages with the Animal. Braidotti (2002) argues for different engagements with these beings that have been othered, treated as discursive and material, psychical and social resources, and used to (pre)serve humans and Capital. Iovino (2016) suggests that literature might allow us to “transcend the category of the “human” and enter into a posthuman age that is more in tune with the hybrid and porous natures of our species” (p. 18). Morton (2010b, 2010d) and Derrida (2008) foreground problems with our capacity to know other creatures at all—given their irreducible strange strangeness, their unavoidable (matter-discursive) entanglements with the Human, and our historical denial of/blindness toward them—and assert our ethical accountabilities to them. For Deleuze and Guattari (1987), becomings-animal offer paths of sensuous reconfigurations of subjectivities and every becoming is singular, even those that are imaginary (p. 238). Becomings-animal are not to do with resemblance or imitation, copying or physical transformation, though the writer is not denied such things. Nor are they to
do with representing in language the animal’s pain at the hands of the Human. Rather, literary becomings-animal constitute incorporeal transformations (no doubt, transforming our material capacities). They are attempts to pursue an encounter and to draw writer/reader/animal into the production of a zone of proximity within which categories, subjectivities, difference as negation, human-animal dialectics, and anthropocentric perceptions are lost or exceeded (Bruns, 2007, p. 703). Literary becomings-animal cultivate sense beyond the Human. They are encounters during which other affects, other sensibilities are made available. Such encounters also have the potential to reorient writers’ and readers’ ethical frames: cultivating our sensitivity to our “interspecies junction points” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 185), to the interdependencies of our flourishing with the flourishing of non-and-more-than-human bodies, and to the movements of traumatized bodies amid Crises of Ecologies.

I note that literary becomings might—indeed, must—go well beyond the already damaging category of Animal, and embrace becomings-non-and-more-than-human in all their variations. Deleuze and Guattari would, perhaps, characterise these movements as becomings-minor as they would be oriented away from the dominant forms of subjectivity implicated in Crises of Ecologies. Literary becomings-imperceptible go further, entailing fallings-back into the molecular flows of Life (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 248); albeit, Braidotti’s (2006a) note that “Becoming-imperceptible is the event for which there is no immediate representation” (p. 28) raises the question of how to write it. Perhaps, to return to writing the posthuman, a story might express the affective intensities of the lines of dissolution of the
subject into matter-energy flows, a becoming-molecular. A writer’s challenge involves setting readers adrift from our moorings (temporal, spatial, and perceptual); exploring the percept or the world absent the Human; and assuring us of Life's/life's potential to be different.

Minor Literature

Minor literature is a work of the dominated,\(^{124}\) using the socio-material context of their oppression to transform (deterritorialise) it: to pursue becomings-minor. Minor literature resists and renews through expression and fabulation. Language and style are critical to this work (Deleuze, 1994, p. 170). As Bogue (2003) explains, minor literature is, for Deleuze and Guattari, a material pursuit. Its language is a-signifying and intensive—‘nonrepresentative, nonillustrative, nonnarrative’ (Deleuze 2003a, p. 100)—and it integrates catastrophe into its affective capacities. Not least, it catastrophises with the dominant (Major) language. Words operate physically (Bogue, 2003, p. 27). Their traits are sensations, through which the writer breaks codes that are “inevitably cerebral”, and acts upon the nervous system (Deleuze 2003a, p. 109). Bogue (2003) notes that art becomes a schizophrenic experience, offering both liberation and chaos; a sense of exteriority, vulnerability, and crisis. A Minorised language roams and breaches binaries, boundaries and sedimented habits, including

---

\(^{124}\) Albeit this should never suggest this is all they are; all they can do (Muecke, 1992).
monolingualisms (Braidotti, 2002, p. 94). It stutters, stammers, and screams its inadequacies amid the event; attends to and launches itself through its cracks; gesturing toward the cracks in Majoritarian thought.

There is some sense to the notion that Crises of Ecologies—their derangements of scale, their transversality, and their nonhuman and non-and-more-than-human qualities—cannot be encountered without some breaking (renewal) of language. Syntactically and affectively, then, minor literature might express the unassimilable qualities of these Crises. It might also disrupt, break, “bore holes in” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 173) Majoritarian concepts, language and figurations that serve to perpetuate and deepen Crises: Nature; the naturalisation of capitalism; the continuity and primacy of the Human; the subordinated, subsumed animal; sustainable development (LeMenager & Foote, 2012, p. 572); that consumption brings individualism; that value is only measured in terms of capital accumulation; that technology, governments, innovators, social movements, or God, will save us; and that there is, indeed, some way out.

Deleuze’s adaptation of Bergson’s concept of fabulation involves literary practice in the prospective: offering access to worlds and futures beyond our rational capacities and expectations, and other to the “reassuring” worlds produced by capitalism’s material-discursive forces (Lazzarato, 2004, p. 187). The writer, Bogue (2007) explains, “diagrams” the

---

125 Simplistically put, for Bergson (1977), fabulation is a practice of social control to preserve stability. Not unlike, perhaps, our human tendency to anthropomorphise the weather, or to make freakish or refuse to make connections between our acts and catastrophic events that are increasingly found by scientific study to arise from forces associated with global warming, mass extinction and planetary degradation.
forces shaping states of affairs, destabilises them and points to cracks in the existing world; and catalyses new sense events, thoughts and visions in the reader (pp. 98-99). The writer produces worlds rather than critiques the world as it is. At a minimum, the writer “displaces the struggle” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 500). Their visions might be “intolerable” (Bogue, 2003, p. 105) but they are also a productive critique of received wisdoms—the true as well as the false (2010a, pp. 32, 226)—and a disruption to the sanctioned flow of History (2007, p. 105). As with fabulation in cinematic science fiction (Braidotti 2002, p.182), literary practices might enable us to cope and come to terms with Crises of Ecologies, and renew our capacities to imagine pathways for relations (Bogue, 2007, pp. 98-99) and worlds beyond those sanctioned by the current state of affairs: even beyond—though not redeemed from—the most dire prognoses (Braidotti, 2013, p. 83; Collings, 2014).

A minor literature also operates as a future-oriented, intensive gesture away from structures of power and towards a collective that did not exist beforehand or that, perhaps, is threatened with annihilations (Deleuze & Guattari 1987, p. 345):

The individual concern thus becomes all the more necessary, indispensable, magnified, because a whole other story is vibrating within it […] everything takes on a collective value. (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 17)
From within systems of control—parasitically, Tynan (2012, p. 167) suggests—the writer issues “a call to attunement […] an invitation to a mutual inclusion” (Massumi, 2015, p. 105), although it is not instructive, and it cannot lead or impose a program or an imperative. Its principle becomes through performance or enactment, and can be as broad as desiring something counter to current conditions, the freeing up of expression, and the augmentation of our powers of affirmative existence (Massumi, 2015, pp. 105-106; Tynan, 2012, p. 155). Literary fabulations involve hallucinations of history—perhaps, oxymoronically, a future history—of such intensity that the writer’s literary expression “contributes to the formation of a group-subject, a self-determining, fluid and open collectivity” (Bogue, 2007, p. 106). New myths are offered for those who do not recognise themselves in the ones that exist, and these are transformative: “apocalyptic”, O’Sullivan (2006, p. 203) suggests. Tynan (2012) acknowledges the potential for the writer to invoke peoples to come and resist the forces—including biopolitics and affective capitalism—that engender crises of agency. The writer’s expressions of other/new “norms of life” invoke “communities and peoples not reproducible or maintainable” (p. 166) by those in power.

Aaltola’s (2008) definition of ‘person’—recognising the transversality of Life and incorporating all beings that can experience, not just humans—might also enable another, more expansive (albeit speculative) invocation. We might speculate that the excluded—those most affected by, and
disempowered (O’Sullivan 2006, p.78) amid, Crises of Ecologies—will at least include the poor, the non-westerner, the colonised, those most exposed to the material forces of Crises, dependants, and those still to be born: “A people [...] created in abominable sufferings [...]They have resistance in common – their resistance to death, to servitude, to the intolerable, to shame, to the present” (Deleuze & Guattari 1994, p. 110).

When it comes to the non-and-more-than-human, we might intuitively dismiss the prospects for animals, insects, plants, fungi, bacteria and single-celled organisms to be called into the collective. After all, they cannot directly—or at least humanly—access and interpret the symbols and affects carried by literature, and our capacity to access how the non-and-more-than-human stories itself, on its own terms, is at best limited. Nevertheless, perhaps a literary practice can still call forth the non-and-more-than-human, precisely through humans becoming-posthuman. Tynan (2012) writes that, for Deleuze, “The author is in touch with the illiteracy – conceived non-pejoratively – of such virtual collectivities, and literature in this way causes a type of non-language to merge with language” (p.156). Furthermore, Deleuze and Guattari (1994, p. 169) explain that minor literary practices express the “nonhuman landscapes of nature” and the nonhuman becomings of the Human. Where minor literature cultivates “transversality and mutations” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 94), might an affirmatively mutant collective become: open to anyone and everyone, not only through the stuttering, stammering, breaking and failing of human language but also through its material, incorporeal, transversal, species-less registers of
relation and expression? As Tynan (2012) observes, the “pathos of something alien and inarticulate is ultimately the source of the power of articulation itself” (p. 154): forces expressed intensively through the writer’s work but not the writer’s forces. To some, the thought of such a literary practice might well seem like an invitation to delirium or madness, but it might, to others, seem like the way to cultivate ecological sense.

In the next part of this chapter, I argue that there are opportunities to expand the current state of literary studies at the nexus between these Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist conceptualisations of literary practices, Crises of Ecologies, and contemporary Australian novels.

Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialism and the Australian critical field(s)

As Chapters 1 and 2 suggested, scholarship on Australian literature and aspects of Crises of Ecologies flourishes: addressing, not least, poetry, nature writing, life writing, travel writing, novels, fictocriticism, theatre, and cinema; concerned with contemporary and earlier Australian writers; and published in journals concerned with Crises of Ecologies—including *Environmental Humanities*, and *The Australasian Journal of Ecocriticism and Cultural Ecology*—and in numerous doctoral theses, monographs, and

126 See Deleuze (1997, p. 60) and Haraway (2015, p. 162) on this.
edited collections. However, writing the posthuman, writing affect and becomings, and minor literature have been the subject of only a modest number of explorations in relation to contemporary Australian novels and Crises of Ecologies.

Only a few studies exist combining literary affect—not always utilising Deleuzian concepts of affect—with contemporary Australian novels, and Crises of Ecologies. There is, though, a more substantive body of studies of literary becomings-, becomings-animal, and human-animal relationality in this context. These studies of becomings engage with the novels of Coetzee, Faber, Flanagan, Leigh, and Malouf. While studies occasionally gesture toward affective modes of writing relationality, they more commonly characterise themselves as focused upon Indigenous and posthuman approaches to conveying matter agency, relationality and

127 See, for example, Ben-Messahel (2006); Birns (2015); Carter (1996, 2010); Crane (2012); Cranston and Zeller (2007); Davies (2000b); Herman (2016); Jordan (2014); Muecke (2005); O’Reilly (2010b); Pollak and MacNabb (2000); Potter (2003); Ravenscroft (2012); Rawlings (2009); Rigby (2015); Rossiter and Jacobs (1993); Ryan and Wallace-Crabbe (2004); Sarwal and Sarwal (2009, 2008); Simpson-Housley and Scott (2001); Volkman (2010); Weaver (2007); Westling (2014b).


129 Drichel’s study of Coetzee’s novel Disgrace, notes more than ten contributions on these matters. Other recent studies include Barrett (2014); Danta (2007); Deyo (2013); Ley (2010); McDonell (2013); Paula (2012).

130 See Dillon (2011).

131 See Bogue (2010a); Deyo (2013); L. A. White (2012); Wiese (2014).

132 See Bartosch (2016); Brewer (2009); Crane (2010); Hughes-d’Aeth (2002); Kerridge (2002); S. S. Turner (2007).

133 See Mikkonen (2004); G. J. Murphy (2010).

134 See Armellino (2007); Barras (2015a, 2015b); Campbell (2014); Devlin-Glass (2008b); Emmett (2007); Gleenoson-White (2013); Mead (2012); Morrissey (2015); Slater (2005).

135 See Archer-Lean (2014); Boehmer (2012); Callahan (1997); Cummins (2015); Davies (2000a); Farnell (2000); Grogan (2014); Harris (2015); Hayles (2015); Hughes-d’Aeth (2009); Kimberley
subjectivity. Contemporary novels studied with these foci include those of Bail, Egan, Flanagan, Hospital, Leigh, Malouf, Mears, Scott, and Wright. Beyond the employment of notions of becoming already mentioned, these studies contain few substantive and explicit engagements with Deleuzo-Guattarian thought.\textsuperscript{136}

It does not seem unreasonable to expect to find applications of concepts of minor literature to contemporary Australian novels where scholars bring together postcolonial and ecocritical issues. However, only a few studies engage with these ideas of the resistant and creative work of the novel(ist) amid colonial capitalist oppression: referencing Indigenous peoples (Emmett, 2007; Mikkonen, 2004; Slater, 2006), and also queer culture (Davidson, 2004), settlers (Mikkonen, 2004) and others resisting European cultural hegemony (Boehmer, Ng, & Sheehan, 2016). They rarely, however, attend directly to the potential work of minor literary practices amid ecological crises in (post)colonial contexts: particularly with regard to climate change, mass extinction, and planetary degradation.\textsuperscript{137}

There is, then, substantial scope to complement existing studies of contemporary Australian novels and the posthuman, materiality, relationality, and expressions of collective resistance. Employing conceptualisations of writing the posthuman, writing affect and becomings,

\textsuperscript{136} Exceptions include Campbell (2014); Emmett (2007); Farnell (2000); Davies (2000a); Armellino (2007).

\textsuperscript{137} Daley (2016a) provides an exception.
and minor literature will also contribute new knowledge, particularly with respect to the potential(s) for contemporary Australian novels to cultivate ecological sense amid Crises of Ecologies. Chapters 4, 5, and 6 present studies of three such novels: Tim Winton’s *Eyrie* (2013); Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book* (2013); and Janette Turner Hospital’s *Oyster* (1996). These novels were produced during a period of increasing social, political, scientific, artistic, technological, and commercial engagement with aspects of Crises of Ecologies. Each writer’s interests in and engagements with Crises of Ecologies are well known. Furthermore, as I discuss below, the research in this thesis complements and expands upon extant literary studies of these writers and these three novels.

Winton literary studies attend to his concerns with environmental damage and to his activism (Ben-Messahel, 2006; Pollak & MacNabb, 2000; Rooney, 2009; Taylor, 1996); to his writing of landscape, space, place, Australian natural particularities and culture-nature interfaces (Anandavalli, 2008; Crane, 2006; Galvin, 2000; Kuhlenbeck, 2007; Liu, 2013; Tyas, 1995; Winton, 2015); and to his concerns with Human/non-and-more-than-human relations, including violence to the animal (Huggan, 2015b; J. P. Turner, 1993). With respect to cultural and political concerns, Winton studies attend to his writing of the violence of capitalism and neoliberalism (Ben-Messahel, 2006; Birns, 2014, 2015); to threats to Australian culture, community, civilisation, citizenship and multiculturalism in his works (B. Bennett, 1994; Helff, 2014; Hubbell & Ryan, 2016; McCredden, 2016; McCredden & O'Reilly, 2014a, p. 3; Winton & Watts, 2015); and to his attention to faith, spirituality, religion, the sacred and their limits (McCredden, 2010, 2016).
Attention to these aspects of Winton’s writing often accompanies consideration of subjectivity and relationality. Studies engage with trauma and violence (Arizti Martin, 2011; Baelo-Allué & Herrero, 2011; Conrad, 2013); with postcolonial and still-colonial challenges to peoples and country (Crane, 2006; Kuttainen, 2012; McCredden, 2016); with language, the vernacular, idiom, their limits, and their importance to identity; with making, and being unable to make, meaning (McCredden, 2014, 2016); with families (conventional, broken and unconventional) (McCredden, 2016); with subjective movement, transformation, transience, and transcendence (Ashcroft, 2014; McCredden, 2010; Schuerholz, 2012c); with childhood, and growing up (Dalziell, 2014; Laigle, 1997; Matthews, 1993); with women (Alarcos, 2010; McCredden, 2016; McGloin, 2012; Schuerholz, 2012a, 2012b); and with masculinity (McCredden, 2016; Thomas, 2010; Zapata, 2008). Studies of Winton’s literary concerns with transversality—material and otherwise—attend to water and transformation, materiality, death and renewal (Ashcroft, 2014; Huggan, 2015a); to Indigenous culture, non-and-more-than-human relationality and non-indigenous Australians (Harris, 2015; McGloin, 2012; O'Reilly, 2010a); and to liminality, marginality, extremes, and the outsider (Crane, 2007; Fei, 2014; Hopkins, 1993).

While a substantial body of scholarship engages with Winton’s environmental literary practices, a more modest body of work undertakes Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist studies of his writing and its potential efficacies amid Crises of Ecologies. Boehmer (2012) raises posthuman concerns, arguing that “understanding ‘real life’ through the medium of the body” is important to Winton’s writing, with humans often reduced to “pre-
verbal” states of being. Harris (2015) explores relationality and sound in Dirt Music, suggesting that “To ‘sound’ the land […] encourages the potential for new understandings of the human relationship to the natural environment, and thus a more complete way of being in place” (p. 1). Ashcroft (2014) finds water to be a medium of transformation in Winton’s works: cultivating corporeal, psychical and spiritual becomings. Huggan (2015a) suggests Winton’s novel Breath has the potential, in the context of climate change, to cultivate our sense of material agencies, and to enable new ethical responses. “[C]ontemporary risk narratives” (p. 89) like Breath, Huggan argues, increase reader awareness of:

what it means to ‘dwell in crisis’ at a time of full-blown ecological emergency in which risks of all kinds – and all degrees of magnitude, proliferation, and intensity – register within and across a dizzying variety of spatial and temporal sites. (p. 100)

There are, though, no published studies of Eyrie attending to Crises of Ecologies and writing the posthuman, writing affect and becoming, or minor literature.

Critical attention has been given to Alexis Wright’s fiction and the questions of human and non-and-more-than-human relationality. Studies of Wright’s Carpentaria (Brewster, 2010; Devlin-Glass, 2007, 2008b; Gleeson-White, 2013; Ravenscroft, 2010; C. E. Rigby, 2013) are concerned with the
transversal, vibrant, non-and-more-than-human world and Indigenous cosmologies/onto-epistemologies, although less attention is given to the animal and to becomings. Literary studies also attend to Wright’s political focus upon other ways of perceiving and conceiving of Life (philosophy) and lives (Indigenous states of affairs) in contemporary (and future) Australia.\(^\text{138}\)

Critics attend sparingly to potential resonances between Wright’s fiction and Deleuzo-Guattarian conceptualisations of literary practices.\(^\text{139}\) However, Barras’, Skeat’s, Gleeson-White’s, and Daley’s studies signal trajectories for scholarship with which the ideas in this thesis are consistent. Barras (2015b) explores the materiality of writing in *The Swan Book*, and its potential to shape ecological thinking and sense. The novel, he contends, is a cultural vehicle for unsettling and reconstituting “still colonial” perceptions and conceptions of indigeneity, non-indigeneity, relationality, and our Australian state of affairs. Barras (2015c), Skeat (2016), and Gleeson-White (2016) attend to Wright’s writing of the agency of the non-and-more-than-human, and of the human as imbricated with/an extension of country. Barras argues that Wright produces a sense of the unbounded posthuman and of an enmeshed relationality that is singularly Indigenous but has potential to sensuously reshape readers’ sense of ecology more generally. He focuses particularly on the potential for story (language) to reshape subjectivity amid Crises of Ecologies. While he notes the sensory force of story and writing,

\(^{138}\) See Brewster (2010); Devlin-Glass (2007, 2008b); Gleeson-White (2013); Ravenscroft (2010, 2012); White (2014).

\(^{139}\) Ravenscroft (2012, p. 40) discusses the potential affective force of Indigenous literature, positing a kind of affective blindness in non-indigenous readers.
his analyses do not employ notions of affect. Focusing on climate change, and not privileging Indigenous philosophy vis-a-vis Wright’s literary practices, Skeat embraces thing theory (J. Bennett, 2010; Brown, 2003), ideas of networked ecological crises (Heise, 2008; Nixon, 2011) and Baradian intra-activity (2007). Skeat argues that *The Swan Book*, including Wright’s “bewildering” (p. 6) style, contributes to “re-imaginings of ecological realities” (p. 1), reorients conceptualisations of our relationships with non-and-more-than-human Life and the forces of ecological crises to encompass transversality or transcorporeality (Niemanis & Walker, 2014), and cultivates a more expansionary environmental ethics. Gleeson-White (2016) offers an initially pessimistic reading of *The Swan Book* focusing upon the extent to which ecological crises (climate change) puts country and hope at risk, and exploring Wright’s novel as a literary response to these risks. In this context, Gleeson-White reads Wright’s literary practices as seeking to find new stories, and new ways of telling stories—particularly via Oblivia as dynamic embodiment of country—that resist damaging coloniser representations of country, and that contribute to the revitalisation of its agency and that of Indigenous peoples. Daley (2016b) employs Deleuzo-Guattarian concepts of event, becomings, fabulation, and minor literature explicitly in her reading of *The Swan Book*. The notion of event is used to support a reading of Indigenous crises and the violence of colonisation as unfinished and not consigned to a past (p. 310-311). Daley points out the becomings-swan that “express openness between human and non-human life forms” (p. 305) and enable new life trajectories amid Crises. She argues that the work of the impossible image of the black swan “out of place” (p. 313) in country is
expressive, in its anomaly, of the earth’s imperceptible non-and-more-than-human forces. She also contends that Wright writes intensively: disrupting language and style to evoke a non-and-more-than-human collective assemblage of enunciation or people to come, to resist oppression (not least discursive), to express Human/non-and-more-than-human transversality, and to gesture towards “other possibilities for living and speaking […] than are currently available” (p. 306). The ideas I pursue in Chapter 5 resonate strongly with Daley’s work, albeit I attempt to reorient the critical approach to begin with Indigenous onto-epistemologies, considering how Wright’s work informs conceptualisations of literary practices and enriches Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist thought on them. I also deal more expansively with Wright’s re-conceiving of the symptoms of Indigenous ecological crises, with non-and-more-than-human agency in the text, with becomings, with the contributions of style to the vitality of Indigenous expression, and with how these qualities of Wright’s literary practice cultivate ecological sense.

Studies of Hospital’s writing and *Oyster* have been modest, though generative, insofar as they concern themselves with Crises of Ecologies, the posthuman, affect and becoming, minor literature, and the literary cultivation of ecological sense. Scholars have, in particular, engaged with Hospital’s writing of Indigenous Crises of Ecologies: violence to peoples and country; coloniser-Indigenous relations; the repression and survival of alternative modes of spatiality and temporality; the incommensurability of Indigenous histories and coloniser History; and the repression—and survival—of non-
western notions of ecologies. Studies also deal with language and discourse as forces of embodiment and subjectivity in Hospital’s works. Certain of these studies gesture toward the materiality of subjectivity and the non-discursive material forces at work in Hospital's writing. However, Hospital’s writing of the unavoidable, mutual entailment of the material and the discursive in the world’s becomings, to use Barad’s (2003) ideas, remains little considered. Davies’ (2000a) study, via Deleuze and Cixous, of Hospital’s writing and *Oyster*, gestures toward the transversal production of subjectivities via material relations. Attending to what language cannot represent—through absences, silences, gaps, and expressions “without words” (p. 190)—Davies raises the matter of language carrying sensation; producing movement, flow, and change. At the very least, Davies’ critique suggests that Hospital’s writing in *Oyster* could move readers into the realms of affect, transversality, permeability and the agency of the non-and-more-than-human. There are, in Davies’ words, material oppressions and liberatory trajectories to be explored via certain re-attunements: first, to our “embodiment in landscape” (p. 195); second, to the nature of the “oppressive and controlling [and, I suggest, material-discursive] forces” at

140 See Dunlop (2010); Fraile (2011); Muller (2000).
141 For Brennan (2004) and Davies (2000a) the very discursive order that contracts subjective potential paradoxically becomes a source of resistance and liberation in *Oyster*. Callahan (2009), Coyle (2001), Davies (2000a), and Greiner (2007) attend to Hospital and the inadequacies of language to capture Life: they note the desire for order and the indeterminacy and slipperiness of words in *Oyster*, as well as the intrusion of other orders of existence, and dimensions of relations: that there are things not easily seen, touched, spoken, written, and expressed. There exists an unavoidable permeability and flux which means that words and things refuse to settle (Callahan, 2009, pp. 6-7).
work; and, third, via the pursuit of variations in relations or “different linkages or new alignments’ (Grosz 1995, p126)” (p. 196).

While *Oyster* is not her focus, Potter (2005a) discerns a “literary poetics” in Hospital’s writing, with capacities to convey the “material unfolding” of life, expand ecological discourse, decentre the Human, and unflatten “the heterogeneous life-world” (p. 4). Potter suggests that Hospital’s writing works to convey “enchanted matter” and to impress interconnectedness, indeterminacy, flow and flux upon the reader, rather than the stability and unity of things.143 Potter considers metaphor to be a mode with positive potentials to convey ecological complexity, relations and flows, and human and non-and-more-than-human entanglements. Potter’s focus does not exclude the possibility that “Language, though headstrong, is not simply in opposition to intensity” (Massumi, 2002a, p. 25) and that metaphor can—indeed, must necessarily—operate intensively as well as representationally.

The studies of *Eyrie, The Swan Book,* and *Oyster* that comprise Chapters 4, 5, and 6 respond to the research trajectories and lacunae outlined here.

---

143 Callahan (2001) and Coyle (2001) study Chaos and Complexity in Hospital’s writing, and appear to be implicitly concerned with literature’s potential to cultivate a sense of Life beyond human perceptual limitations.
Chapter 4 - Tim Winton’s *Eyrie*

Why do we think that the deepest ecological experience would be full of love and light? (Morton, 2007b, p. 198)

Pulsating with the ruined Life of a decidedly post-apocalyptic-feeling Fremantle, in a country ravaged by capitalism, *Eyrie* follows Tom Keely’s also ruined life, his crises and his conflicts. Keely wants to discard his identity and forge a meaningful subjectivity; to stand alone from family and community and protect those who fall into his sphere of concern; to wallow in his ruins and find ways back to vitality; and to blame everyone else and excoriate himself. Recently, Keely lost his job as an environmental lobbyist, became estranged from his wife, sister and mother (he lost his father as a boy), and took refuge in his shabby tower block apartment (The Mirador). His health has deteriorated and he self-medicates with alcohol and pharmaceuticals. He finds himself pulled, half-willingly, into a relationship with two other tower-dwellers: a woman he knew as a child, Gemma, and her grandson, the “strange kid” (p. 146), Kai. As they face extortion and threats of violence by Kai’s father, Stewie, and his side-kick, Clappy, Keely tries to help; eventually falling back down to street level where Life, “chance”, and “destiny” (p. 375) await.

A study of *Eyrie* as a pain-full novel might not immediately appear to be uplifting amid Crises of Ecologies. Nevertheless, uplift may not be what is needed. I propose to eschew the search for meaning, salvation, redemption,
and affirming moralities in Winton’s story: each of which might represent a pathway to fictitious comfort or false closure. I also propose that we need not be disappointed by an absence of salvationary light at the end of the literary tunnel. Rather, I explore how encounters with *Eyrie* can affect readers in at least two ways: negating some paths for Life and living and affirming others. Indeed, the literary practices that express such variety suggest something of literature’s potential to cultivate ecological sense.

Although these two types of encounter with *Eyrie* are irreducibly entangled, I engage, first, with violent negations: the bleak, the dark, and the unredemptive. Winton ruins what Braidotti (2002) describes as the “normative vision of [the] embodied[1], coherent, sustainable, Human] subject” (p. 124). He breaks down, suspends, and holds indeterminate the promises of signification as a path to meaning and rational sense-making. An axe is taken to language and a brutalist style employed. Religion, family, and community are withdrawn as ways through Crises, and capitalism is installed as the ground and limit for subjectivity, Life and meaning. In addition, the non-and-more-than-human world’s vitality and nurturing qualities are withdrawn: particularly those of birds and water.144

While reading only for negation and loss confirms *Eyrie’s* stark impressions of the tragic and unsustainable paths down which Life is moving, it risks leaving readers with an unassimilable traumatic burden of destruction, absence, and isolation. Consequently, in this chapter’s second half, I argue that by moving further into the *Eyrie’s* darkness and

144 Water is so often a powerful, material-spiritual field in Winton’s writing (Ashcroft, 2014).
brokenness, and by pursuing relations across other registers (material, affective, and discursive), we can find Life and strange affirmations amid ruination. Winton’s literary practices in *Eyrie* carry potentials to cultivate ecological sense, specifically: immersing readers in a dark ecology (Morton, 2007b); producing intensive cartographies of the vulnerable posthuman (Braidotti, 2013), and of the agentic non-and-more-than-human, such as global warming as hyperobject (Morton, 2013a); writing traumatic affect and becomings-child and -bird (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987); and employing an intensive, contagious, and resistant (a minor) writing style.

**Violent negations**

[M]an is an invention of recent date. And one perhaps nearing its end (Foucault, 2004, p. 422)

[Y]ou told your sister you were already dead (Winton, 2013, p. 213)

While the aporias, constraints and violence associated with the idea of the Human have been long debated, Keely has come late and hard to the

---

145 For Braidotti (2013), Althusser, Blanchot, Foucault, and Lacan are contributors to the debate.
fall of Man. Through Keely, Winton writes microcosmic crises of organism, subject and signification (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 134) and a line of flight towards dissolution and oblivion. A dominant version of the Human—male; coherent identity; audible speaking voice; recognisable form, purpose, and influence; defined family role; able to protect; in control—has fallen. We are witnessing, Winton suggests, a “burnt figure” (Steger, 2013). Keely is a walking ruin: a “ruined carcase” (Winton, 2013, p. 28) and a “remnant self” (p. 18); a fragmented form with uncontrollable limbs and unreliable senses; intoxicated and toxic; “peeled” (p. 18) and an “empty thing” (p. 325). He exists in apocalyptic suffering and pain: “beyond anything the booze could induce. Here it came, the smoke and thunder, the welling percussion in his skull. Like hoofbeats. Two riders approaching. And the wind set to howl” (p. 6). He experiences something only approximating “waking consciousness” as “bad weather and shapeless mortification” (p. 4). The best he can say for himself is that “he hadn’t died in the night” (p. 8). He is without stable form in the world. In the Mirador elevator, Keely’s “dim outline in the mirror moved in sympathy. Not really in sync. An approximation” (p. 48). His body and his mind seem to have been rendered fluid, mobile and uncontrolled (p. 23).

146 Gemma is also a ‘ruin’—“Inside I was rubbish” (p. 136)—as are Keely’s ex-wife (p. 181), Harriet, Conan the vagrant (pp. 172-175), Keely’s father, Nev (p. 130), the cook, Gypsy (p. 389), and the thug, Clappy (p. 421).

147 He experiences fugue states (“fugue-walk” (2013, p. 145)), blackouts (p. 115-116), his “right leg twitching waywardly” (p. 70) and “One arm flapped independent of him” (p. 114).

148 His body poisoned by Barossa shiraz (2013, p. 4). He overmedicates: numbs himself to sleep (p. 52) and numbs his thoughts/pain with “worthy analgesics” (p. 240).
Deleuze and Guattari (1987) conceptualise faciality as a social mode of controlling and contracting subjectivity and signification: a face marks and limits what you can do (p. 167) and enables you to cohere and fit in (Lorraine, 2011, p. 66). In *Eyrie*, Winton’s teratological narration finds Keely “asignifying, asubjective, and faceless” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 167): sporting “the face of a Monster” (Winton, 2013, p. 161). Keely has lost the face that fitted and cohered physically, psychically and socially. It has become the “ruins of a scorched earth retreat”; a “battlefield” from which his eyes have “retreated”; with a “Wildman beard” and “wine-blackened teeth”; all “gullies and flaky shale”; a “Badlands” (p. 4). Socially, he believes himself no longer “necessary” (p. 236). He has been cuckolded (p. 148), maritally estranged, suffered his wife’s abortion as though losing his own child (p. 195), and lost his job, house, reputation, boat and friends. He wallows in separation in the Mirador tower. Keely is strange even to himself: “When you felt as abstracted from yourself as he did these days, why not feel strange in your own face?” (p. 188). He tries to resist habits of his old self—“He reached for the radio. Checked himself” (p. 6)—and the connections to others that shaped it. He closes his email account: “fried everything while he had the will” (p. 52). When Gemma recognises Keely, he avoids recognition—“It was nasty, hearing his own name uttered” (p. 27)—eventually “regretting admitting who he was” (p. 28).

Keely has lost his “armour” and his “enviable […] social capital” (2013, p. 112). Although he doubts the loss of his moral bearings (p. 119), the media marks him as a “traitor to progress” (p. 117). Keely does not miss the irony that his employment in resisting capitalist excesses depended upon
capitalism’s existence. He was marketised and drawn into the system. His public “catastrophic brain-snap” (p. 41) led to his banishment and now he can no longer “make a living” (pp. 116-117). Keely has lost “the will to count” (p. 3) and to place himself at history’s centre: it is, he thinks, “Someone else’s fight now” (p. 116). A short list of ascetic habits—a walk, a swim, and a coffee—give Keely’s “standard wasted” days “a certain functional coherence” (pp. 17, 18); although “Some days he struggled to even form an intention” (p. 42).

With regard to language, Winton’s acknowledgement that he writes “odd, eccentric, lonely and marginal characters who strive to find meaning amidst a symbolic environment” (Ben-Messahel, 2012, p. 9) seems appropriate to Keely. While my engagement with Eyrie focuses upon Winton’s intensive use of language rather than the search for meaning, I acknowledge McCredden and O’Reilly’s (2014b) reading of Eyrie as “a novel about language and the limits of the linguistic to carry the full burden of meaning with which humans often seek to imbue it” (p. 9). McCredden (2014) suggests that Eyrie conveys a condition traversing author, character and reader: “intolerable insignificance, the loss of faith in meaning-making and ontological power” (p. 308). Until recently a spokesperson, Keely’s words now lack sense. He finds himself to be “pure bullshit and noise, just another flannel-tongued Jeremiah” (Winton, 2013, p. 6). At times, he can hardly speak—“Well, he croaked […] he rasped […] muttered […] slurring” (pp. 27, 42, 48, 80)—and speaking truth doesn't help because, “We’re meant to lose” (p. 74). He finds words uncontrollable: talking to himself (p. 42); speaking and not knowing it (pp. 80, 176). For Keely, language offers no
safety, and meaning repeatedly eludes him (pp. 25, 66, 72, 249 & 265). He finds himself drawn to, and drawn into, silence: “they bounced in his head, the words. Clotted his jaw. Ground it shut. Till his teeth went into his soft glowing brain” (p. 337).

Keely is not alone. Kai distrusts words (Winton, 2013, pp. 232-233), mutates them (pp. 23, 135), and obsesses over their materiality (p. 232). His emotional inscrutability and gnomic utterances could, of course, be as profoundly meaningful as they are inaccessible. However, in the search for interpretative stability, we should not presume that Winton has provided a scaffold by which we can ascend to meaning. Mostly, Kai emits an impregnable “Diamond drill-bit silence” (p. 151) and a blank, “impassive, unreachable” (p. 235) unresponsiveness: “The boy said nothing” (p. 251). His rare utterances are often perplexing: “I was stuck, said Kai […] No words, said the boy in a strange, flat tone. Things didn’t work. I wasn’t feeling right. Something had to take me” (p. 132).

Winton’s writing appears unwell, pained, and pain-full: both producing and produced by Keely. It is arid, unpredictable; often gasping and winking out to nothing; at other times grinding and banging almost unsustainably; enduring only through an arrhythmic, alliterative, consonant and assonant heartbeat. Winton’s syntactical and lexical choices express a purposive suffering from inadequacy; a breaking-down; an atomisation; and a failing reminiscent of Deleuze’s (1997) characterisation of Beckett’s “atomic, disjunctive, cut and chopped language” (p. 156). Winton’s short, fragmented sentences seem to function in sympathy with the sense we get elsewhere of
Keely’s ruined and fragmented body, mind and self. Because Keely is the novel’s focaliser, we might also gauge that these broken-down utterances are the products of Keely’s ruined powers of living. Winton’s writing conveys and yields “freeze-framing jerks of consciousness” (Winton, 2013, p. 281), suggesting broken, disordered perceptions, movements, relations and thoughts, and itself jerking, broken, and disordered. Words often seem to be lost or omitted. Clipped dialogue and full stops produce a halting, broken down rhythm, and incompleteness in the narrative and in Keely’s focalisation, again resonant of Deleuze’s (1997) Beckett: “riddled with dots […] in order to ceaselessly reduce the surface of the words” (p. 174).

Longer sentences, broken by commas, disrupt the narrative flow, as when Keely describes himself as “maudlin, grievous, fitful, lacking proper administration, useless for anything other than goading the pain […]” (Winton, 2013, p. 6). This is the stunted, partial language of the broken, shambling and cast adrift subject: lacking the vitality to produce anything more fulsome. Consider the rattling rhythm of ten short sentences early in the novel:

In the kitchen he scrabbled for ammunition, pre-emptive relief. Any bottle or packet would do. Said the joker to the thief. Lucky dip and rattle them blind from the knife drawer. Gurn them down like bullets. And reload. Or at least stand to. Sprawled against the countertop. Sweating through his soapy freshness in a few seconds. Think of something else. (p. 6)
The passage expresses an unravelling. The syntax is interruptive, fragmentary, and contracted. The rhythm is jerky. The language suggests monstrosity, grotesquery: “scrabbled […] Gurn […] Sprawled […] Sweating”. We need hardly attend to what Keely is doing (desperately seeking chemical solace for his pain) to participate in the painful and ruinous process: style draws us in. Albeit, the writing retains the faintest, enduring heartbeat: rhyming “relief” and “thief”, “would do” and “stand to”. Later in the novel, as Keely washes dishes at Bub’s cafe, linguistic, corporeal and incorporeal connections and sense appear to be breaking down: “Time was choppy. Fitful. Endlessly interrupted. Like a broken signal. Dirty coronas hung over every passing object. He worked, aping his own movements, head fluffy as the suds rising in his face” (p. 388). Albeit, again, within this literary arrhythmia, the barest hints of a consistent pulse persist: “choppy […] Endlessly […] interrupted […] passing […] fluffy”, and the repetition of “o”.

As Keely experiences a fugue state, inexplicably finding himself at the ocean’s edge, Winton’s spare, halting prose expresses the sense of an incapacitating void by entering its own:

Furious blank.

A Kind of.
Kind of.

Kind of turbulence.


Okay.

Tamp down the panic.

Okay.

Nothing you can do about it. Well, nothing you'll let yourself do.

Being what and who you are.

Alright. Whatever. (Winton, 2013, p. 115)

At times, as with Keely’s withdrawn existence, Winton’s writing is drawn back almost to erasure or abbreviated to no more than the absolutely necessary: “Dawn. Morning. Day. // Didn’t take the bike out. Didn’t swim. Eyes like hot pea gravel” (p. 51). Chapters too, become almost insubstantial textual materials: one of eighteen lines; another of nine, in which Keely tries to ready himself to help Gemma and Kai escape the city:
Didn’t know how long it was before he stirred again, still connected. Climbed up. Took the mobile into the next room. Blinked at the suitcase on the bed. He knew Doris would come if he called. But he was too blurry just now to get going and stay going. Needed to be competent.

Felt the mattress subside beneath him. Clutched the phone close. Sound of the living boy. Just for a moment, until he was clear.

Then they’d go south. To forest, white coves, granite boulders like beasts resting before the silver sea. (p. 419)

This chapter, and its equally truncated fantasy of salvation, are spectral: corporeally insubstantial, though not deprived of force by being so. Floating without subject, some of Winton’s sentences almost lose the Human. As focaliser, Keely’s consciousness hovers, his thoughts a fading pulse. Escape impulses are anaesthetised by the ethereal, exhausted prose and we lose Keely to the folds of his bed.

The disparate sensory flashes and flares of the novel’s final lines render events incoherent and withdraw access to a reliable version of what has happened:

The veiled faces retracted uncertainly and Keely understood. He’d fallen. He saw the tower beyond and the tiny figure of the boy safe
on the balcony. He smelt salt and concrete and urine. Saw lovely brown thumbs pressing numbers, cheeping digits, reaching down. The edit was choppy. The boy’s face a flash – or was that a gull?

Sir, there is bleeding. Are you well?

Yes, he said with all the clarity left to him. Thankyou. I am well.

(Winton, 2013, p. 424)

We can, of course, scrabble for sense here. We might deduce that Keely has been injured but we cannot close off his story; nor Kai’s and Gemma’s (however safe we might hope they are). Given Keely’s dissolution of late, his definition of being “well” seems far from clear. His body, thoughts and voice seem to map a fragmentation and thinning out of connections. He too is “A pale facsimile […] Very pale” (Winton, 2013, p. 198). Whether we find ourselves outside Keely looking in, or inside looking out, Winton writes us into a void.

Just as broken humans and broken language inhabit Eyrie, so do broken communities. For Winton, as capitalism’s “prosperous individuation” continues (Steger, 2013), lives are ruined, and collectivity fragmented. He bemoans the decline of “the old communal ethos of previous generations […] replaced by the citizen as consumer” and observes that “links between people have hardly been fainter” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 109). Keely’s “good neighbours” in the Mirador emit “the stench of strangers” and remain “alien to him in the most satisfying way imaginable, anonymous and
reassuringly disconnected”, while the multiplicity of beings at ground level are, for him, a “spreading mob” (Winton, 2013, pp. 3-4). Kai also exists in “wary isolation” (p. 28). Keely finds Kai a “strange” (p. 132), unconventional child. The boy exhibits precision, graveness, “hermitic concentration” (p. 134), loneliness (“an island of self-possession”), and melancholy (p. 134). He is “toneless” (p. 138) and “expressionless” (p. 151): offering “not a flicker” (p. 155). He is “Solitary, oblivious, preoccupied” (p. 206); avoiding eye contact. He is almost corporeally insubstantial: “just pale mist in the narrow gap” (p. 151), and “no more substantial than a blur” (p. 131). It seems that Kai shuts himself off from others, including Keely, rather than make sociable overtures towards them, interacting only on his own terms.149

McCredden notes that Eyrie engages with “questions […] about family as cradle of identity and values; the redemptive or tragic possibilities of family; and family as the primary crucible of language formation and signification” (2014, p. 308). This said, families in Eyrie are, at best, rent asunder by their failings and, more often, entirely broken. Keely’s marriage is over. He avoids family members (Doris and Faith) as much as he craves and feels obliged to connect. The familial relationship Keely develops with Gemma and Kai is an always-qualified, melancholically rendered, “faded marriage” in which “he yearned for more” (Winton, 2013, p. 233). Gemma’s family is also broken: her daughter imprisoned and estranged, and her grandson threatened by his father. There are no functional Oedipal triangles in Eyrie, only the

149 Albeit, as I discuss later, Keely and Kai are drawn to each other.
realities of broken lives, failed connections, failed role models, violence, and loss.

Winton’s well-recorded literary engagements with faith, religion, and the sacred (McCredden, 2010, 2014, 2016; McCredden & O’Reilly, 2014a) recur in *Eyrie*. Winton wraps his story in faith’s empty promise. When Harriet suggests to Keely, “Bad faith. It bends you out of shape”, he responds “Faith of any sort, I’d have thought” (Winton, 2013, p. 181). Faith, it seems, works to divide people, like Nev and his good friend, Wal: “You could sense something solid between them. Despite Jesus. And all the lost Sundays” (p. 122). Others, like Nev, are lost to faith: “Keely remembered him in a cane chair beneath the almond tree, praying, weeping […] Soon afterwards the heart attack carted him off” (p. 130). As far as Keely is concerned, religion entails trauma, failure and unrewarded faith.

The promise of salvation and transcendent grace are continuously withdrawn in *Eyrie*; not least for Keely, the figure who desires these most. Too often, exhortations to save are accompanied by awareness of its impossibility, and of an incapacity to make any substantive difference: “I have redeemed a bicycle, he whispered […] That is what I have saved” (p. 195). Rather than offer salvation, *Eyrie* engages with Keely’s, Kai’s, and Gemma’s search for a sense of safety and how it can be found and felt differently: for Gemma, through sex with a trusted other (p. 102); and for Keely, through hiding away in the flat (p. 11). It is not clear that Kai ever feels safe, or knows what safe is, except, perhaps, when he erroneously believes that he has been saved from his father, Stewie, by Keely. A
reading of the final passages of *Eyrie* might suggest that Keely’s (and Gemma’s) acts have made Kai safe, or that Keely’s wounded condition represents an act of sacrifice to secure that safety. However, such a reading would be to read more than the text provides. At best, the fates of Keely, Kai and Gemma are unresolved or suspended. Humans—among others—remain endangered and vulnerable.

Winton notes that “The real challenge [for the writer] is finding language that still carries something to people in an era when religion is counter-cultural, even anti-social – an affront to the mainstream” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 112). And, indeed, scriptural “high language” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 155) pervades *Eyrie*, with “God”, “Jesus” and “Christ” peppering the vernacular (Goddard, 2014). However, the “high language”, symbols, mythology, tropes, figurations and indexes of religion, do not enable *Eyrie* to be read unproblematically as a story about finding salvation or redemption, and they are scarcely used to evoke matters of faith or spirituality. More often, they express and underpin irony, cynicism, sarcasm, and exclamatory, reactive remarks (Goddard, 2014). The first few pages offer up: “Gospel gasp […] revival […] mercifully […] pillar of dust […] ‘Beelzebub’ […] philistine-giant […] Leviathan […] pentecostal […] By God […] Jeremiah […] mission [and] prophecy” (Winton, 2013, pp. 3-6). This language, though, is trammelled by the vehicle of capitalism and emptied of its Christian religious meanings. It is the Western Australian mining boom\(^ {150} \) that

---

\(^ {150} \) Growth in demand for Australian ore, beginning in the second half of the twentieth century, dominating economic growth and shaping coloniser and Indigenous cultures (Measham, Haslam Mckenzie, Moffat, & Franks, 2013; Trigger, 1997).
expresses a “pentecostal ecstasy” to which resistance is “heresy” (p. 6). Western Australia is the “philistine giant” and “Leviathan” (p. 5). The only “angelic logic” is that of the “trickle down economy” (p. 60).

Capitalism rises up as the dominant faith in Eyrie: shaping bodies and colonising meaning. I noted in Chapter 1 that the orientation and control of affect is one way in which capitalism shapes and operates through bodies, producing subjectivities aligned with the drive for ongoing capital accumulation without significant resistance. In Eyrie, we find Keely brought to the brink of a particular kind of oblivion by affect. He escapes the chaos of Fremantle’s streets by entering a retail environment but this escape entails an affective immersion and transformation (almost dissolution) of his already faltering sense of self. The body and subject as consumer colonises the void of self. Keely enters the store and we read: “Coles. Safe harbour. Obedient glass doors, airconditioning, muzak” (p. 16).\footnote{Coles is an Australian grocery chain.} In these short sentences, Winton brings together the separation of the subject from the chaos of the world, the notion of control, and a sense of the forces that will affectively (re)shape the subject. Winton’s poetics immerse Keely in a sensual arrest and emptying out;\footnote{Though it is also a saturation, with other affects.} in an almost cryogenic suspension of those qualities that we might, so far, have deemed to be ‘Keely’. The alliterative, consonant, and assonant form in the lines that follow these first few short sentences, including the repetition of “c” and “k”, enacts a halting or choking, a sense of arrested movement:
cool […] cooler […] Christ’s […] clement […] colour […] colonnade
[…] cool […] Celt […] kind […] calm […] caught […] cabinets […]
Karen Carpenter […] clean […] crates […] Cleen […] clung (p. 16)

Sense impressions evoke order and hygiene: “uniform lines […] serried
ranks […] unpeopled order […] clean pine crates” (p. 16). Keely is lulled into
sensory suspension: auditory (“muzak […] special kind of quiet […] silent”
(p. 16)); visual (“fluorescent […] pale green […] pastel colour […] misty
sheen […] unending blur” (p. 16)); tactile (“cool air […] his cheek was cool
against the floor” (p. 16)); and olfactory (“the last faint odour” (p. 16)). To be
immersed here is to be “unpeopled”: to undergo a kind of contraction of
subjective scope (p. 16). Keely’s body is calmed, cooled, slowed down; his
mind put to sleep, drawn into a reverie, blurred, quietened, silenced; his
condition transformed into “stunned mullethood” (p. 17). Vitality is sucked
from him (he is “shriven” (p. 16)) and his powers of acting are diminished by
the retail encounter’s affective force. At the same time, he loses the anxiety
that he expressed on the street moments before. He is now “Becalmed,
Adrift”: a wraith “ghost[ing…] through the aisles accompanied” by the dead
(p. 16). Keely reflects that “he really could be losing his mind’ (p. 17),
although, if he is, the body and the senses are driving the evacuation. For
Keely to “feel in charge of himself”, he need only consume: and consume
anything. He becomes an automaton: “Going through the motions at the

134
checkout” (p. 17), as does the checkout girl sporting a “limp smile of boredom” (p. 17).

Winton expresses the belief that human relationships with the non-and-more-than-human are critical to our well-being (Ben-Messahel, 2012; Winton, 1996, 1998, 2009, 2012, 2015). In Chapters 1 and 3, I surveyed his engagements in Eyrie, and elsewhere, with these relationships. In Eyrie, capitalism, planetary degradation, and violence toward the non-and-more-than-human, entail and engender crises of agency. Animals (as well as humans) are unhomed, endangered, estranged, and killed. In what follows, I chiefly address the violent negations of birds and the debasement of water’s vitality in Eyrie.

Eyrie attests to the subsumption of animals and water to capitalism’s requirements, to human damage inflicted upon them, and to the withdrawal of their vitalities. Birds and marine life are evasive, absent, and often dead. Water has become lifeless, uninviting, and, to use Winton’s words on water, “as disturbing as it is reassuring” (1998, p. 45). Eyrie’s birds and humans, it seems, carry un-releasable burdens of doom. Birds are not only subsumed as resource, they have become disposable, material obstacles to progress. They are cast out, unmeasured externalities of modernity’s march. Keely mentions Carnaby’s black cockatoos (Winton, 2013, p. 64) and Mallee fowl (p. 190) unhomed and endangered by agriculture and urbanisation. Forests have been stripped—once “teeming woodland half the size of Poland”—and habitat is transformed into “the wheatbelt and the salt ravaged Badlands” (p.
Reading the newspaper, Kai and Keely’s exchange gestures toward crises traversing animal and human: “Habitat, said the boy, quoting from the headline. // That’s the big problem. // For birds. // For all of us” (p. 339). Bird and human experiences become analogous, although birds do not violate humans. Birds too are Eyrie’s burnt figures. They are violated and deterritorialised: ‘wheeling’ (p. 193); without “habitat” (p. 339); and aflame, “Just flames flyin and screamin” (p. 109). Industrial pollution has poisoned them in their thousands (p. 141), and children (Gemma, as a child, after being sexually assaulted) pass on the violence done to them by burning domesticated birds (p. 108).

Although occasionally animated as dancing cockatoos, as drawings, as memories, and as symbols, real birds are largely elusive, silent, or absent from Winton’s narrative. The Osprey/Eagle remains aloof and indeterminate; not least by virtue of Keely’s inability to name it (Winton, 2013, p. 162). Its precariousness is more than just another failure of human signifiance. When Keely takes Gemma and Kai to see the bird, it remains remote, producing a momentary, energising “flash” or “flare” (pp. 87-88). Bird song comes once in the novel, from unseen Wattlebirds amid traffic noise, and beyond that we are left with the “plaintive and querulous call” of the “eagle”, with its “whingeing” (p. 61), and with silence. Only “sea-goals” (gulls) proliferate. They spread like waste, becoming indiscernible from it:

153 Hughes-d’Aeth (2007, p. 56) writes on this “ecological annihilation”.
154 There are, along with the Osprey/Eagle, numerous sea gulls; crows (p. 312); a dove (p. 372); “A pelican alighted on a jetty pile” (p. 61); cockatoos/galahs frolicking (p. 31); and wattlebirds sounding out of view (p. 131).
“nothing moving but blown trash and gulls that looked like blown trash” (p. 323).

Ashcroft (2014) reads water as a medium of transformation in Winton’s writing, offering a corporeal experience of the sacred; a sense of “the holiness of the world” (p. 28); and access to the eternal (p. 30) and to God (p. 33). In water we find rebirth (p. 18), home and hope (p. 41), or Heimat (pp. 17-18). For Winton, water also possesses a dangerous and transformational, material agency that we find, for example, in his novels Breath (2009) and Dirt Music (2012). Given this context, readers might reasonably anticipate vibrant, agentic, redemptive water flowing through Eyrie. After all, what could be more ecologically oriented than a focus upon water’s non-and-more-than-human, transformational force? And while there are moments of immersion offering possibilities of transformation (Winton, 2013, pp. 210, 247), these moments are ephemeral, compromised and comparatively rare. To enter water, in Eyrie, physically or imaginatively, is to struggle through wounded/wounding sea, to be overburdened, and to be enveloped in the darkness, uncontrollable fecundity, and debilitating mud, of the swamp.

Eyrie begins with water’s compromised agency: “the shining sea, [and its] cruel, wince-making sheen in the dregs of morning” (Winton, 2013, p. 5). We read that “The sea beyond the breakwater was flat” and that a pilot boat cuts a “whitening wound on […] its skin” (p. 8). The sea is “invisible”, or it is welling up with junk and waste (pp. 119, 120), and emptied of marine life. Keely’s moments of elevation from immersions in the sea are few (pp. 247-
short-lived (interrupted immediately upon him surfacing by the theft of his bicycle (p. 158)), and inadequately refreshing (p. 174). To access these momentary spiritual, sensory and cognitive uplifts, Keely has to “pick […] his way through the eternal dogshit to the water” (p. 157). The sea cannot help him as he hopes. His dreams of swimming are dark, with him “fleeing shadows, making himself tiny with fear” (p. 238). There are traumatic immersions when:

> every turn of his head sent his brain spilling like unsecured cargo and it crashed against the bulwarks of his skull until he could take no more. He rested a moment, floating on a sudden pulse of nausea. His hand stung. Starbursts went off behind his eyes. He sculled back gingerly. The whole ocean curving away beneath him. Shining hard and horrible. (p. 335)

Although the river glitters “in the afternoon sun” (p. 315), its “pleasant clamminess” (p. 210) and “briny scent” (p. 70) carrying a nurturing promise, it shines only “for a moment” (p. 68). The riverbank is bounded, for Keely, by abject, mushroom-like jellyfish, and the dead, white skeleton of the Marri tree. While Keely imagines that an immersion in the river’s soupy, uninviting water might still offer a kind of “reprieve” (p. 303), human bodies do not enter it in the narrative. Close up, river water becomes murky, squalid, and
smelly: “sloughy” (p. 302); “flat, shallow, brown” (p. 177); a “shithole” (p. 334).

Having considered the violent negations of *Eyrie*, I turn now to its strange affirmations. While Winton writes compromised bodies—the Human, family, language, religion, community, nature, the non-and-more-than-human—from which some might still, hopelessly, seek transformation and redemption, he also writes other modes of relation. This writing, while not necessarily salvationary, carries affirmative potentials: to cultivate ecological sense and to enable our embrace of our entanglements in Crises of Ecologies.

**Strange affirmations**

So while we campaign to make our world "cleaner" and less toxic, less harmful to sentient beings, our philosophical adventure should in some ways be quite the reverse. We should be finding ways to stick around with the sticky mess that we're in and that we are, making thinking dirtier, identifying with ugliness, practicing "hauntology" (Derrida's phrase) rather than ontology. (Morton, 2007b, p. 188)
There is little “trite ecological sentimentality” (Morton, 2010a, p. 200) accompanying Eyrie’s human and non-and-more-than-human falls. What we encounter instead resonates with Morton’s (2010d) notion of “‘humiliating’ descent[s], towards what is rather abstractly called ‘the earth’” (p. 265), with humility as an affirmative condition. Keely’s pain and nihilistic grief are entangled with his loss of identity, and all, in turn, are entangled with the denuded world in which he “limped in ruins” (Winton, 2013, p. 371). He expresses the loss of the human as coherent concept as well as the painful, material entanglements of Life that go so far as to break down the conventional notion of there being boundaries between the subject and the object. Winton dissolves the human and recuperates the non-and-more-than-human by immersing Keely and the reader in a non-identitarian, entangled, ugly, strange, abject, collective condition from which he/we cannot achieve a distance and in which he/we must linger. Morton (2007b, p. 142) calls such writing practices “dark ecology” and Winton’s dark ecology is no celebratory revelation of the posthuman but, rather, a descent into intimate melancholy.

Morton (2007b) writes:

155 An imbrication, entanglement and irreducible proximity to; a strange inseparability from that which we might have deemed other and separate. Not, Morton clarifies, a “predictable, warm fuzziness” (2010c, p. 31).
For Freud, melancholy is a refusal to digest the object, a sticking in the throat, an introjection […] Unable fully to introject or digest the idea of the other, we are caught in its headlights, suspended in the possibility of acting without being able to act. (p. 186)

While Winton’s dark ecology is not comforting, its entanglements offer a kind of coherence. It allows writer and readers to “linger longer’ […] in the darkness of a dying world” (Morton, 2010a, p. 269): to remain stuck in the waste, the ruins, the swamp, and upon the “ravaged plain” (Winton, 2013, p. 23). Keely is always-already enmeshed and, as such, there has been no loss of Nature, but rather damage done to Life, of which he is an entangled part. While he mourns Life’s losses, Keely cannot shake his melancholy nor pass off his grief to some separate, absorbent Nature that can soak it up: the grief remains with him/us. Further, the very indeterminacy of Winton’s narrative—namely, the perplexing end to Keely’s trajectory, on the street beneath the Mirador—is suggestive of one form that dark ecology might find in fiction: a form that can “undermine a sense of closure” (p. 253) and refuse any path by which we work through mourning to some other side: salvation or redemption. The desire Keely expresses, and readers might have, for escape, is unrequited. We remain with the clogging waste and the damage.

Morton (2010a) proposes “progressive ecological elegy”, by which a writer mobilises “some kind of choke or shudder in the reader that causes
the environmental loss to stick in her throat, undigested” (p. 256). Indeed, Keely’s sister, Faith, an investment banker entangled in the global financial crisis, tells him that the “world as we know it is choking on a bone” (Winton, 2013, p. 37). Keely, too, finds himself in impotent suspension, with “no idea what he was doing. This aimless driving about” (p. 321). He sinks into the awful, fecund intimacy of the ruined world, like Morton’s (2007b) “wasp which sinks into the jam and drowns in it” (p. 158). And, worse, not only is he drowning in the mess, he is implicated in it, akin to Morton’s eco-noir detective implicated in the crimes they investigate (2010b, p. 111). Keely’s belief that he can save something—this time Kai, previously the environment—transforms into complicity in damage. His actions to avert an attack precipitate rather than put off Clappy and Stewie’s violence.

Although Keely basks in the awareness of having “let yourself go to this extent” (Winton, 2013, p. 5), and, in his elevated apartment, seeks some distance from the world, he has not been let go at all. He is not only ruined, he is stuck in the ruins. Winton draws his characters and the reader down among the unavoidable junk, waste, chaos, ordure, and multiplicity. As we find with Wright’s swamp in The Swan Book (2013), the world of Eyrie is filled with junk and everything has become so much junk: “washing against the sea wall” (Winton, 2013, p. 119); “in the shade where it looked as if someone had backed a truck and dumped a load of garbage” (p. 173); “strewn” across the verandah at Stewie’s house (p. 329); “Disposable cups, newspapers in gyres against graffiti walls” (p. 322); and “nothing moving but blown trash” (p. 323). Even Keely and Gemma are rubbish (pp. 29, 136). Poison flows unconstrained through human and non-and-more-than-human
lives—“An entire town contaminated. Vegetable gardens, watertanks, clothing, food. Kids poisoned” (p. 141). The cement works plunders the ocean bed before, “a few hundred metres inland their stack rained particulates on the roofs of five thousand homes” (p. 207). Keely tries “not to think of all the toxic crap washing into the sea” (p. 120).

I noted in Chapter 3 Morton’s (2007b) argument that embracing the mess, the strange and the monstrous cultivates ecological sense (what he calls “ecological thought”). In this regard, a return of the abject to intimate sensibility, paradoxically, carries affirmation. There is, in Eyrie, a “collapse of distance” (Morton, 2007b, p. 160) between the world’s filth, its waste, its corpses, and Keely: a dissolution of “barriers” (p. 267). It is not, though, just their unhealthy, unclean qualities that are important; the revelation of our interconnectedness disturbs identity, systems and order: notions of a divided Human/Nature, for example. Muecke and Hawkins (2002) write that:

waste can touch the most visceral registers of the self—it can trigger responses and affects that remind us of the body’s intensities and multiplicities […] all those things that break in from the outside, that surprise, that disturb, that introduce unpredictability. (p. xiv)

The non-and-more-than-human in Eyrie is not pristine Nature but entangled and ugly; “a monumental jumble” in which Keely imagines an immersion: “hauling himself through it, all those slick domes sliding down his chest and
thighs. Not pretty” (Winton, 2013, p. 303). The separation of Keely, as subject, from the detritus of the world, is lost. Subject, object and abject blur together (Morton, 2010a, p. 267). Winton (2013) writes of “snarled” things, as in blocked, muddled, confused, and knotted: cars (pp. 56, 408, 355); the mind (p. 101); thoughts (p. 116); bikes (p. 156); colours (p. 351); plants (p. 353); body parts (p. 373). Keely can “carry disaster with him” (p. 104) and he carries it close.

In *Eyrie*, Winton employs a dark, abject aesthetic which muddies the breaks we might assume between human and world. The swamp recurs throughout the narrative, as metaphor and as material assemblage: low lying; saturated; fecund but uncultivable; vaguely abject to some; a thing in which we can become—are already—stuck, sunk, and overwhelmed. It is a thing, for Keely, “both strange and familiar” (Winton, 2013, p. 222). He experiences a melancholic dissolution into the swamp of abjection: “Darkness sucking at him” (p. 42). It is a psychical and corporeal immersion: not a reconnection but an unavoidable interconnection with the discomforting other. In *Eyrie*, Winton could be accused of admiring, or “appreciating what in us is most objectified, the ‘thousand, thousand slimy things’” (Morton, 2007b, p. 196). He breaches the borderline between waste, slime and shit, and the Human. Shit—dove shit (p. 10), a good shit (p. 52), dog shit (pp. 58, 362), eternal dog shit (p. 157), batshit (p. 172), human shit (p. 176), people as shit (p. 393)—and other unavoidable, abject matter infuse the world. We find Keely observing “the balcony with its

156 Eleven times.
coralline aggregations of dove shit” (p. 10); standing at the rail track fence “festooned” with bags of dog excrement, becoming a stinking “wall of ordure” (p. 159); and on the “rank” smelling river, amid the jellyfish corralled “against the bank […] and the] water […] brown and chunky” (p. 302), with its “estuarine miasma of algae, cypress and invertebrate slime” (p. 86). It is all, as Gemma opines about the river, a “Fuckin shithole” (p. 334).

As much as we might acknowledge his physically elevated location, Keely has been brought down to earth and his apartment does little to separate him from the world. The Mirador is a “porous […] birdcage” (Winton, 2013, p. 219). Keely cannot avoid the ruins at his doorstep, prevent intrusions, or maintain a distance from other tower “folks” (p. 137): the air of his flat is already “Thick and heady with the fags and showers and fry-ups and dish-suds of others” (p. 3). Like the closed raptor’s claws he describes to Kai, Keely is “locked-on” (p. 140), entangled, unable to extricate his self or wash his hands of the chaos and the damage: the “bloody tangle” (p. 365). While Keely might wish himself to be the Beautiful Soul, passing judgement upon the world from a distance and without implication in the Crises,\(^\text{157}\) Winton does what Morton (2010a) hopes the artist can amid Crises of Ecologies: “not assuming an ideological distance towards this disgusting, incessant enjoyment object [the ruined Western Australia] but stepping [us] into it” (p. 267). Furthermore, Morton (2007b, p. 201) flags a paradox which, I suggest, is true also of Keely: it can be “the very feelings of loneliness and separation, rather than fantasies of interconnectedness,

\(^{157}\) See Mline (2002, p. 65) on the Beautiful Soul, and Morton (2010d) on the problematics of false distancing for ecological thought.
[that] put us in touch with a surrounding environment”. Keely’s expressions of isolation, his continuous, splenetic critiques of long lists of others, his memories of all that he feels has been lost, and his views of the ostensibly distant chaos below the Mirador, multiply his and readers’ entanglements in that surrounding environment. While it might be uncomfortable (pain-full), we find ourselves alive down with the squalid, wasted earth, not up on the balcony.

Although Eyrie might serve to ruin normative visions of the Human, I contend that the novel also offers an encounter with Pickering’s (1995) “posthumanist space […] in which the human actors are still there but now inextricably entangled with the nonhuman, no longer at the centre of the action and calling the shots” (p. 26). Readers could still choose to filter their encounter with Eyrie through ideas of the Human, and infer unspoken medical conditions from the narration of Keely’s symptoms: loss of vision, intense neurological pain, loss of consciousness, vertigo, loss of limb control, aphasia, agnosia, and so on. However, Winton’s writing frequently returns to the exteriority of the body and to the forces that penetrate, fold it and fold into it. Keely offers, I suggest, something akin to Braidotti’s (2013, p. 26) “more complex and relational subject framed by embodiment, sexuality, affectivity, empathy and desire as core qualities”. Winton’s writing can orient readers away from conceptions of the Human as unitary, internal, central, stable, and cut-off from the non-and-more-than-human world, and towards subjectivity as a collective, matter-discursive, dynamic, intensive production. Like the Mirador, Winton’s Human is porous. Winton’s diagramming (Deleuze, 2003, p. 66) of Keely—writing him not as a stable,
interior figure but via the forces that produce him—involves a material opening out: something akin to the ancient Greek *apocalypse*, or lifting of the veil of the Human. We encounter the subject *ecologically*: as a porous, fluid, permeable body; its flourishing (what it can do) dependent upon its capacity to sustain the affective charges of relations with other bodies; and accountable to those other bodies for its affects upon them (Braidotti, 2005/6).

Lovino and Oppermann (2012a, pp. 84-85) cite Wheeler’s conceptualisation of the body that “‘reveals the reciprocal interferences of organisms, ecosystems and humanly made substances…It is, therefore, a ‘collective’ of agencies and a material palimpsest in which ecological and existential relations are inscribed ‘in terms of flourishing or…illness’ (Wheeler, 12)’’. This notion of flourishing or being *well* (or not) recurs through *Eyrie* and, admittedly, some non-and-more-than-human agents are accorded regenerative qualities. Material phenomena—some welcome, some not—surround, penetrate and assault Keely; shaping his body and mind. Reaching the coast, Keely’s “bewilderment and disgust [are] gradually softened by the smells of limey sand, ocean air and saltbush” (Winton, 2013, pp. 219-220) and later we find the ocean water, on a rare occasion, “delicious and silky, stalking him pore to shivery pore before the numbing warmth sank in and clumsiness took hold” (p. 335). These regenerative forces are, however, overwhelmed by those carried by bodies that diminish the subject’s capacities. The desert wind carries violently penetrative bodies: “grit sharp enough to flay a baby-boomer to the bone” (p. 8). Industrial waste (p. 141), additives and poisons (p. 207) pull Keely up short
and inflict violence upon Life. Sugary snacks are sensed as dangerous:
“Keely glanced into the snarl of bright colours. Recoiled at the cloying whiff of industrial additives” (p. 351). Working in Bub’s cafe, Keely feels “the grease settling on his skin and he drew it into his lungs with every breath” (p. 388). I note that Winton’s writing of non-and-more-than-human (what he refers to as “land”) agency resonates with sentiments expressed in his memoir, Island Home (2015), that: “The material facts of life, the organic and concrete forces that fashion us, are overlooked as if they are irrelevant or even mildly embarrassing” (p. 10) and that “Climate change has intensified what we’ve always felt” (p. 26). In this vein, I explore a speculation that by attending to Winton’s writing of the porous body in Eyrie, and its penetration and (trans)formation by non-and-more-than-human bodies, we cultivate our sense of the ecological-literary force of global warming.

I have argued that endangerment, extinction and planetary degradation comprise substantive strands of Eyrie’s narrative and that the novel’s bodies are exposed to, penetrated by, and express the forces of these crises. And yet, climate change is mentioned just three times briefly: twice, with a sense of helpless resignation (pp. 7, 341), and, perhaps, once obliquely (p. 18). This apparent absence might seem curious, given Winton’s well documented environmental concerns. Shouldn’t Eyrie be Winton’s global warming novel?

I contend, in response to this apparent omission, that Eyrie is saturated with the intensities of global warming; that Winton’s narrative pulses with the
force and agency of the non-and-more-than-human hyperobject (Morton, 2013a). The sun (its light and heat) carries apocalyptic force in *Eyrie*: unrelentingly assaulting and invading bodies *and* illuminating the posthuman condition. Readers could, of course, conclude that Keely’s parlous physiological and psychological condition leaves him unbearably sensitive to the sun, or that his condition influences his experience (and representations) of the qualities of the world around him,\(^{158}\) returning the human to the centre of our concerns. However, the sheer repetitiveness of the sun’s violence in *Eyrie* should at least open up tentative possibilities for an intensive reading: that the felt force of the non-and-more-than-human is “beyond anything that the booze could induce” (Winton, 2013, p. 6). I will go so far as to entertain the idea that global warming has a hand in writing *Eyrie*: that “nonhumans are dictating the script” (Morton, 2013a, p. 175).

Morton (2013a) argues that hyperobjects, including global warming, are representationally and perceptually disruptive, and compel us to think ecologically. As hyperobject, global warming is unrepresentable but nonetheless materially real. It is massively distributed in time and space and always withdraws its entirety from our perceptions. On the other hand, global warming is viscous, sticky, intimate, penetrative and inescapable (pp. 27-37). It is both nonlocal (pp.38-54), in that we do not perceive the manifesting object directly or in totality, *and* intimate and local in its affects. It is also temporally undulating in that its massively extended duration forces temporal reconceptualisations, reconstitutions and reorientations (pp.55-68).

\(^{158}\) See Ball (2014) on Ruskin’s pathetic fallacy.
Also, bodies encounter global warming as material phasing (pp. 69-80): becoming perceivable selectively, in patches that sensuously index its existence but are not it. Global warming also discloses, or gives us “the most vivid glimpse” (p. 85) of, interobjectivity: of the “shared sensual space” (p. 86) of objects or bodies in which becomings of those objects or bodies occur. These becomings are “inscription events” (p. 77) producing transformations and phenomena such as, Morton suggests, the mind (p. 84). The human and the non-and-more-than-human become “living textbooks on global warming” (p. 88). Knowledge, in this way, becomes onto-epistemological and material-discursive: sensed by and written into bodies. Indeed, referencing the inescapability of the hyperobject, Morton (2013a, p. 175) conjectures, “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. 109) suggests that “Art and architecture in the time of hyperobjects must (automatically) directly include hyperobjects, even when they try to ignore them”. Global warming, hardly the object of explicit discourse and representation in *Eyrie*, still pervades it: intensively unavoidable; massively distributed; unrepresentable in its totality; and violently and indifferently permeating pages and bodies. Indeed, 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 readers (to) a sense
of the hyperobject, global warming? How do things become, as Kai refers to his own condition, “hot in the temperature” (Winton, 2013, p. 23), even though global warming, to adapt Morton (2013a, p. 146), is present and never to hand: “always disappearing behind the […] sunburn”?

Sun, light, and heat impinge upon Eyrie’s bodies and these impingements are aesthetic events that materially index the “invisible presence of the hyperobject itself, which looms around us constantly” (Morton, 2013a, p. 76); which inhabits and shapes us. The sun, its light and its heat are inescapable, viscous, penetrating, and violently transformational. By turns, the sun scalds (Winton, 2013, 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 eyes (p. 242), overwhelms, and leaves bodies cowering (p. 11). Heat, too, is ever-present and moves with its own agency. We read that “heat rolled down from the ranges in waves” (p. 239); and that “[t]here 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 heat “shrink his throat and cause flares at the edge of his vision” (p. 241). Heat powers a flesh-stripping (p. 8), land ravaging (p. 239) “desert wind” (p. 6). Eyrie’s light is “vicious” (p. 6), “hideous” (p. 14), “acid” (p. 15), “blinding” (p. 196), “hot” (p. 396), “searing” (p. 420), and “impossible” (p. 423). It is not an affirmative force
of illumination, revelation, or clarity. Rather, it bathes and penetrates bodies in ways suggestive of Morton’s (2013a, p. 49) characterisation of Hiroshima’s atomic energy flare: “so intense that they couldn’t quite see”. It is, to adapt Morton, “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.

The “pitiless” sun (Winton, 2013, p. 197), “brutal” heat (p. 408), and “blinding” light (pp. 15, 196, 260) contract Keely’s powers of living. They slow him down, reduce his energy, leave him wounded, disoriented, and dehumanised. One alliterative, assonant and consonant passage, narrating Keely’s collision with these forces outside the Mirador tower, carries the sensations of the porous body, swamped, and diminished in what it can do:

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 [...] (2013, p. 15)
The language pulses, sizzles, flows, breaks, swirls, contracting Keely’s and readers’ capacities, as we stumble, with him, through the passage. 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). 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). Navigating the paragraph’s convoluted syntax, the reader risks becoming swamped too; albeit, the repetition of “s” and “sh” might just pull us on and through.

The hyperobject is an “insupportable” (Winton, 2013, p. 13) machine driving (trans)formations in Eyrie. It is malignant, to the extent that a virus or contagion is, and agentic in a non-and-more-than-human sense. Sun, heat and light’s transformative incursions are indexes of the hyperobject finding ways to “strafe and penetrate the physical body at every opportunity” (Morton, 2013a, p. 85). The object “leave[s its] traces in your flesh, traces that alter your DNA” (p. 51) and involve a material not a discursive or linguistic experience of pain and trauma. Morton suggests that “lifeforms themselves are poems about nonlife, in particular highly dangerous entities that could destroy life” (p. 52) and Keely, I suggest, is a weathered matter-poem of the hyperobject.

Nor do sun, heat and light affect and contract the matter-discursive capacities of the human subject alone; they participate in the manifestation of

---

159 Albeit, encounters with the hyperobject also expand our conception of how mind is produced (Morton, 2013a, p. 85).
global warming in water scarcity, in drought, and in land conditions. Sun, heat and light are neither background nor foreground in *Eyrie*. Rather, they are violently enmeshed with other bodies: Keely, Gemma, Fremantle, birds, cars, fish, water, gravel. Morton (2013a) writes that, “In the mesh of interconnectivity, the sieve through which hyperobjects pass, smaller things become indexes of the hyperobjects inside which they exist” (p. 77). Dust, gravel, injurious winds—“More hellish updraught, than pastoral uplift” (Winton, 2013, p. 8)— parched land, ravaged plains, and bushfire haze are indexes of global warming, lurking and phasing into the narrative as (trans)former of bodies. And yet, global warming, the hyperobject that encompasses these objects, phenomena or becomings, remains withdrawn. Its reach (its “horrifyingly complex tentacles” (Morton, 2013a, p. 71)) is expressed in patches: drought-deadened land, reeking rivers, superheated cars, sunburnt faces. These literary bodies express global warming’s boot-print. They are “crisscrossed with interobjective calligraphy” (Morton, 2013a, p. 88): at once the body/ies and the material memories of the hyperobject.

Morton’s (2013a) perspectives on hyperobjects gesture toward the qualities of the onto-epistemological transformations we find in *Eyrie*. Hyperobjects, Morton 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 we cannot become intimate with the hyperobject in its totality. While I accept Morton’s (2013a) assertion that global warming is something that humans can never fully acquire as an “object of knowledge” (p. 172), I suggest that Winton’s writing also encourages what Morton calls a
“tuning to the object” (p. 174): “an attunement to the demonic force coming from the nonhuman and permeating us” (p. 175). *Eyrie* exposes readers to material, intensive transformations: of literary bodies, of our perceptual registers, and of ourselves. The novel also expresses the transformational force of the non-and-more-than-human objects with which we are irreducibly interconnected. With regard to the writer, I propose that *Eyrie* expresses what Morton (2013a) refers to as a “collaboration between humans and nonhumans” (p. 174). While Winton need not necessarily have tried to write the forces of global warming through *Eyrie*, a reading for the intensities the novel carries does fuel a sense that writing, amid Crises of Ecologies, may be unable to avoid what surpasses, permeates and transforms it. For readers and writers, such exposures can still be affirmative while not necessarily pleasurable. *Eyrie* has the potential to change our sense of the *world*.

The hyperobject ruins our sense, if we had one before *Eyrie*, of a delineable, controllable, perceivable, secure, and stable *world*. We cannot represent it and envelop it into our *common sense* 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 […] not simply a product […] of a human gaze” (Morton, 2013a, p. 199). As a material-discursive production of Humanity, with a terrifying attachment to its creators, global warming expresses itself through bodies, and the horror in this is that the variability to its expressions—what it can do—is never closed. While I acknowledge Clark’s (2015, p. 189) broad concerns that the affects of writing the hyperobject might well be
negative—engendering fear, nihilism, passivity, for instance—there is also humility to be found in an attunement to this imbricated state of affairs. This humility is a power of living that Winton’s writing cultivates: afforded by our sense that, like Keely, we cannot avoid such entanglements. Winton (2015) offers an allied sentiment: “I’m part of a thin and porous human culture through which the land slants in, seen or felt at every angle” (p. 18).

The banishments, endangerments, estrangements, and intimate violations that seem to characterise human and non-and-more-than-human (trans)formations in *Eyrie* do not preclude the writing of affirmative intimacies, relationships, and (trans)formative entanglements. Nor does “wary isolation” (p. 28)—not least Kai’s, Keely’s and birds’—preclude permeability, connection, and the production of involved blocs of sensation. By attending to writing affect and becomings we find that it is not necessarily the case in *Eyrie* that “links between people [and between people and animals] have hardly been fainter” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 109). Winton writes sensuous, intensive, bodily encounters that expand our sense of the registers across which Life can still find expression. These encounters convey relational intimacy and involve the production of the new: neither the search for a place in some larger conventional construct—Humanity, Nature, Society, Nation, or Community—nor an entity’s dissolution within it. For Braidotti (2002, p. 145), becomings cultivate an ethics of connection and transformation. They intersect with posthuman notions of the exteriority of subjectivity, they withdraw humans (and separable concepts of the Human)
from the centre of Life and ontology (and also epistemology), and they reorient our sense of sustainability. More particularly, becomings involve us with pain, and with limits: ours, and those of the irreducibly entangled strangers with whom we collide. While Eyrie’s becomings are not necessarily trajectories towards salvation or redemption, they still affirm the potential for variation to be found in connections. They express resistance in that they “reinscribe subversion at the heart of subjectivity and […] make it operational” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 145). They confirm Keely’s impression that Life is “chance” not “destiny” (Winton, 2013, p. 375): immanent and unpredictable, rather than predetermined and teleological; and full of desiring machines connecting.

To explore these aspects of writing affect and becomings in Eyrie, I begin with the relations that (trans)form Keely and Kai: “the kid. Who set something off in him each time they met” (Winton, 2013, p. 120). Keely, it appears, does not like people. His recurring, bitterly cynical, condemnatory lists leave few collectives untouched and estranged. However, Kai’s affective charge sensuously jolts Keely and, to appropriate Braidotti’s (2002, p. 8) words, the two are drawn into relations of “emphatic proximity and intensive interconnectedness”. Considering Keely’s attempts to retreat

---

160 Braidotti (2006a, p. 4) writes: “Sustainability is about how much […]becoming] a subject can take and ethics is accordingly redefined as the geometry of how much [becoming] bodies are capable of”.

161 Winton employs an electromagnetic register to express relations: the charges (p. 131), circuits (pp. 32, 116, 146), currents (pp. 35, 158, 303), sparks (pp. 21, 114, 146, 220, 324, 329), flashes (pp. 11, 15, 368), shorts (p. 146), shocks (p. 247), and jolts (p. 416) that course through and transform Keely’s body.
from others, Kai’s transformational force upon him seems all the more remarkable.

To assume Kai’s lack of emotion equates to a lack of affective capacity, or to try and articulate his impacts as to do with the mind, is to miss his (trans)formative potentials. Deemed “affectless” (Winton, 2013, pp. 90, 165, 214) and “removed” (p. 24), Kai is also “intense” (p. 24), often confusingly so for Keely. Encounters with Kai leave Keely in turmoil: reeling, disoriented, and charged with inexplicable, unassimilable sensations. Kai un-keels Keely: folding into him, opening him out and leaving him “suspended” (p. 24). Like Kai, Keely is disconnected and connected. We find Kai’s silence “Boring into [Keely]” (p. 151), something indefinable making Keely’s “stomach flip” (p. 24) and “his heart jump” (p. 161). Keely feels that Kai is “looking straight through him” and experiences “A tiny jet of panic. Sudden irrational fear” (p. 132). The boy’s gaze leaves Keely feeling “hotter than he had with the sun beating on his skull” (p. 57). While Kai is almost insubstantial, standing in Keely’s apartment doorway, we read of him “filling the space with his peculiar static energy” (p. 131), emitting a charge that Keely feels on the skin. However, when Keely thinks of Kai’s expressions “he didn’t know what they signified” (p. 235): “[h]e had no idea what the boy was thinking” (p. 400). His responses to Kai come from something difficult to articulate flowing between them. He cannot easily name Kai’s affects: only, that he is “peculiar. Compelling in a way” (p. 134).

Paradoxically, the turmoils and suspensions into which Kai draws Keely are also flush with potential. They differ from Keely’s evacuated standstill in
the “unpeopled” (Winton, 2013, p. 16) Coles store. Finding Kai perched on a high balustrade of the Mirador tower, Keely feels “strangely self-conscious, anxious that something about his being out here wasn’t quite right” (p. 90). It is, for Keely, “unnerving […] this harried feeling” (p. 90). He hesitates. He is suspended, as if connected to Kai such that his own movement could endanger the boy: “reluctant to move for fear of startling him” (p. 90). In his unusual stillness, hanging over the balustrade in the updraught, Kai is a vehicle for intensities well beyond him: “hair ripped back like the tail of a comet. As if he were speeding, hurtling, falling already” (p. 26).

Kai and Keely fold into each other, becoming, at times, indiscernible. Winton’s narratives of stilted conversations and miscommunications are accompanied by his writing of an intensive intimacy and knowing. Indeed, Kai’s preoccupied evasion of physical contact becomes an expression of intimacy: “Kai could find space where there seemed to be none; he could sidestep any well-meaning pat or squeeze, as if his body anticipated yours, as if he were monitoring your every movement” (Winton, 2013, p. 235). At Kai’s bedtime, Keely reflects on the “potent, dreamy calm between the pair of them, the intimacy of the whispered story and the long silences that ensued” (p. 235). They float together. Winton writes that “Kai drifted beside…[Keely] in the shafted gloom, unmoored from the day and his defended self” (p. 235). The possibility of an elision here—concerning which of the two is the “defended self”—assists in conveying the zone of indeterminacy they construct together. Winton’s language softens measurably, to: “whispered […] ensued […] drifted […] shafted gloom […] unmoored […] he murmured” (pp. 235-236). Consonants soften to “m”s and
“f”s, and vowels to “o”s and “u”s. Such selections might lull readers into the intimacy of Kai and Keely: into a sense of shared perceptions.

Late in the novel, exchanges that appear to be beyond interpretation are filled with a sense of transversal relations. At Kai’s bedtime, his fingers trace Keely’s hands and he recalls dreams and waking:

I wake up and I’m the same as you, said Kai. Like, I’m dreamin.

Then I am you.

See? That’s imagining. You’re seeing in your head what it’s like in the future, to be a grownup, to get old.

No, said the boy, giving Keely back his own hand. That’s not it. (p. 400)

The passage ends there. Although we achieve no clarity on what becoming-Keely is for the boy, we know what it isn’t. There is intimacy but no salvation.

In the novel’s final pages, Keely and Kai have their most intimate interaction. Gemma, it appears, has told Kai that Keely has saved them (p. 418) and Kai is more conversationally fulsome and responsive than at any other point in the narrative. The boy believes he is safe. He tells Keely: “I’ll get old, Tom. Like Doris” (p. 418). Then Kai and Keely’s bodies interlace: “Kai’s breath was in his ear, right in his head. Something sweet and benign
finally inside him, like a bulwark” (p. 418). Is it the boy’s breath that is sweet and benign inside Keely, or is there a sense of safety, sweet and benign, inside Kai, or is it both? Although the words of the last sentence make more than one reading available, they also have the potential to leave readers suspended, with “him” being both child and man: the two participating in a singular perceptual intimacy and subjective flight.

As another of Winton’s “odd, eccentric, lonely, marginal characters” (Ben-Messahel, 2012, p. 9), Kai lives as Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) “exceptional [literary] individual” (p. 243). He expresses the qualities of the anomalous (p. 243): in his “strangeness” (Winton, 2013, pp. 132, 146, 168, 215); in his resistance to fitting the shape of the “Australian child” (p. 139); and in his affective impacts on Keely. He is, to adapt Deleuze and Guattari (1987), “neither an individual nor a species; […] he has only affects, […] he has neither familiar or subjectified feelings, nor specific or significant characteristics. Human tenderness is as foreign to […] him] as human classifications” (pp. 244-245). Kai is, in certain respects, a loner: skirting the sidelines; hanging over the extremities; navigating the cracks in the pavement (Winton, 2013, p. 57); living on the fringe; bringing exception to the world. However, in these respects, Kai is also open to the infinity of assemblages into which he can enter “to solve a problem” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 260), including becomings-bird. Winton’s writing of these involutions offers one response to what might be viewed as the problematic appropriations of birds—as metaphors and resources—by humans in Eyrie; appropriations that deny the non-and-more-than-human its potentials and vitalities.
While they are absent or estranged in critical, material respects from Keely’s world, birds still constitute a discursive—metaphoric and metonymic—foundation for *Eyrie*, particularly with respect to Keely’s point of view as he navigates the social. They are also, for Kai, objects to be represented; although, like Keely, readers might find those representations to be strange.\(^{162}\) I noted in Chapter 2 that such discursive (and other material) uses attest to the intractable problem of Human’s habitual responses toward the animal, the violence those responses entail, and the risk that they reinscribe anthropocentrisms. Keely often figures himself and others (and, by implication, birds) by attributing bird “qualities”. He shaves his beard—an “itching nest” (Winton, 2013, p. 188)—and becomes a “veritable boobook owl”, finds himself “chortling like a loon” (p. 188), and admits “I was a goose” (p. 80) and that he is “the chief wounded bird in [Doris’] life” (p. 71). For Keely, Doris is “a shrewd old bird” (p. 41), “owl-eyed” (p. 281) and “a lovely, impressive old duck” (p. 72). Faith is “Bold as a mudlark” (p. 92), while Gemma and her sister are Doris’ “lame ducks” (p. 71). In the novel’s final passage, Keely perceives birdlike people surrounding him: “Surging in, a gathering flock of heads and legs” (p. 423). Birds are also appropriated as resources for human memory. The Osprey/Eagle—a being beyond, and beyond definition by, the human—is diminished when Keely nostalgically renders it subservient to his own life: “The bird of his married years” (p. 87). As the novel’s most prominent image, the nest or eyrie becomes a human territory, reminiscent of

\(^{162}\) Bird representations proliferate. Kai draws herons, owls, kites, hawks, mudlarks, and countless unnamed, damaged, birdlike beings.
Bachelard’s precarious place of safety (1994, pp. 102-104). As a “seedy little eyrie” (Winton, 2013, p. 9), in which “All he wanted. Was to be safe” (p. 11) but in which Keely never is, it offers little value. Keely also uses birds to hint at human life-lessons: telling Kai the cautionary tale of the raptor’s claws that once closed cannot open, leaving it “trying to fly up against the ocean” (p. 141), burdened by something it can neither bear nor release (p. 148). How then, with Keely apparently locked on to his Humanisms, does Winton write affirmative encounters with birds in Eyrie, beyond “simple wordplay” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 22) and their co-option as mirrors and resources exploited to solve human-centred problems? One response is that there are becomings-bird in Eyrie that involve Kai and Keely and through which, as Braidotti (2002, p. 126) suggests, we might find the animal’s “radical immanence as a field of forces, a quantity of speed and intensity” beyond any limits or forms within which we might seek to contain it. Such becomings also express a creative, immanent ontology that resists privileging the Human.

To attend to Winton’s writing of Bird-Kai-Keely relations, we might adapt Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) thoughts on rats:

The […]bird] and the man[boy] are in no way the same thing, but Being expresses them both in a single meaning in a language that is no longer that of words, in a matter that is no longer that of forms, in an affectability that is no longer that of subjects. Unnatural participation. (p. 258)
Although I accept that we can, we need not focus upon and interpret Kai’s birdlike poses and movements as imitations of a bird, as symbol or metaphor, or as only resemblance. We can, instead, entertain the idea that Kai exhibits “room for becomings”: something Deleuze and Guattari observe as particular to children (p. 274). This is not to say that Kai must transform into a bird to enter into becomings; such a requirement would be no more than an attempt to uphold the “irreducibility of the Human” (p. 273) and of separable forms, rather than to attend to the flows of intensity. Rather, we might remain open to Kai’s affective expressions being shaped by his “involutions” (p. 238) or “inhuman connivance[s]” (p. 274) with birds: actual birds (present, sentient bodies), and virtual birds (drawn, imagined, not yet, and no longer here), albeit always real birds. Winton’s writing of birds and boy (and man) amounts to more than the production of metaphorical relations. Rather, things are shared and new trajectories of subjectivity produced.

Kai becomes obsessed with actual and imaginary birds and intensities that birds carry trigger unusual, sensuously expressive responses in him. His drawings of birds, birdlike creatures, and other bodies proliferate: “It seemed that every page had a different bird on it, sketches and doodles […] Many of them bore no resemblance to any bird he [Keely] knew, but the kid had given all his creatures wings” (Winton, 2013, pp. 143-144). We read of Kai’s fingers twitching (p. 61), his face suddenly open (p. 87) in the vicinity of birds. Guzzling greasy fish and chips, we find him “absorbing the word”
Heron (p. 61); the writing blurring the boundaries between corporeal and incorporeal ingestions. Later, on the river, he becomes uncharacteristically animated and vocal having seen the Osprey/Eagle and the sense of his connection with birds goes beyond the purely visual and cognitive. The word “Osprey” seems to suspend him as he repeats it (p. 87).

Kai and birds share intensities beyond Keely’s discursive reductions of birds and humans into a “symbolic community” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 274). They enter into “objective zone[s] of indetermination or uncertainty”, in which there is “something shared or indiscernible” (p. 273). There is a proximity “that makes it impossible to say where the boundary between the human and animal lies” (p. 273). As Keely sits by Kai’s bed, the boy is absorbed into a bird image on the front of a raptor book:

He tilted the thing up on his chest and surveyed the cover. It was a close-up image of an eagle’s eye – black-rimmed, stark, the iris a web of yellow-bronze – and Kai wasn’t merely glancing at it but peering deeply, chewing his lips, wheezing in fervent concentration. The kid seemed to mesmerize himself, sink into the interlacing layers of the bird’s irises. (Winton, 2013, p. 226)

While becoming-bird might offer escapes for Kai, they are not necessarily freedoms: they are both a flowing-away from forces shaping his own life and a flowing into the vicinity of forces damaging birds. Kai flies in his dreams,
though he also dies (pp. 152-154): “I crash” (p. 152). As doves “fluttered onto the balcony [of the Mirador tower]. Kai flinched” (p. 165). Sensing trauma, he stops “as if arrested by a thought or a sensation” (p. 166). He expresses an awareness of endangerment and death: “Birds are first, said the boy […] // First at what? // First to die” (p. 165). Keely asks himself “How did it get straight to death from a pair of doves?” (p. 165). One answer, perhaps, is that Kai conducts the trauma of birds (albeit, he tells Keely later that he has seen pictures). He seems caught in a loop, foretelling the death of all birds. Kai’s words, as Keely puts him to bed, produce a sobering rhythm or, to return to the electromagnetic resonances in Winton’s writing, follow a circuit. They read like a mantra, or perhaps an invocation: “die […] die […] dead […] die […] extinct […] extinct […] bones […] bones […] extinct […] extinct” (pp. 141-142). We might find the force of the words in their repetition and in their proximity, not necessarily in their meaning. Deleuze and Guattari (1986) write on this intensive force: “Children are well skilled in the exercise of repeating a word, the sense of which is only vaguely felt, in order to make it vibrate around itself” (p. 21). At the same time as emitting them, Kai absorbs words, as if embodying (being incorporeally transformed by) them: “Extinct, he whispered, as if tasting the word, trying it on for size” (p. 142). He expresses the collectivity of these traumatic affects—“Extinct, he said through another yawn. Like us” (p. 142)—and, via him, Winton connects readers to the violent finitude of Crises of Ecologies. Keely senses other intensities to which Kai is exposed, fearing “that the kid was enchanted by something obscure and awful, some terrible certainty” (p. 311). Indeed, as Winton’s narrative focaliser and a perceptual
vehicle entangled in these becomings, Keely’s becomings-child are becomings-bird.

Kai carries non-and-more-than-human intensities to Keely: “The boy took the book in one hand and raised his arms from his sides. Keely’s first thought was of a bird, that he was stretching his wings, but then he thought, Underpits” (Winton, 2013, pp. 161-162). Keely watches Kai use a computer, taking “cautious pecks at the keys” (p. 232). He finds Kai perched on the Mirador’s balustrades, a bird ready to take flight, and a human ready to fall. Keely’s sense of the boy moves between the two. Waking at his mother’s house, after collapsing at the beach, Keely finds Kai standing next to him, “Shirtless, pigeon-chested, his arms pitifully thin” (p. 338). At the dinner table, Keely observes the “hunched wings” of Kai’s shoulders (p. 134), and at the end of the novel, Keely thinks he sees the boy on the tower balcony: “The boy’s face a flash – or was that a gull?” (p. 424). For Keely, Kai and birds become discursively and intensively indiscernible.

Keely is not simply co-opting avian symbols to represent Kai. He is expressing an intensive openness to Kai and birds. Via his sense of the flows of traumatic affect and his becomings-Kai, Keely also becomes sensuously involved with the unhomed and the endangered: feeling and expressing deterritorialisations, elevations, precipitous descents, fallings-prey, and takings-flight. Outside his apartment, overlooking the vertiginous facade of the Mirador tower, Keely speaks to Kai: “Isn’t it weird, the way you look out there and you feel yourself going out at the same moment?” (Winton, 2013, p. 166). For Keely, there is more than a cognitive quality to
the “going out”; there is a bodily, sensuous aspect to it. Keely also recalls the sensation of the violence inflicted upon birds viscerally transforming him and producing the outburst for which he lost his job: “When I saw those trees falling I didn’t even feel anything. But that little black cloud of birds […] and the poor bird-boffin with his specs broken […] I just lit up. Like a flare” (p. 75). He feels endangered: he gets that “hunted feeling” when he goes to bed and has to medicate to “ease past” it (p. 81). Sensations of damage to birds come to him when he is in pain. Drunk, arguing with Gemma, and having scared Kai, Keely is left reflecting on his inability to be a defender, even when the issues are “Small beans”. His thoughts return to bird deterritorialisation: to “[r]ipped earth as far as the eye could see, and homeless birds, black and wheeling” (p. 193).

For Keely, Kai hovers in a realm not quite human and not quite bird: a realm of intensities to which all bodies are open:

Bare arms aloft in benediction or flight. He was calm, those moments he lingered; the boy was calm and solemn and terrible […]. The child was three balconies distant. He was bare chested, squatting on a milk crate, breasting the rail and dipping his head to it. His pale hair shone in the dark as he perched and bobbed, lapping dew off the iron like a thirsty dove. (Winton, 2013, p. 49)
Moreover, this indeterminate, unnatural creature seems to dwell somewhere between Keely’s dreams and his waking. Keely’s sense of Kai’s indiscernibility from birds is accompanied by affects we might call fear, fragility and precarity: “he could feel the glow of the boy there, waiting. In the swamp of his ungoverned country. Perched, pigeon-chested. Too high. Unguarded. Only a straightened leg away from toppling” (p. 49). Glimpsed again—or envisioned—on the balcony, “Perched atop the rail […] While the building swayed and rustled like a tuart tree”, Kai is “startled by the sudden movement”, before falling, or taking off, and disappearing (p. 53), leaving Keely “rattled” (p. 53). For Keely, Kai perches at the threshold across which trauma flows, bringing with it “something awful” (p. 48). In dreams and waking, the intensities Kai carries are, for Keely, “what could not be borne” (p. 49). When Kai recites his bed-time mantra/invocation of extinction (pp. 141-142), Keely senses his own existential coherence to be at stake: “trying to keep himself in order […] his mind had already run ahead, flashing on it, drawing him in […] tamping the tremor in his hands […] broken into a sweat […] his hands trembling” (pp. 141-142) and “bringing him to the boil […] He needed to break off, cut the frigging circuit before he shorted out” (p. 146). The traumatic affects Kai undergoes are hardly imaginable to Keely. Keely senses them and turns to the body to articulate them. Winton turns to intensities. Keely’s expression of an inability to “imagine the life the boy had endured” (p. 138) is at the same time an entry into affective proximity with Kai, in which Keely senses “[e]ndless uncertainty. Disorder. Probably worse” (p. 138).
I return, in this context, to Lorraine’s (2011) conceptualisation of writing trauma affectively. Trauma is expressed affectively in *Eyrie*, not repressed. Winton writes trauma impinging upon and, over time, continuing to shape physical, psychical, social and environmental bodies: Kai’s, Keely’s and others. Tracking these impingements or affects, we sense the violations of bodies amid capitalism; the damage of returning ecological violence; and the degradations of the non-and-more-than-human. Keely’s life as part of the capitalist machine was a traumatic parade: the body diminished by “toxic adrenaline […] ceaseless performance […] Sucking in trouble […] shaking with rage, caffeine and fatigue […] one long fighting retreat” (Winton, 2013, p. 7). Fremantle is left “cowering” after a century of capitalism (p. 6). Industry yields “flaring […] hectic […] savage […] searing” (p. 8) weapons against Life. Development and agriculture pillage, dig up, empty out, and devastate the landscape; wound the seas; leave the Marri tree a skeleton; rip up Tuart trees and sea grasses; and “drill, strip, fill, blast” whatever is of economic value (p. 6). Damage to the non-and-more-than-human returns as flaying red-plain wind (p. 8), the poisoning of food and children, industrial particulates raining on houses, and a warming environment that penetrates and violates bodies and minds. Abuse (physical and psychical) shape Gemma, Kai, Stewie and, eventually, Keely. Keely’s sense of Gemma’s pain—as it seeps and flares out of her—comes not only from her horrifying narration of the persistent force of her being assaulted as a child, but also from her non-linguistic, asignifying, affective expressions: “She hunched

---

163 See Chapter 3.
forward suddenly. She beat a fist against her brow in a ghastly, silent sob” (p. 245).

With Lorraine’s approach to traumatic affect in mind, I respectfully amend Conrad’s (2013) assessment of *Eyrie* as relatively lacking in horror: trauma and “ecological upsets in *Eyrie* [do not] remain marginal” (para. 13). Rather, our sense of trauma depends upon how we read for it. Trauma is pervasive, connective and often overwhelming in *Eyrie*. No body is immune and no body is innocent: entanglement is unavoidable. When Keely senses that Gemma “really did carry with her a kind of desolation” and we read that he “had a hole that size in him too; sometimes it was the size of him entire” (Winton, 2013, p. 205), he gestures toward bodies inhabiting a shared bloc of traumatic sensation. Winton’s writing carries the desolation that finds expression through Gemma and Keely and Kai but is not theirs alone. It conveys the unrepresentable and that which could not be given greater verisimilitude through simply expanding the frequency of traumatic images. I differ from Conrad’s (2013) claim that Winton allows readers to “blithely launder our sins in the ocean” (para. 23) in *Eyrie*. Rather, Winton’s withdrawal of water as salvationary medium, and his writing of trauma carry potentials to affectively cultivate an ethics of vulnerability—without moral judgement or closure—in a world where trauma does not cease to move purely because it was encountered in the past or has been literally captured.

164 Albeit, oceans are certainly not protected from human damage.
Winton contends that “the physical world is the prime means by which we encounter the sacred” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 113), which I presume to involve the religious sacred that may be set apart from, but is manifest in, the becomings of the material world. However, might it not also follow that to write affects and becomings is to express secular sacred processes: to express, paradoxically, the strange transcendence of non-and-more-than-human continuous variation, immanence, and irreducible relationality, without reference to some transcendent source? To find processes always and already dissolving the profane or the sacred by virtue of their ongoing differentiation. Indeed, for Braidotti (2002, p. 127), becomings entail a “secular form of spiritual inter-connectedness” and I suggest that, in *Eyrie*, we find such intimacy in secular-material involutions; not in transcendence, redemption or salvation.\(^{165}\) We find bodies transmitting and receiving intensities, entering into compositions, producing new, shared perceptual zones, and undergoing transformations: albeit, what moves is often traumatic, and the involutions entered can diminish as well as augment the involved bodies’ powers of living. Nor are movements of affect and becomings in *Eyrie* to do with progress or regress (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 239). They are to do with interactions, difference and heterogeneity. They convey Life’s capacities to move along trajectories unfettered by conventional/habitual forms of identity. If, for example, we are looking for Life in Keely’s grasping crusade to emulate the Vitruvian Man—

\(^{165}\) See Chung (2015) on Bateson’s sacred ecology of immanence and Deleuze.
to live in his father, Nev’s, image—then we are looking in the wrong place. Indeed, the desire to become the great Man limits and endangers 
becomings and risks turning them towards abolition. To find Life in *Eyrie*, we 
are better advised to attend to what moves between bodies and to their 
strange sensations and perceptions. *We* might find Keely entirely 
inadequate as subject. *We* might find Kai hard to understand. However, 
rather than look for subjective stability or essence, *we* might instead accept 
that subjectivity flows not from one essential form to another (Australian 
child to Man, girl to woman, mother to grandmother, son to father and so on) 
but is a function of affective productions involving desiring machines and 

corporal. This approach to the subject does not, though, absolve Keely and 
ourselves of accountability for the becomings into which we enter. Rather, 
this approach embraces the potential in Being to be something different—a 
haecceity—unbound by preconceived notions of the human and, as 
Braidotti (2006a) puts it, immanent to the world we make.

Becomings cultivate a sense of ecology as non-and-more-than-human; of 
what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call “the true Nature spanning the 
kingdoms of nature” (p. 249). *Eyrie*’s becomings have the potential to 
cultivate an attunement to the open-ended, relational, trans-species 
qualities of subjectivity, and to subjectivity dynamically structured by affect. 
*Eyrie*’s becomings-bird also offer encounters with animals outside of the 
“Oedipal cage of consumption and otherness in which they have been 
historically caught” (Braidotti, 2002, p. 121), although these encounters do 
not/cannot ignore the violence that continues. Indeed, becomings in *Eyrie*
also reinforce what Braidotti (2002, p. 50) defines as shared human and non-and-more-than-human vulnerability.

My contention that writing affect and becomings can cultivate ecological sense does not entail an expectation that literature can resolve Crises. Nor do I suggest that a literary practice for Crises of Ecologies can (or must) depose itself of its Humanisms and representations. To fall back upon dualistic conceptions of literary practices would involve abnegating the philosophical underpinnings of this thesis, and ignoring the obvious avenues of representational, metaphorical, symbolic and moral interpretation open to critical engagements with *Eyrie*; few of which this chapter touches upon. I do, however, argue for literature’s capacities to cultivate our openness to affirmative relations and to strange, new assemblages of bodies and the subjective trajectories potentialised by those assemblages. What is proposed, and what this engagement with *Eyrie* highlights, is that becomings are one response to a question that arises when we find ourselves un-keeled amid the flows of loss, diminishment, violence, trauma, and ruin of Crises of Ecologies: *how can Life—a life—keep going?* With Keely and Kai and birds and Winton, we might, for a moment, sense literature’s potential to uproot readers from our humanity and to leave us “truffling” (Winton, 2013, p. 11), “perching” (p. 139), “wheeling” (p. 193), “crying” (p. 87), “flaring” (p. 88), “chortling” (p. 188), “flocking” (p. 423), feeling “hunted” (p. 81) or unhomed (p. 75), or “burning” (pp. 108-109): living not exactly as a Human might, or, rather, exactly as a posthuman might.
Earlier in this chapter, I noted McCredden’s (2014) concerns with the ways in which *Eyrie* entails disruptions of language and meaning for writer, reader and literary figures alike. I also explored the brokenness and ruinations of Winton’s writing. In the final part of this chapter, I return to style and argue, *pace* McCredden, that writing can carry transformational force precisely via its disruptions and ruin: that style gives language intensive force even where, and, indeed, often precisely when, meaning is lost. For Deleuze and Guattari (1983):

> The artist is the master of objects; he puts before us shattered, burned, broken-down objects, converting them to the regime of desiring-machines, breaking down is part of the very functioning of desiring-machines […]. Even more important, the work of art is itself a desiring-machine. The artist stores up his treasures so as to create an immediate explosion, and that is why, to his way of thinking, destructions can never take place as rapidly as they ought to. (p. 32)

With this notion of broken objects in mind, what I represented earlier as linguistic losses, might be perceived differently: namely, as Winton’s literary practices to employ other powers of language, in particular its capacities to vary and resist. Winton’s stressing, exhaustion, peeling back, making-foreign, and breaking of language become productive and material
expressions of resistance to, and paths out of, the sanctioned notions of the current state of affairs that affect bodies (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986). The very impoverishment of language in Eyrie (its diminished, broken, jolting and stumbling syntax) and the “making-foreign” of language (its idiomatic style) can constitute Winton’s expressive interventions in the world (Braidotti, 2002), not escapes from it.

What of the stain on Keely’s carpet; the ‘M’ on Kai’s palms; Kai’s dreams; Keely’s fugue states; the Osprey that might be an Eagle? We can conjecture what these indeterminate phenomena might mean. However, assigning meanings risks closing off their potential, as does privileging their lack of meaning as our focus of study. We can, instead attend to the intensive force of their indeterminacy: “As it happens, the exemplary expression signifies nothing. Which is not to say it expresses nothing” (Massumi, 2002b, p. xxviii). The withdrawal of meaning—we cannot alight upon a stable interpretation—is deterritorialising. We lose common sense and we apprehend our unfulfilled desire for resolution. Something is happening “in excess of” any signification we might crave (p. xxviii). Such irresolution unnerves Keely and has the capacity to unnerve readers. The stain on his carpet carries a sensation that brings him low. He becomes-animal; “truffling about on all fours, date in the air, tackle adrift, whiffing out his own spoor like a lost mutt” (Winton, 2013, p. 11); not becoming a dog but emitting the molecular intensities we associate with dogs and to which humans are also open (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 275). Kai’s enigmatic utterances, on his hands and on his dreams, leave Keely and readers in the
mud: wanting to reach for interpretation but suspended and disoriented. Kai looks at the lines on his palms that map out a letter:

But what’s it for? He asked. M for what?

Well, M for whatever you like, I spose. They’re your hands, sport.

But what does it mean?

I don’t think it means anything, mate. It’s just a…just…just crease.
(p. 284).

Readers might interpret one of Kai’s dreams as presaging the final passage of the novel. In the dream, Kai sees Keely surrounded by people in burkas, their eyes visible only through slits, “With only eyes showin […] All black. And just eyes” (Winton, 2013, p. 152). Keely notes later: “or was it [, the dream,] more an intimation?” (p. 158). While hard to recall, as dreams often are, it seems that Kai’s difficulties are with articulation and not with memory. I also note that while Kai’s descriptions of his dream make meaning less accessible, they are intensive:

All black. And just eyes. Behind them it’s…fire […] Fast. Shooting […] They talk, said Kai, eyes clouded with awe. But, not proper words […] They’re kind, I think […] Everything goes away, he said.
Kai’s perplexing recollection expresses sensations of violence, fear, loss, and a winding down, and Keely finds himself asking question after question. He fumbles desperately for meaning, gaining none, before trying to calm Kai’s intensive experience (and his own distress) by suggesting it is only “a dream” (p. 153). While Kai remains impassive and expressionless, the dialogue, and the relations between Kai and Keely, carry an energy that is not represented in the boy’s body language, and that Kai cannot represent or articulate as an emotion: these are flows of affect. His final words—“Sometimes it’s not me” (p. 153)—carry a different intensity and expand the scope of the trauma to who knows who else.

Eyrie’s broken, thinned, stumbling language also carries intensities. Indeed, “[t]o bring language slowly and progressively to the desert” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 26) is not to negate its force. Rather, a writer can go:

always farther in the direction of deterritorialization, to the point of sobriety. Since the language is arid, make it vibrate with a new intensity. Oppose a purely intensive usage of language to all symbolic or even significant or simply signifying usages of it. Arrive
at a perfect and unformed expression, a materially intense expression. (p. 19)

Winton’s writing carries, at least, the potential to function as a material, intensive expression of a new way of living—in fits and starts, in vulnerability and fragility, without recourse to coherence, unity or resolution—and not only as a linguistically denotative, connotative or symbolic text. As Deleuze notes more generally, so, I suggest, in Eyrie, are the desertification and failings of language expressions of a breaking, fragile Life: not only Keely’s but the non-and-more-than-human world in which he, the novel, the writer, and readers persist. Readers must endure the violence of Winton’s language and the violence done to it: “Language stops being representational in order to now move toward its extremities or its limits” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 23). We find in Eyrie a style that achieves something akin to Deleuze’s (1997) description of writing that dries up the flow of language (p. 156) and of voices (p. 161). At times it seems an immense effort is being made to pulse out even the shortest of sentences. We are sensitised as much to the stopping as to the movement. Passages progress as litany, in multiple short, sharp jabs. While Keely’s capacity to speak is diminished and his sentences are often cut short or break off without completion, it need not be a matter of seeking out longer sentences to gain more meaning: it is this inadequacy that carries a force. Eyrie’s exhausting and exhausted prose might be felt as a writing of the pain of the drained vital body; a language in ruins but utterly intensive nonetheless.
When Winton pushes language toward its extremes in *Eyrie*, “nothing remains but intensities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 19). The passage that takes up Keely’s *bad turn* at the beach, for example, is a sensuous expression of linguistic, corporeal and psychical breakdown and disorientation:

Rippling steps. Leaning Trees. Hot tar. The horizon lurching, oceanic. The car. The ground turning as he fell into the roasting interior. Round in circles, tighter loops and whirls. Gemma drove fast, spinning him into the roof, his lap, the green furze of golf links, screaming, slapping his belly through the cowling of his head.

(Winton, 2013, p. 337)

Winton alienates language’s parts, making it discordant (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 23), and withdrawing sense (as in interpretable meaning), though not sensation. These seeming impoverishments are not losses. We might appreciate them as Deleuze and Guattari (1986) did Kafka: as “a creative utilisation for the purposes of a new sobriety, a new expressivity, a new flexibility, a new intensity” (p. 23). The syntax is clipped, its flow broken and potentially unpredictable and disorienting for the reader. One thing does not follow naturally to the next, however short the sentence. Keely loses the capacity to speak. The last sentence confounds as vertigo takes hold. While it is difficult to visualise the scene, the writing is sensuously disruptive. It is
not difficult to sense (even to participate in) the disorientation via: “Rippling [...] lurching [...] turning [...] circles [...] loops [...] whirls [and] spinning” (p. 337). The world becomes fluid rather than solid; mobile and unpredictable; and difficult to hold onto, rather than offering some grounding.

_Eyrie_’s idiomatic style also carries potentials to produce convulsions and ruptures to sense. The host of distinctive and arresting phrases used by Winton’s narrator include: “a real swine-choker” (Winton, 2013, p. 4); “the full gorgonzola” (p. 5); “a judicious bit of biff” (p. 33); “in his cock-jocks” (p. 53); “eat like pokie machines” (p. 69); “a couple of beefy brufens” (p. 89); “Rupert-rag” (p. 111); “the Kombi lay down beside the beemer” (p. 157); “a minute’s skin-peeling banter” (p. 177); “huffle his nuts” (p. 199); “surfin a Torana” (p. 220); “the good sammies’” (p. 229); “Pig and bumnuts do you?” (p. 257); and “a malarial dishpig” (p. 369). Often humorous, idiom can also be disorienting and can elude interpretation. While Winton suggests he employs such styles “automatically or for sheer pleasure” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 157), we should not infer an unthinking indulgence. Indeed, I suggest that it is precisely the humour and strangeness of Winton’s writing that contribute to _Eyrie_’s potential political force.

I outlined in Chapter 3 that writing as a becoming-minor is an unavoidably collective act. Winton’s comment, that the use of idiom is to do with his “love [of] the ordinary language of the people I grew up with and who I still mostly associate with” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 157), suggests a line along which to explore how literary style might enact and call forth collective resistance. Winton sees himself as part of a fraying community, persevering under
assault. Moreover, his desire to convey collectivity—"the sense that we are a social-cultural ecosystem, a chain of interdependent communities" (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 146)—goes well beyond conventional Western notions of society or family, and entertains other registers of relationality. He writes of artistic production particular to (and drawn from the particularities of) a people (Ben-Messahel, 2012, p. 12)). For Winton, writing involves resistance to the "imperial influence of Britain and the US": the production of "work on our own terms in our own dialect" (Ben-Messahel, 2012, p. 12). In *Eyrie*, I suggest that idiom carries the capacity to revitalise links between some of those who have become isolated, producer-consumers amid globalised capitalism.

Such is the prevalence of idiomatic language in *Eyrie* that it becomes a purposeful body: a collective assemblage of enunciation with the capacity to make a difference, to use Deleuze and Guattari’s idea (1986, pp. 17-18). Arising from *within* the dominant (or Major) language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 16)—Australian English—Winton’s use of idiom works to express resistance to sanctioned ways of speaking and writing, and to the forces—local and international—that standardise, atomise, and contract expression. However, while many of the phrases Winton uses might be translatable or interpretable in an indicative, proximate, general sense, accessing their force does not require unlocking their meaning. Take, for example, the phrases “off his chops on the fruit of the Barossa" (p. 11) and “stunned mullethood” (p. 17). This language is not entirely alien but the phrases are strange and transversal, not least because the conventional meanings of the words used are traversed by other unconventional meanings when
brought together as these phrases. They suspend and disorient the reader’s search for meaning: remaining within the dominant language while expressing what Winton refers to as a baffling “particularity” (p. 157). Winton writes such that he becomes, as Deleuze and Guattari suggest of Kafka, “a sort of stranger within his own language” (1986, p. 26): though not to those people who apprehend the idiomatic gestures. I also note that while some of these phrases might be characterised as earthy or base, and perhaps discomforting to read for some—for example, “face like a spanked arse” (p. 86)—these qualities also carry their own potentials. Colebrook (2004) observes that humour “descends to the depths of life” (p. 136) and a scan of the phrases above brings to life the notion that humour deterritorialises standards (the Major), not least through showing “subjects to be collections of sounds, gestures, body parts and signs devoid of any real sense” (p. 137). The phrase, “twitchy as a numbat” (Winton, 2013, p. 56) offers a good example of this deterritorialising capacity. Winton’s idiom resonates with Colebrook’s (2004) Deleuzian conceptualisation of humour as anti-subjective; making the Self appear less organised. Humour, she argues, produces a “destruction of subjective positions” (p. 136) by making readers aware of the nonhuman forces that produce and run well beyond us. It “recognises the lowly animal being, behind all our ideas of self-creation” (p. 139). We lose what makes sense: “logic, […] moral categories […] the body [which dissolves] into parts without any governing intention” (p. 134): not unlike Keely’s own uncooperative body.

Winton’s idiomatic language enacts and invokes a vibrant resistance to commodification and standardisation, and to what he calls the “pressure […]
to submit to some kind of standard, placeless, cosmopolitan [language] usage" (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 114). However, this style is not just an act of resistance to the force of the generic: it is also creative. Idiom, Winton notes, enables readers to “feel in the language the gravity of the specific” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 114): this involves operating in “transversals that continually escape from the coordinates or punctual systems” of Major language (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 299). Albeit, the proliferation of idiom in *Eyrie* suggests the creative energy needed to maintain that “gravity of the specific”, and to continue to outpace capitalism in its chase (Bell, 2009) to co-opt phrases and words and turn them into marketable commodities or sterilise them altogether.

Winton exists both inside and outside the collective his language invokes (Winton & Watts, 2015): a remotely located writer (geographically); with a strong sense of connection to the non-and-more-than-human (Winton, 2015); who values what might be termed solitary pursuits; and who has sought to traverse the realms of popular and literary fiction (McCredden, 2016; McGirr, 1999, p. 13). There is, though, a power to being “in the margins or completely outside his or her fragile community [because] this situation allows the writer all the more the possibility to express another possible community and to forge the means for another consciousness and another sensibility” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986, p. 17). Winton’s language pushes at the edges of the Major from the inside; it exposes readers to the language’s outside; and Winton hopes it functions to enable a holding-out “against the centre, the imperium” (Winton & Watts, 2015, p. 157). Style also connects Winton (and Keely) to that “tribe” beyond family (2013, p. 6),
with which he feels an alliance. Winton contends that “A really good novel makes you a citizen – it claims you” (p. 158), and I suggest that his style in *Eyrie* enacts such a claiming. Idiom functions as connective tissue and it lays claim to those it affects and who sense, in encountering it, the expression of a collective to whom they might belong.

*Eyrie* can be mined for Iovino and Oppermann’s (2012a) “posthumanist vision” which “questions the givenness of the split between the human and the nonhuman, and emphasizes their hybridizations, their cooperative configurations, and their intra-actions” (p. 86); including, I suggest, in the production of literary works. Additionally, to focus upon flows of affect and becomings in *Eyrie* is to explore writing’s capacities to cultivate an embrace of collectivity and of subjectivity not too distant from Winton’s expansive notions of community. Furthermore, Winton’s writing of affect and becomings, and his affective writing, embrace and enact resistance: to standardisation; to living only along what Whitehead (1926, p. 197) referred to as mental grooves; to borders; and to separation. While Winton’s writing exposes (and is exposed to) our obdurate Humanisms and essentialisms, it also attunes readers to the “inhumanities” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 190) composing us.

Winton’s work in *Eyrie* is not solely intensive (nor need it be) and, consequently, it carries with it powers to reterritorialise and constrain thought, bodies, and subjectivities: not least, the ways in which the animal remains the object of the Human, and the persistence of (no doubt,
problematised) ideas of the Human as a source of redemption. However, to engage with *Eyrie* is also to confront intensively the question of whether we can close ourselves off from Crises, trauma, and pain, and to find that we cannot. To engage with *Eyrie*, regardless of our initial sense of our psychical, physical and social locations and conditions, is to explore and sense how materially open and vulnerable we are. Winton’s literary practices go to the heart of interconnectedness and offer up a material sense of the interdependencies, and the traumas of Crises of Ecologies, that traverse human and non-and-more-than-human, and bind them: “from our genetic neighbours the animals, to the earth as bio-sphere as a whole” (Braidotti, 2005/6, p. np) and beyond. In *Eyrie*, Winton produces this shared habitat; not romantically or from a height or distance, but materially, intensively, viscerally and intimately.
Chapter 5 – Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book*

**On ethics**

Before engaging critically with *The Swan Book*, I consider the ethics of non-indigenous research into Indigenous cultural production, in particular the dangers of appropriation, misrepresentation, subjectification, silencing, and crowding out (Kwaymullina, 2016; I. Watson, 2015). These dangers lurk in the Eurocentric, anthropocentric, “colonial mindsets” (I. Watson, 2015, p. 8) at the heart of Indigenous Crises of Ecologies. They manifest in erroneous assumptions, including: presumptions of homogeneous Indigeneity and style; attractions to deficit/oppression-led models when engaging with and interpreting Indigenous art (Muecke, 2005, p. 204); confidence that we can definitively know a culture (or what that culture knows (Ravenscroft, 2012)) through its art; expectations that we share common conceptualisations of art’s functions and efficacies and of the artist; and beliefs that we can entirely mitigate the influence of our “colonial mindset” upon our engagements with artists and their works. These dangers can be actualised through interpretation and assessment: for example,

---

166 Kwaymullina (2016, p. 441) notes: “Aboriginal (Tanganekald and Meintangk) legal academic Irene Watson (2009) has written of her reluctance to “provide specific examples of Aboriginal relationships to ruwi [country, homeland] … because of the dangers of mistranslation, appropriation and commodification” (p. 38). See also, Rose (1999, p. 182).


168 See Heiss (2003, Ch. 2), and Spivak (1988).

where we claim a work as fitting a Western philosophical frame for artistic practice, such as writing the posthuman, or minor literature.

With these concerns in mind, this study of *The Swan Book* makes certain acknowledgements and follows a number of principles. I reiterate my earlier acknowledgement of the still-colonial state of affairs affecting Indigenous peoples and country, its associated material-discursive violence—overtly physical, covertly structural, and psycho-social (Kwaymullina, 2016, p. 440)—and its historical and ongoing genocidal results (I. Watson, 2015). As a coloniser, I acknowledge my own complicity in, and that I benefit from, the continuation of this violence.

I also acknowledge the risks of perpetuating a “failure to hear” (Kwaymullina, 2016, p. 440). Kwaymullina writes that “Indigenous voices are not heard equally; nor do Indigenous voices have an equal opportunity to be heard” (p. 441), and that “the task of the non-Indigenous scholar is not necessarily to add to the commentary but to highlight and support Indigenous voices” (p. 441). Bignall and Patton (2010) note that how we listen is as important as how we speak or write:

> it is not enough for Western intellectuals to resist the imperial temptation to *speak for* the colonised other, since this response carries with it the danger that the other will remain inarticulate, having already been silenced within colonial history. If she is to speak ‘for herself’ in ways that are not fully captured by Western
forms of discourse and structures of representation, then alternative forms of ‘listening’ are also required so that the particular sound of her ‘voice’ and the heterogeneous and irreducible ‘sense’ she conveys is able to be adequately heard and properly acknowledged on its own terms. (p. 5)

Accordingly, my analysis attempts to begin with, and respect the sovereignty of, Indigenous voices because “an acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty (humanity) is a necessary element of both respectful engagement and decolonization dialogues” (Kwaymullina, 2016, p. 442).

While I attend to significant connections between Indigenous oppression and Alexis Wright’s literary practices, I avoid conclusions that oppression/resistance is the lens through which to analyse Indigenous literature. *The Swan Book* is also a vehicle for the production of new futures immanent to always already vibrant Indigenous philosophies, to still living pasts, and to sovereign bodies and minds: human and non-and-more-than-human. I acknowledge, also, after Kwaymullina et al. (2013), that literary works need not meet the requirements of Western research paradigms, and that art is not best served when de-humanised into/by theory (p. 7). This study is not, therefore, an attempt to claim Wright’s work for Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialism. It is an exploration of ways in which Wright’s

---

literary practices inform and enrich conceptualisations of literary practices for Crises of Ecologies in the Australian context; cultivate ecological sense; and enable resistance and renewal. I associate many qualities of Wright’s novel with aspects of writing the posthuman, affect and becomings, and minor literature, but I do not suggest that Wright is attempting to respond to Deleuze and Guattari’s hopes for writers. I also recognise Louis’ (2007) concern, after Rundstrom and Duer, that “all research is appropriation” (p. 133), albeit, I hope that bringing Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist thought together with *The Swan Book* might, at its best, approximate a collaboration or mutual gifting. This mutual gifting could serve to illuminate the capacities in Wright’s novel and in my thesis, and avoid binding Wright’s ideas and work in a theoretical straitjacket or barricading my thesis against affirmative encounters with other knowledges.

My engagement with *The Swan Book* involves an embrace of Indigenous onto-epistemologies. Admittedly, this is a partial embrace given that it encompasses an encounter with Waanyi cultural production and, although there are strong resonances between the ontologies and epistemologies of Australia’s Indigenous peoples (Kwaymullina, 2016; Louis, 2007), no homogeneous Indigenous culture-philosophy exists.171 Furthermore, I possess an outsider’s limited apprehension of Indigenous knowledges and relational living. In this regard, I am conscious of my personal, European, colonising cartography and therefore of my particular and partial standpoint (Kwaymullina, 2016). I also acknowledge that my arguments on the efficacy

171 See, on this, Foley on Rigney (2003, p. 48), Grieves (2009), and Muecke (2011).
of Wright’s literature vis-à-vis Indigenous readers are entirely speculative and that, as Kwaymullina puts it, “An individual’s knowledge is at once informed and limited by position, and no one can ‘know’ what it is to experience the web of relationships that is the world from a position they do not hold” (p. 441), including literature’s work within that web. It is with these substantial caveats that I attempt an opening out to, and advocacy for, the efficacies of Indigenous onto-epistemologies, as Louis (2007) characterises the opportunity for non-indigenous researchers (p. 134). I accept that Indigenous readers might find the value of my research, at best, limited. Nevertheless, I offer this work with the expectation that “Sharing knowledge has to go both ways” (Louis, 2007, p. 136) and that it will, at least, be indirectly productive. I hope that my attempt to argue the opportunities that Wright’s work offers—for “becoming, dissemination, and exchange” (Muecke, 2005, p. 204) amid Crises of Ecologies—at least carries the capacity to engender among readers—as it has for me—an enhanced respect for other philosophies and knowledges, and to inform the approaches of non-indigenous readers to their relations (Bignall et al., 2016, p. 474). As Rose (1999, p. 175) observes: “[o]penness produces reflexivity, so that one’s own ground becomes destabilized. In open dialogue one holds one’s self available to be surprised, to be challenged, and to be changed.”
Alexis Wright is a member of the Gulf of Carpentaria’s Waanyi nation. Her 2013 novel, *The Swan Book*, is set in a contemporarily resonant future Australia experiencing the devastations of global climate change, and it tells Oblivion Ethyl(ene)’s (Oblivia’s) stories. Gang raped as a child, Oblivia resurfaces as an invisible outcast among the also outcast “swamp people” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 13). Bella Donna, a refugee/coloniser/invader, takes Oblivia in. After Bella’s death, Oblivia is married against her wishes to Warren Finch: Indigenous politician and soon-to-be Australian president and international “saviour” (p. 185). Removed to desert country, then to a climate-besieged city, travelling through civilisation’s ruins, then witnessing and possibly committing Warren’s execution, Oblivia is eventually guided by (and guides) climate-change-exiled black swans back to their newly adopted country and Oblivia’s home: the swamp. Indeed, Wright’s novel is as much the story of country and black swans as it is Oblivia’s, so richly entwined are the three in the telling. Wright’s work is devilishly satirical, deep with irony, dazzlingly transversal in its cultural references and its imagery, dizzyingly complex in its scope and language, and disruptive, imaginative, and vibrant in its prose. Notions of nation, country, history, people, capital, consumerism, colonialism, human, animal, past, present and future, are critiqued and complicated, resisted and reinvented; not least by the novel’s
driving force: an Indigenous onto-epistemology or relational philosophy which irreducibly entangles human and non-and-more-than-human.

In this chapter, I argue that *The Swan Book* carries potentials to cultivate ecological sense, and to enable resistance and renewal amid Crises of Ecologies. These potentials resonate with Wright’s (2008b) expectations for the political work of writing and are to do primarily, though not only, with her employment of Indigenous onto-epistemologies in her literary practices. I also identify where these literary practices and potentials traverse and enrich Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist conceptualisations of literary practices. First, how Wright renews our understanding of the forces shaping the health of Indigenous peoples and country, and writes Life moving beyond and through the Human: what Deleuze (2005) calls fabulation, or story-telling. And second, how Wright tends to (nurture) the health of expression and, thereby, the collectivity and health of Indigenous peoples and country.

**Into the hornet’s nest: a future-present-past symptomatology**

[W]riters […] use their pen as a sword (A. Wright, 2008b, p. 20)

‘It may be that I am fleeing, but throughout my flight, I am searching for a weapon.’ (Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 36)
If we conceive of weapons as instruments of “projection”, enabling “free-action” or self-propulsion (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 395, 397), then we might find resonances between Wright’s, and Deleuze and Guattari’s conceptions of literature as a weapon. Wright’s weapon incorporates a critical diagnosis of Australian conditions, what might become from those conditions, and how they provide resources for resistance and renewal. She explains that:

\[
\text{it is the work of the writer to try to imagine this, to imagine what the world might look like. It's not a simple thing like going out into the backyard and seeing a hornet’s nest – it’s describing the hornet’s nest of the world. (Zable & Wright, 2013, p. 28, Italics in original)}
\]

This idea of describing the hornet’s nest—Wright’s literary diagnosis—sheds light on the efficacies of what Deleuze calls a writer’s “symptomatology” (1989, p. 133; 1995, pp. 132-133,142-133). Responding, in part, to conditions of oppression, The Swan Book renews the diagnosis of the forces that afflict particular civilisations, rather than attributing pre-existing, innate qualities to Indigenous peoples as the causes of their conditions (syndromes). Wright (2002) argues that “fiction penetrates more than the surface layers and probes deeper into the inner workings of reality” (p. 13). Wright also imagines ways by which the suffering colonised—the Minority—
might revitalise their collectivity and find ways to “live the opposite of being shackled” (A. Wright, 2011c, p. 42). Writing fiction, then, is an immersion into, and a drawing upon, the forces shaping the Indigenous and Australian states of affairs. In A Weapon of Poetry (2008b), Wright expresses admiration for Oodgeroo Noonuccal’s “diagnostic” writing practice (p. 22): her “cold eye” (p. 22); her recording of the “heartbeat” (p. 20); her letting “the world see” (p. 20); her accessing the “cultural interior monologue of her people” (p. 21); and her describing “the troubled interior world” (p. 22).

Wright writes diagnostically too: of “taboos” (1998); of viruses; of pain; of fear; of physical and psychical wounds to human and non-and-more-than-human. She writes of the forces perpetuating “the living hell of the lives of many Aboriginal people” (A. Wright, 2002, p. 13).

Wright (2007a, p. 8) concerns herself deeply with truth: to affirm on one’s own terms “what has been unwritten”; to keep alive the knowledge of the trauma of colonisation or to keep “the wound” open (2002, p. 18); to correct prevailing and repeated misrepresentations of Indigenous people (Vernay & Wright, 2004, p. np); and to make discernible the truths that Australians hide (A. Wright, 2002, p. 20). To tell stories, to write fiction, is, for Wright, to release particular expressions of truth: “to try and create a truer replica of reality” (2002, p. 13). She points out that it is not her priority to write history, as this would never get close to the truth she seeks to release. Rather, she believes in the work of stories as “not the real truth but

172 My focus here is on materiality, agency, affect and minor writing, though I concur with Takolander’s (2016) assertion that “trauma is not the ‘cause’ of Wright’s magical realist narrative […] its ultimate agenda is ironising traumatic colonial histories to imagine a sovereign future” (p. 117).
more of a truth than non-fiction” (p. 13). Kwaymullina et al. (2013) argue that stories are creative vehicles for knowledge, expressing endurance and uncontainability, and resisting, in form and content, dominating ideas of truth (pp. 8-9). Graham (2009) concurs and notes that, for Indigenous peoples, stories are expressions of place, are ontologically genetic, and offer ways to nurture the relational self (p. 72). These ideas resonate with Deleuzian conceptualisations of fabulation as “story-telling”,173 which involves using the forces shaping our historico-material state of affairs as resources for collective escape: “diagno[s]ing the impasses of the present and their historical causes and then insti[g]ating disruptive becomings and lines of flight toward a people to come” (Bogue, 2010a, p. 46). Story-telling, Bogue (2010b, p. 99) argues, has strong connections with both history and the present state of affairs. Drawing forth “aspects of the past that have not been actualised” (Bogue, 2010a, pp. 45-46), story-telling is a critique of acquiescence to sanctioned, common sense, habitual histories, and a response to powers of forgetting, denial, silence and fear. Deleuze writes of the storying of the false:

What is opposed to fiction is not the real; it is not the truth which is always that of the masters or colonizers; it is the story-telling function of the poor, in so far as it gives the false the power which makes it into a memory, a legend, a monster. (2005, p. 150)

173 See Chapter 3.
Quoting Richard Flanagan, Bogue (2010a, p. 192) notes that story-telling responds to the power of wrong history that could leave bodies, collectives, and Life “condemned to an eternity of imprisonment”. One power of story-telling’s unlikely truths—the false or the absurd—is to disrupt dominant truths and dominant falsehoods: exposing their constructed and not necessarily superior qualities; making mad what is taken as natural; offering wild words; projecting exaggerated visions—hallucinations—of the historically familiar; telling stories outside of orthodox colonial Australian narratives (A. Wright, 2007a, p. 10), though always with foundations in versions of History. Story-telling disrupts: problematising common sense structures rather than reinforcing them; unsettling linear, progressive, and incremental notions of time—Chronos; and rendering truth and falsity indeterminate and transversal rather than finally separable or independent. As *The Swan Book*’s narrator tells us, “The girl convinced herself that only the mad people in the world would tell you the truth when madness was the truth, when the truth itself was mad” (p. 73).

To story, then, is to experiment on the real: which is to “open new possibilities for life by ironically or humorously warping and transforming its structures” (Bogue, 2012, p. 21) and by redirecting and changing the intensities of what flows materially and discursively. Wright’s notion of a disruptive and creative imagination, I suggest, resonates with Deleuze’s “hallucinatory perception” (1997, p. 115) as a story-telling practice. Literary deviations—via the historical field and into realms of the phantasmatic
force “images on reality and counteract[…]” operations of reason and intelligence” (Bogue, 2007, p. 104). These hallucinations and visions are productive rather than evasive: the writing transcends “empirical circumstances by engaging their virtual components in new actualisations” (Bogue, 2010a, p. 46). Specifically, Wright’s experiments in The Swan Book involve producing new ways of knowing Indigenous Crises of Ecologies, and co-opting the forces driving Crises as resources for sovereignty.

Just as The Swan Book finds global warming “flipping” the northern Australian weather—“this unique event of unrolling the climate upside down” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 18)—so Wright flips diagnoses of Indigenous and Australian civilisational afflictions and offers “the new figure of a disorder or illness” (Deleuze, 1990b, p. 273). Her symptomatology gestures toward other truths: namely, that Indigenous conditions are not innate to Indigenous peoples or country, but are an infection. Wright writes against the grain. She injects complexity and multiplicity to disrupt and contest tacit assumptions, routine habits, unquestioned concepts, and zones of constructed and regulated memory and amnesia: literary practices that Bogue (2010a, p. 223) finds in fabulation. Wright also reveals the material and discursive forces brought to bear in the service of power relations and oppression: characteristics that Bryant (2013) suggests are particular to materialist critiques of power. To tell new truths about the Indigenous condition(s) in these ways is to give the lie to a capitalist-colonial “false grouping” of symptoms into an Indigenous “false syndrome” (Bogue, 2012, p. 17). Oblivia’s “cut snake virus” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 1) is a production of
composition forces and not an essential and unalterable Indigenous condition.

_The Swan Book_’s colonisers host the virus and, via material and discursive relations with Indigenous peoples and country, its damaging affects are expressed: acquisitive possessiveness; civilisational hubris and a desire for omnipresence; ignorance and deafness; a desire to remake and to save; fear and rejection of difference, and a desire to control, hide or erase it; twisted and empty care; violence; and amnesia. These expressions _infect_ Indigenous peoples and country, producing dead, violated bodies, and “exiled psyche[s]” (A. Wright, 2008a, p. 137). Indigenous relational capacities are skewed towards the production of what Wright describes as “self-inflicted wounds” (p. 133): fear, shame, disconnection, compliance, self-silencing and the negation of self. Sovereign Indigenous bodies and minds disappear to each other and to themselves.

The novel begins amid a viral colonisation _and_ a casting out. Oblivia tells us that “Upstairs in my brain, there lives this kind of cut snake virus in its doll’s house” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 1). The Indigenous mind has been “sucked” in (p. 1) and the virus “etched” (p. 3) into the brain. But this is not an essentially Indigenous condition, it is an occupation by “poor lost assimilated spirits that thought about things that had originated somewhere else on the planet and got bogged in my brain” (p. 3). At the same time, Indigenous people are cast out—psychically and physically—and become “gypsies” (p. 15); a condition in which Wright finds affinities with the globalisation of gypsies produced by other colonisations and by
anthropogenic climate change. These globalised traumas are expressions of the virus’ interest, as Oblivia puts it, in “belonging everywhere” (p. 4).

The virus operates materially and discursively and it puts at risk the sovereign Indigenous mind. It is ingrained, entrenched in people and country, “stitched in the brain” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 109), and “like a lice infestation” (p. 95). It enacts violence and brings on a “madness” (p. 334). An ongoing history of occupation, intervention, internment, exclusion and control sees the virus achieve “full traction over what these people believed and permeance over their ability to win back their souls and even to define what it meant to be human, without somebody else making that decision for them” (p. 48). The virus damages Indigenous collectivity and produces islands of isolation. It has “stuffed up […] Oblivia’s] relationships with her own people, and made her unsociable” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 334). It only allows certain kinds of discourse and “won’t talk about anything in level terms” (p. 2). It encourages a “nostalgie de la boue” (p. 3): attraction to that which makes us sick.

Wright’s “ignis fatuus” (p. 7)—foolish/false fire, Will-o’-the-wisp—suggests a power to mislead and to draw people on to their ruin. Indigenous minds become filled with bad ideas—“vomiting bad history” (p. 1)—and the virus leaves no fertile ground to support stories other than its own. The country of the mind is emptied of variation to become “flat, space, field” (p. 1); barren such that “truths” (p. 1), like drought-affected crops, risk failure. What the coloniser sees as good for people and country, and for itself, entails the creation of a wasteland not the filling of a void. The nurturing of this
“moonscape garden” (p. 1)—a physical, psychical, social, material terra nullius—threatens the very nullification of peoples and country that colonisers perceive(d) to be the case on their arrivals: “Anyone there? […Bella Donna] called” as she set foot on country (p. 32).

The virus expresses itself through an obsession with homogeneity. A coloniser fear of difference prompts the flow of the civilising material-discursive forces of categorisation, demonisation, and exclusion. Instincts to categorise and to control—”white government social engineering intervention” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 82)—run forward and backward across capitalist-colonial time, encompassing eugenics, assimilation, protectorates, and contemporary and future imagined policy frameworks that continue to classify Indigenous people against deficit models: “just another moment in a repetitious black and white history repeated one more time for Aboriginal people […] after having their lives classified and reassigned yet again?” (p. 49). White people relentlessly try to make something of the Indigenous. Those in power position themselves as the “designer of black people’s lives” (p. 96). We read of the norms to which Indigenous people are expected to aspire. Bella Donna wants “to get the girl [Oblivia] to act normal” which is to:

- behave and sit up straight at the table and use a knife and fork properly,
- learn table manners, talk nicely, walk as a butterfly flies,
- dress like a normal person, learn something marvellous on a daily basis, and show some resilience. (p. 21)
Warren’s colleague, Red, also wants to remove variation from the field of being: to physically clean/transform Oblivia, and “to get into […]her] brain, as though this was where one removed grime, salt, vegetation, blood of dead animals, lice, and whatever thoughts about having different origins she had brought into the house” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 221). Oblivia is named and renamed. Her given-name is bastardised and fragmented (pp. 158, 159, 182, 276, 290, 297). She is pulled from identity to identity: lost girl (p. 86); “No name” (p. 2); terrorist (p. 54); promised wife (p. 148); trophy wife (p. 227); animal (p. 36); First Lady (p. 226); widow (p. 290); killer (p. 290); nothing (p. 211); and spirit (p. 334). Her condition is, in part, one of being told that she is known without ever being known; the force of that known subjectivity burning its way through the mind such that she is at risk of becoming only what is sanctioned by others: both something and nothing. The media-machine supports the shaping of subjectivities that serve the virus and secure its hold. Ultimately, it is not what we stand for but the “propaganda” of it that matters (p. 302). Warren Finch, his subjectivity emptied out and repopulated with a media-shaped cult of personality—“He was post-racial. Possibly even post-Indigenous” (p. 122)—is left with only the orbital and hollow-sounding “unique quality of his extraordinariness” (p. 302).

Imposed aspirations to be normal—we read that being so minimises the threat of violence upon Indigenous people (A. Wright, 2013, p. 97)—produce “yes people” (p. 96). For Warren Finch’s people, a desire to please—to
avoid suffering additional harm—generates a long list of what they are “anti”, capped off by being “anti-anyone not living like a white person […and] about whatever there was to be anti about if white people say so” (p. 97).

Proliferating conformist modes of living—a “universe of viruses” (p. 3) for Oblivia—draw Indigenous subjectivities into states of almost total negation. This is the future, terrifyingly familiar version of self-determination born of a capitalist-coloniser deficit model of Indigenous subjectivity and the threat of violence against variation.

Deafness and silence prevail. Indigenous people are to have no meaningful voice in the Australian world of the living. They are encouraged to speak only about things that colonisers believe will divert their attention from their oppression and parlous life conditions and let the real talking—and everything else—be done for them. As a response to the swamp people’s feelings of trauma about the lost girl (Oblivia), the government builds a sports stadium. It is felt that, now: “The swamp people would not need to talk about anything else really except football […] So let the Government do all the talking, all the planning, and the thinking and the controlling” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 84). Oblivia finds herself spoken for, her silence prolonged, and her isolation from others deepened. She also chooses silence over the seemingly impossible alternative of finding a voice that adequately conveys the truth of her suffering. At the same time, Oblivia’s silence is also an expression of trauma:
She would rather be silent since the last word she had spoken when scared out of her wits, the day when her tongue had screeched to a halt with dust flying everywhere, and she was left screaming *Ahhhhhh!* throughout the bushland, when she fell down the hollow of the tree. (p. 19)

In *The Swan Book*, fear and shame pervade cultures, bodies, and country under continuous siege. Colonisers’ fear of difference shapes colonial violence which, in turn, over centuries, tightens the boundaries around Indigenous subjectivities. Indigenous people become loci of fear. Refugee, terrorist and racial stereotypes are conflated to produce threats: “brown- and black-coloured criminals, un-assimilables, illegal immigrants, terrorists – all the undesirables; those kinds of people” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 55). Bella warns Oblivia not to leave the swamp, fearing that she will be accused of being “one of those faces kept in the Federal Government’s Book of Suspects” (p. 54). Like black swans, Indigenous people appear to be “marooned in flight, unable to break apart from their fear” (pp. 158-159). Indigenous fear in *The Swan Book* entails fear of self, or of the expressions of self that lead to violent reprisals: “We still live in punitive raid times” (p. 150). Trauma and fear engender secretiveness and a preference to hide self, whether psychically, physically or socially: as with Oblivia’s retreats “down the tree” (p. 172) when she feels threatened. Indigenous people also fear the shame of failure, of facing accusations of delinquency in their care for self and for their children, and of losing their children. Searchers for the
lost girl (Oblivia) are asked to “give up hope” rather than keep searching and unearthing the shame that inhabits the country surrounding the swamp and attaches itself to a parent “failing to take notice of his child” (p. 85). Swamp people’s sense of culpability is cultivated by their being continuously blamed for their predicament by distant others.

As we might expect of a writer steeped in Indigenous onto-epistemologies, Wright’s symptomatology traverses and entangles human and non-and-more-than-human, as well as coloniser and Indigenous peoples. The globalisation of the virus has produced degradation of country, mass extinction, and climate catastrophe, with human and non-and-more-than-human life unhomed and much of it drought-stricken (A. Wright, 2013, p. 46), frozen (p. 17), and annihilated (p. 16). Climate change—itself an expression of the forces of capitalist-colonial violence—unites Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and human and non-and-more-than-human, via their collective diminished existences amid unceasing ruin. Globally, millions of refugees and “poverty people” (p. 17) are displaced, and forced to wander to avoid climate wars, land wars and the curtailments of civilisation occasioned by weather pattern changes. Climate change refugees and Indigenous peoples also share names: gypsy; unwanted; unhomed. The virus, it appears, is a great leveller. Its qualities extend the colonial encounter to encompass the violent encounters of human with non-and-more-than-human, and ecological crises also draw together all peoples in bequeathing us a “dilapidated country” and “world” (p. 266).

174 See Nixon (2011, p. 3) on this.
Adam (2006) proposes that Western concepts of time enable the imposition of human demands upon other humans and the non-and-more-than-human, and are entangled with the associated damage (p. 123). Furthermore, Western concepts of time involve a discounting of the future and, consequently, the impacts of human acts now on future ecological health (p. 125). By setting *The Swan Book* in a future-present-past, Wright offers a projection of the diabolical worlds immanent to Australia’s present state of affairs. The colonial virus appears to have overcome history and time; it symptoms recurring ceaselessly: an “overload of historical repetitiveness” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 110). The virus thrives upon a continuity of violence. The very notion of care, embraced by white Australians in relation to Indigenous people and country in *The Swan Book*, is, to adapt Bogue’s words (2010a, p. 45), bound up with a “continuing process of wounding that has become habitual in its own right”.

Capitalist-colonial Australia is always at war with Indigenous peoples and country, and homogeneity and invisibility are violently enforced “truth[s]” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 228). Law and public policy—“the adjudication of harm” (van Rijswijk, 2015, p. 214) and the proliferation of control—repeat old failings and are executed martially. The Army administers Indigenous *security* at the swamp: transporting “unwanted people” (p. 50) to this “asylum” or detention camp; destroying ancestral bodies—the eucalypt tree—deemed to pose a threat to the progression of *civilising* Indigenous thought; stopping parents

---

175 Van Rijswijk (2015) calls it “a dystopic history of our future” (p. 237).
176 See, also, Muecke (2007, p. 136) on this idea more generally.
harming their children (Army as “welfare people” (p. 86)); incarcerating people behind the ironically described “security fence of government transparency” (p. 32); controlling the flow of information, including to “those approved by the army to watch television” (p. 124); surveilling any “sign of Aboriginal strength” (p. 38); working to “control the will, mind and soul of the Aboriginal people” (p. 47); owning “every centimetre of their traditional land” (p. 334); and, eventually, blowing up the place (p. 230). And yet, the virus suggests to Indigenous minds that they should be grateful for the care by which they are smothered because they are “little pets owned by the Mothers of Government who claimed to love them more than their own “inhumane’ families” (p. 50). However, to be so loved is to be lost.

Viral symptoms repeat and sediment over time and space, cementing a “limbo world” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 82). Bella Donna repeats an invasion: “this old woman invaded Australia” (p. 31). Conflict is continuous: “all those who had fallen in the long Indigenous war against colonisation with the State of Australia – And continue to fall” (p. 116). Intervention is interminable: “by tweaking it ever so little this way and that, the intervention of the Army never ended for the swamp people” (p. 47). Detention defines a way of life for all: “a fast-growing population […] settling, living the detention lifestyle right around the swamp” (p. 52). Intolerance and racism recur infinitely: “So inter-racially intolerant Australia was still the same old, same old” (p. 50). These violent and intensive repetitions traverse existential registers and work to stop Life moving. Bella describes Oblivia’s experience of “the haphazard way sanity and madness were reaped from her having been gang-raped physically, emotionally, psychologically, statistically, randomly, historically,
so fully in fact: *Your time stands still* (p. 82). Oblivia is “petrified” (p. 83), it seems. Swamp-like, the future-present-past immobilises and suffocates bodies. History congeals into habits, common sense and limited expectations that retain their potency and are repeated into the future by colonisers and Indigenous peoples. Oblivia—“the girl has never recovered from being raped” (p. 19)—and countless others enact endless cycles of trauma and mourning: “They were mourning here. And tomorrow, they would mourn somewhere else” (p. 319). Scars remain unhealed and unavoidable, and history continues to surge into the future present: “contemplation of the wound […] contracts all the instants which separate us from it into a living present” (Deleuze, 1994, p. 77).

*The Swan Book*’s colonial virus also finds spatio-temporal expression in the Australian “mainstream” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 52) seeking to hide and reject things from the body, and to deny truths/reiterate falsehoods. Attempts to forget or empty out “bad history” expand and proliferate: “genocide, a horrendous crime against humanity that was unheard of. It never happened. Not in this country” (p. 309). Some Indigenous people in the novel—“overwhelmed swamp people who had always been told to forget the past by anyone thinking they were born conquerors” (p. 26)—believe that forgetting avoids the retribution that comes when old atrocities resurface, and helps them elude the horrific forces those events still carry (p. 85). This ejecting of unwanted bodies, veiling of truths, privileging of

---

178 I note, also, that Van Rijswijk’s (2015) analysis of *The Swan Book* as anti-elegy (holding wounds open rather than closing them off) (p. 240) resonates with my use of Morton’s dark ecology of elegy to explore Winton’s writing of *Eyrie*. 


coloniser knowledge, forgetting and excising out of histories, and attachment to only looking forward (A. Wright, 2013, p. 232), doom white Australian governments to increasingly damaging repetitions (policy and otherwise). The physical relocation, imprisonment, and banishment of Indigenous—and other—peoples, and the overwriting and erasure of country continue unabated. Even the fecund promise, complexity and variation of the city’s newly burgeoning—climate change revitalised—Botanical gardens is locked away when it threatens to exceed the control of the same government which had previously tried to save it from drought (p. 269). Past castings out—becomings invisible (p. 9)—continue into the future and extend to already outcast, Indigenous people banishing each other. Locals render Oblivia invisible after the shame of her rape: acting “as though she never existed, was too unimaginable, unable to be recognised and named” (p. 60). Lured by wealth and influence (p. 118), Warren Finch’s people split apart from other members of their nation, while Warren orders an explosive casting out in the name of progress: blowing up the swamp. In The Swan Book—and in contemporary Australia—affirmative trajectories for Indigenous peoples and country are threatened where sanctioned futures and pasts are products of the dominant colonial mind. However, while Wright acknowledges attachments to Western notions of time as one of the forces shaping civilisational ill-health, she also echoes Gunter Grass in proposing that “writing against the currents of time” (A. Wright, 2002, p. 14) can be a pathway to health.

179 Though, we find later that invisibility can also be a resource for sovereignty (p. 69).
In Chapter 1, I acknowledged that Indigenous and Deleuzian philosophies (1994) complicate common sense, Western ideas of temporality: of time as “projectile” (A. Wright, 2007a, p. 5), as Chronos or linear, incremental, progressive, and measured as it passes away (consigning things to some separable past), and as independent of matter and space; of the past as a separable, retrievable, though fixed, realm held in memory; and of the future as determined by the past and somehow predictable from, bounded by, and reconcilable to it. Irene Watson (2015) explains that, for Indigenous peoples and country, “A relationship that links us to the past is a connection that is lived in the present and to be recreated in the future” (p. 14). For Wright (2007a, p. 5), time is multiple—“mingling centuries”—and history is something, quoting James Baldwin, that we “carry […] within us”. For Deleuze, similarly, we exist in worlds for which “the past never stops having running effects” (Lampert, 2006, p. 5), albeit, as Wright notes, while events in time are not consigned to the past, neither are they fixed in their qualities (2002, p. 20). Time, for Indigenous cultures, is embodied and marked—materially, in peoples and country—by events and practices of living (Potter, 2015). Unlike Western “clock time” (Adam, 2006), it is not solely a human production. Time entails an immersion in, rather than a separation from, what Adam refers to as the “rhythmicity of the physical environment” (p. 119). For Indigenous cultures, the inseparability of time, space, material productions, and cultural practices implicates the human in the health of the non-and-more-than-human and empowers people to make a difference: past matters—including their traumas—are not closed and performances can bring other worlds into existence. Indeed, because performances—
movement, story, singing, dancing, painting, and writing—function as Life-productions, they cannot be approached (interpreted) as static, representations of the world: they are enlivening. First, what happened can be contested, as the writer draws out new memories, new histories, and new events from the still vital past. Second, the seeming coherence of the present might be fragmented by the writer’s exploration of its temporal and spatial—and material-discursive—multiplicity: there is more than “one Australia”, as Wright points out (2002, p. 15), and her symptomatology suggests other ways of conceiving of the forces producing Indigenous states of affairs. And third, the writer might also envision (new) futures: diabolical trajectories along which current forces might flow, as well as lines of flight or escape. These are the transformed sites of future history, if you will; the truths, perhaps, of imagined future worlds (A. Wright, 2007a, p. 6), “specific to but not specified by the colonial past [or present] that engendered them” (Burns & Kaiser, 2012, p. 13).

For Wright (2007a, p. 5), imagining a “‘fugitive’ future” involves grappling with our agency over the truth in its past, present and future forms. Consequently, to write the memories or the history of a different future, as Wright does in The Swan Book, is to claim a right to participate in making the truth of the future; to record its emancipatory possibilities rather than let them be excluded; to release words as “time bombs” (A. Wright, 2002, p. 20). The violations of the past are not as forgettable as the virus hopes. Indigenous silence does not indicate acquiescence or amnesia. Nor can colonial Australians hold off the Life and events that they have sought to lock out. The “unwanted” bodies proliferate. Trauma continues to flow and
the colony and country are bogged and swamped, materially and discursively, by the liveliness and variation that the virus so fears: rising flood waters (p. 235); resurgent flora and fauna (p. 209); proliferating ghosts and bones; unavoidable suffering animals; disruptive language; different ways of knowing; and deadly stories of enlivening relations. I turn next to these lively variations and Wright’s *deadly* stories of enlivening relations.

*The Swan Book* is not only a symptomatology of civilisational conditions, transforming how we understand the forces shaping those conditions, it is also a machine with the potential to transform readers’ perceptions of their capacities to respond. In the sections that follow, I argue that Wright’s storytelling involves the reader in the carrying, preserving and sharing of deep knowledge (A. Wright, 2011a, p. 81) *and* in encounters with transformative relations (Kwaymullina et al., 2013, p. 5) extending beyond and traversing the Human. These literary practices envision fugitive futures (Wright, 2007a, p. 5) and carry potentials: to (re)generate knowing and being, or to cultivate ecological sense; to confound and reconstitute assumptions about boundaries between humans and the non-and-more-than-human, between past, present, and future, and between individual and collective; and to revitalise attunement to too often (un)storied capacities of peoples and country to relate and transform amid annihilations.
I believe in the transforming power of stories, and that once these stories are heard there is an opportunity to see this other way of knowing, and the sensitivity to acknowledge the legitimacy of beliefs that have held this land together for thousands of years. (A. Wright, 2011a, p. 80)

Indigenous philosophies do not view tradition as a force opposed to progress, a hangover of the ancients, and a dead-weight to be carried as a burden. Tradition is a vital force, enabling knowledge practices via which Life is given healthy continuance across multiple registers, and from which different futures can be fashioned (A. Wright, 2011c, p. 41). Alexis Wright (2011a, p. 78) notes that stories have the potential to open us up to “other ways of knowing, of understanding, of feeling the land and sea, environment and its climate”. Her stories are richly fed by Waanyi Dreamings, and nourish their continuity. In their re-telling, these Dreamings sustain Indigenous culture and capacity to care for country and self in a world seemingly “petrified” (2013, p. 83). Wright (2011a, p. 80) believes that stories can dissolve what seems fixed in stone, including our conceptions and perceptions of the world. She embraces imagination, experimentation, and the exploration of the outside as critical to writing stories: a “taking flight” (J. Sullivan, 2013, p. np). For Wright, it is important: “to write with the
freedom of my own imagination” (A. Wright, 2011c, p. 40); to express truths through incredible, though not supernatural or fantastic stories (A. Wright, 2007a, p. 10);¹⁸⁰ “to reimagine a larger space” (p. 4); and to give truth to imagined worlds (p. 6).

These notions of “the hope of writing. Believing the unbelievable” (A. Wright, 2002, p. 20) resonate with the Deleuzian conceptualisation of fabulation (story-telling) as a transformative force of art. Indeed, Deleuze (2005, p. 243) characterises such “story-telling”—or “the flagrant offence of making up legends”—as the collective revitalising of connections to ancient stories through which different futures can be imagined (and catalysed): futures unimaginable without the non-and-more-than-human bodies and nonhuman forces drawn upon through such repotentialising acts. Stories, not least, are vehicles for Life’s expressions and transformational capacities—“the many voices of country”—over time and space (Kwaymullina et al., 2013, p. 5).

[W]and screaming with all of its life (A. Wright, 2013, p. 327)

Wright is interested in “how we might start to think about the country by knowing the power of the land through its stories” (2011a, p. 81). She explains that “Land”, in her novel Carpentaria, “is, I suppose, one of or even...

¹⁸⁰ I acknowledge that, historically, readings of Indigenous writing as magical realism were common, that these approaches are problematic, and that Wright’s magical realist tropes can be read ironically and, therefore, politically (Takolander, 2016).
the central character [...] being alive and having meaning” (Vernay & Wright, 2004, p. 121), and she describes her attempts to “inhabit in my writing” (2002, p. 20) the bodies that exceed, enfold and entwine with human and animal and other expressions of Life across time. She implies, also, that her writing is temporally, spatially, materially and discursively transversal: “like looking at the ancestral tracks spanning our traditional country which, if I look at the land, combines all stories, all realities from the ancient to the new, and makes it one—like all the strands in a long rope” (2002, p. 20).

Graham (2009) proposes that “Place also determines the logic of Indigenous people” and that it is intrinsic to existence where there is no border between mind and an outside: “no ‘external world’ to inhabit” (p. 76). Indeed, physical and spiritual, human and non-and-more-than-human, “continually interpenetrate each other” (p. 76). To “fashion giants”, as Bogue (2010a) reads Deleuze, is to fill a work of art “with a non-personal life” (p. 17): a Life that flows through, but is not only, human. Iovino and Oppermann (2014, p. 3) note that Jane Bennett, in a resonant context, refers to the “nonhuman powers circulating around and within human [though not only human] bodies”. One effect of this fashioning of giants is an entry into the “nonhuman landscapes of nature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 169), the realm of the percept and the non-and-more-than-human. We encounter a novel’s figures, in their becomings, as more than Human, more than pre-defined subject, and more than pre-conceived thing. I observe also, in these respects, strong resonances between Wright’s literary practices and Material Ecocritics’ embrace of certain onto-epistemological premises, including:
a distributive vision of agency, the emergent nature of the world’s phenomena, the awareness that we inhabit a dimension crisscrossed by vibrant forces that hybridize human and nonhuman matters; and [...] that matter and meaning constitute the fabric of our storied world. (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 5)


As writing of “the fabric of our storied world” (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 5), *The Swan Book* draws readers into, and pulses with the vitality of, a landscape without the Human. It is not flat landscape. Nor is it Abram’s “pure exterior” (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 1), or the Australian coloniser’s landscape, with open horizon, emptied of Indigenous peoples, appropriated and overwritten by European form (Muecke, 2003b; K. Myers, 2013). There is a democracy to Wright’s narration of Life such that bodies exist in a non-and-more-than-human perceptual realm and possess agency. Attempts to write non-and-more-than-human perceptions abound: “The swan could not take its eyes away from the little girl far down on the red earth” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 18); “Talk like this grieved the swan” (p. 332). The narration focalises via a black swan on its journey through to the swamp. Wright writes the swan’s perceptual relationships with the non-and-more-than-human:
Its journey took the black swan over the place where hungry *warrki* dingos, foxes and *dara kurrijbi buju* wild dogs had dug out shelters away from the dust, and lay in over-crowded burrows in the soil; and in the grasses, up in the rooftops, in the forests of dead trees, all the fine and fancy birds that had once lived in stories of marsh country, migrating swallows and plains-dancing brolgas, were busy shelving the passing years into a lacy webbed labyrinth of mud caked stickling nests brimmed by knick-knacks, and waves of flimsy old plastic threads dancing the wind’s crazy dance with their faded partners of silvery-white lolly cellophane, that crowded the shores of the overused swamp. (p. 18)

While the detritus is human-made and the swamp remains a home for, not least, a multitude of humans, the narrative expresses the landscape lived by the non-and-more-than-human: even to the extent that birds appropriate human waste to enable their living.181

Later, as black swans and Oblivia are “heading north, on the way home” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 303), we read that “Somewhere in this landscape, swans were stirring”. We human readers are not privy to where, and “the swans made no sound” (p. 303). Wright draws readers into swan perceptions: into the entangling pack, and into their bodies:

---

181 See Muecke (2003a, p. 125) on Indigenous philosophy, waste, and “overlapping [modes of classification…] where something may be useful to humans or birds, or both, in different ways”. 

217
As the entire flock awakened, great hordes wove in and out of the tight pack with necks stretched high. These birds anticipated the movement of wind in the atmosphere. They gauged the speed of northerly flowing breezes caught in their neck feathers and across their red beaks and legs. The swans made no sound, but stood still while the wind intensified through the ruffling feathers on their breasts. (p. 303)

As Oblivia and the swans finish their journey home, Wright, again, draws readers into the landscape without the Human:

Then the winds grow warmer and disappear in the atmosphere laden with dust. Without a breeze, the land becomes so still and lonely in the silence, you know that the spirits have left the skies. It does not rain anymore. The land dries. Every living thing leaves in the seemingly never-ending journeys that migrating creatures take [...]. (p. 327)

Soon after, Wright removes the reader further from the landscape. Having described the swans stranded in country, the narrator tells us that "If you were there you would have seen them everywhere" (p. 327). This is “land
screaming with all of its life”, with and “to the swans” as much as with and “to the girl” (p. 327), but not for us humans.

In a world of burgeoning non-and-more-than-human agency, I read Bella Donna ironically when she opines that, “The sand got no mind himself. Nothing to do with it” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 63). Wright maintains that country expresses agencies that are not directly explainable via Western approaches to knowledge. In *Deep Weather* (2011a), she raises questions of knowledge amid ecological crises alongside notions of non-and-more-than-human agency:

For years many of those people living on the land have given the forces of nature the name Mother Nature. When you live with the land and regularly see things happen that are often beyond rational or logical explanation, then where do you turn for an answer? (p. 75)

In *The Swan Book*, country is affective: “It fills you up with life” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 169). Country possesses sentience and power and warrants respect: “The genies walked off into the bush. They spoke to the country. Let the country know they had come” (p. 166). While country is sickened by the virus in it (p. 1), it also welcomes (p. 327); it breathes (p. 200); it issues forth music (p. 187); it sees; it rejects, kills, nurtures, protects, releases, enfolds (p. 29); and it teaches (p. 102). Country gathers stories to it and
functions as their custodian. Bodies live in and are the stories of country (p. 18).

Dust, wind, and drought are material-linguistic forces in *The Swan Book*. Dust is not only a metaphor for the renunciation of care and the atomisation of connection: “They could see that Warren Finch’s feelings were nothing more than weightless dust, particles of responsibility from their own Brolga plains he had scattered across the world” (2013, p. 134). Nor is dust solely a function of the material effects of global warming on climate and soils. Dust is the matter of drought and drought has possessed agency for “time immemorial” (p. 79). Wright’s visions of the force of dust—“dust had a way of displacing destiny” (p. 13)—suggests a familiarity with it as a corporeal and incorporeal assemblage with agency: “the dust spirit’s mind” (p. 14); “the storming almighty red dust spirit relation” (p. 14); and “dust given to them by their ancestors” (p. 54). Bodies are covered by dust: “entire continents covered” (p. 18), “shrouded” (p. 18), “dust-covered” (p. 16), “clouds of dust” (p. 166), “films of dust” (p. 66), “never-ending dust storms” (p. 17), “spreading over the land” (p. 332). Dust also transformationally enfolds the human—“permeated with the dust of our plains” (p. 134) —and becomes coextensive with other entities: “the dust in the breeze laden with the aroma of over-ripe mangoes, *gidgee kadawala* woodlands and *bloodwood* *corymbia capricornia*” (pp. 31-32). Dust carries voices: “the old black swans had heard her voice running along streams of dust floating in the breezes” (p. 65). Dust covers roads and cuts off bodies from bodies, queering notions of location (p. 54). It moves mountains. It folds country and bodies together:
Dust rose with each step, filled the air with each breath of wind, and fell to settle in their hair, over their skin, and in their clothes. They looked as though they had crawled in it, but they had blended into the country, and were indistinguishable from it. (p. 178)

In *Deep Weather*, Wright (2011a) notes her own learning: the “stories I heard about how cyclones could chase a wrongdoer inland, that there was no escaping a cyclone if it was after you” (p. 75). In *The Swan Book*, cyclones assault cities, peoples and country. Immediately following Warren’s assassination, we might read a reaction by the wind in the narrative: the city experiences the storm “like a brick wall had been thrown at it” (p. 304) that “carried everything in its path” (p. 277). Wind, as material body and spiritual expression—“the wind running along the ground like a spirit” (2013, p. 326); “the old wind people” (p. 327)—also drives bodies to movement and gives direction to journeys. Wind encourages healed swans to fly again: “the wind off the changing tide pushed it along […] grew in intensity and soon picked up the running swan and pushed it into flight” (p. 263).

The non-and-more-than-human invades and *resurfaces* the climate-besieged city. Buildings and infrastructure have deteriorated and civilisational palimpsests have thinned and fractured: “the city had cracked; the city was breaking up” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 208). Prompted by the wind, Oblivia notices hidden bodies resurfacing: “the natural landscape was
quietly returning and reclaiming its original habitat […]. Through the cracks in the footpaths small trees sprouted, and ferns and grasses became obstacles, through which people were struggling to steer a clear path” (pp. 208-209). Although we might find here a metaphor for new life growing through the cracks of an oppressive state of affairs, there is also a demonstrably material growth of bodies and an expression of non-and-more-than-human agency.  

Wright’s work resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) idea that “we are not in the world, we become with the world” (p. 169). Her prose navigates and produces an unbounded cosmos where being and agency slip from body to body, and the focus of the narrative is on what occurs in relations between bodies rather than what resides in separate bodies. Wright joins and smears bodies, making separable subjectivities less determinate and multiple, and only meaningful when perceived in assemblage. Although there are many examples, I offer two here. First, the kaleidoscopic passage in which Oblivia encounters her first black swan:

The black swan continued travelling low, then flew upwards with its long neck stretched taut, as though it was being pulled away by invisible strings as fine as a spider’s web held in its beak. She saw a troupe of frost-face monkeys holding the strings at the other end of the world. They were riding on a herd of reindeer crushing through ice particles in those faraway skies. Those taut strands of string twanged the chords of swan music called *Hansdhwani* that
the old gypsy woman Bella Donna would play […] while you could watch the blood flowing to the pulse of the music through the old lady’s white translucent skin […] the music of migratory travelling cycles, of unravelling and intensifying, of flying over the highest snow-capped mountains, along the rivers of Gods and Goddesses, crossing seas with spanned wings pulsing to the rhythm of relaxed heartbeats. (A. Wright, 2013, p. 15)

Energy flows along globally connected tissues and bodies, all in movement; conjoining human and non-and-more-than-human, corporeal and incorporeal, music and flight, spirits and earth, and folding Oblivia into a dynamic, translucent assemblage. Second, as the black swans make their way back to swamp country, their energy is drawn from country and they interpenetrate with weather, seasons, air, bodies and spirits of the land, all of which are in motion:

swans flew hillock over hillock along a rolling landscape […] the swans flew high, sailing through winds […] wing flapping and slow glide through floating ashes that flickered with fire and dazzle-danced the sky in the full-throated blizzard of heat flying over the hills, before falling on the country beneath […] surrendering to the air, plummeting thousands of metres down […] flapping slower […] descending […] flying through seasons and changes in the weather
[...] as if the ancestors had pulled the swans across the skies, passing them on to the spirits of gibber plains, ironstone flats, claypans, salt lakes and drifts, towards a sacred rendezvous – a tabula rasa place – where all of the world’s winds come eventually and curl in ceremony. (pp. 323-324)

Rose (2012b) writes on ecological transversality and the ways in which writing can nurture ethical sensibilities, leaving us with “no way to determine where connectivity and responsibility stop” (p. 138). Dynamic enfoldings in *The Swan Book*—things always moving and traversing other things—can be transformational. Wright’s stories bind the translucent world together as multiplicity. They carry potential to enhance readers’ apprehension of country’s—of non-and-more-than-human—capacities to adapt and continue to story itself even amid such ruinous transformations as the ecological crises brought on by *The Swan Book*’s capitalist-coloniser virus.

Kwaymullina (2016) explains that in philosophies of animate realities: “where everything lives and therefore is in a constant state of movement, the process of knowing inevitably involves locating the self within the networks of relationships that comprise the world, and that also comprise the self” (p. 441). I propose that in *The Swan Book*, Wright enacts and cultivates such a “locating [of] the self within” and enriches the conceptualisation of a literary practice of smoothing space outlined in Chapter 3. In the chapter *Owls in the Grass*, Warren’s bodyguards, the “genies” (p. 162), Hart, Doom and Mail, take Warren and Oblivia away from the swamp and deep into desert
country. They intend to keep Warren safe from assassination threats, and to undertake their custodial and scientific duties. Forced to travel with them, Oblivia’s inability to share the sense of the health of the genies’ country contrasts starkly with the Life that bursts forth, traverses and enfolds bodies as they move. We read Oblivia’s experience of desert country as one might a stranger’s removed apprehension of foreign landscapes. In the morning light, the country is “grey and solemn […] silent […] mostly grass and sparsely scattered scrub” (p. 173). She sees “a vista of sameness in every direction” (p. 173) in which “nothing much grew more than a metre off the ground” (p. 175). It seems, for her, to be a “bushland so vast in its sameness, that only the traditional owner could read the subtle stories of its contours” (p. 186). Oblivia sees “an endless journey ahead in an unchanging landscape that they would continue walking forever” (p. 192). It appears unwelcoming and its qualities already fixed. However, there is more to be discerned than “sameness”: more to be sensed in country.

Oblivia initially resists entering into the multiplicity of country. However, as the group moves, other bodies come close up, and country begins to pullulate with the non-and-more-than-human, folding with and enfolding humans. Movement produces lively space. To use Daniel Smith’s words on the writing of percepts in his introduction to Deleuze’s *Essays Critical and Clinical* (1997, p. xxxiv), “The landscape is no longer an external reality, but has become the very element of a "passage of Life". The space produced is colonised or plagued: rats, owls, snakes, insects, and locusts shape the desert country’s qualities as it shapes their futures. The “ground [is] thick with rats” (p. 166); in “strands of millions” (p. 176). Oblivia registers that the
“earth move[s] with their footsteps” (p. 166). They “scattered in rolling waves at every movement” (p. 166), “rushing through the bush whining for food” (p. 170). Wright attends in the novel to the processes of bodies multiplying. Owls arrive in “large flocks”, each brood quadrupling their numbers (p. 176). Country thickens, becoming increasingly intimate as bodies move. The country spirit—scrub devil—draws Oblivia “into the foliage” (p. 168). Spider webs link power lines to mulga trees (pp. 172-173) and Oblivia fears encasement in “thicker and thicker” woven webs (p. 173). They travel among owl nests: circling between, delving in. Owl tunnelling has produced new space in the “thick kinkarra spinifex grasslands” (p. 178). Country’s thick, agentic intimacy is sensed on the body but this is not necessarily to know it as others do, or to relate affirmatively to it. The genies marvel at the singularity of each nest’s construction, each egg, while “Oblivia thought all the nests were the same” (p. 180) and the Harbour Master sees vibrant spinifex as desert: “kinkarra nayi” (p. 181). These becomings of/in space are not solely corporeal; they are also spectral, and temporally transversal. As Oblivia moves, country repopulates with ghosts, and with signs of violence and death: “bones were scattered around the ground throughout the spinifex” (p. 181). Country becomes omnivorous: devouring Indigenous women—lost in spinifex waves (p. 173)—and foreigners. Country also devours the visitors, or rather, its “grey dust” (p. 176) coats and enfolds, and genie and dust bodies become “indistinguishable” (p. 178).

We are, it seems, in the realms of the percept as the narration calls up salt lake country. Country, to borrow Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) words
on smooth space, is “occupied by intensities, wind and noise, forces, and sonorous and tactile qualities” (p. 479). Although country is introduced sparingly, as “white sea” with small jutting crags as its “landmarks” (p. 190), multiplicities live beyond this removed human perception. As the group walk, the “white sea” pulses with life, and readers are drawn into serpent perceptions: of “an insect perching on its skin, come there to recite its song. The landing of butterflies. The feet of a lizard pounding on crystals of salt” (p. 190). There is, here, a filigreed delicacy of existence and activity—a molecularity—beyond common powers of perception, made accessible via the deep listening of “a resting serpent spirit fellow” (p. 190). Wright’s narration, I suggest, qualitatively expands our encounters with what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) define as an artist’s “close-range” vision (p. 493). Hovering somewhere between Oblivia’s, the group’s, the narrator’s, and no human’s point of view, we are drawn further into vibrant non-and-more-than-human territories where, paradoxically, the “quietness” and “solitude” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 190) and multiplicity increase:

There were battalions of stink beetles crawling over each other and the salt. Plague grasshoppers jumped away at the coming of strangers. Moth storms swept across the lake. Crimson and orange chats whistled from the heath of spinifex, pittosporums, mulga and eremophila scrubs growing along the lake. The girl saw twisting clouds of budgerigars crossing their paths at various times throughout the day. Up high, harriers and kites cried out as they
glided in the thermals. To look back was to see fine salt crystals
dusting over their tracks as little storms of salty filaments gurgled
about in the desert air. (p. 190)

This is not just one space. Rather, we traverse lively, heterogeneous,
entangled, fluxing, moving territories: vibrant inhabitations of salt, lake,
heath, scrub, clouds, thermals, and tracks. These territories enrich our
sense of Deleuzian notions of territories as dynamic, “malleable” sites of
passage (Message, 2010, p. 275), always in a state of process and
transformation, though not without qualities of internal organisation.

Night draws us deeper into country, beneath the visible surface, and into
a richly populated “spirit sea” of:

salt-encrusted bodies of millions of grasshoppers, shoals of tiny
bone fish, brine shrimps, larval fish like splinters of glass, colourless
moths, seeds and stalks; grotesque bloated grunters, bony
herrings, frogs, tadpoles and water birds that had perished in the
increasingly saline waters [...] (A. Wright, 2013, pp. 190-191)

The seemingly featureless and dead are full of the pulse of Life and closer
to us than we might be able to perceive, precisely because we humans have
disappeared from, or into, country. Wright's narrator rouses country that
stories itself beyond any human writing; although, as humans connect with those stories they also are drawn into an entangled existence: as much products of country as producers of it: as Muecke (2003b) writes on landscape and variability, “things and people are mutually transformative” (p. 287).

The rapid narrative rhythm of *The Swan Book*, the proliferation and overlapping of images of bodies, the continuous variation of perspective, and the novel’s thickening of the space produced by the movements and relations between bodies, generate a sense of multiplicity, transversality, vitality, and agency. In *Owls in the Grass* and elsewhere in the novel, it is difficult to pin any body down: words to meanings; humans to names, even to corporeal and incorporeal existence; time to direction; narrative to point of view; stories to truth or falsity; landscapes or space to their lack and wealth of vitality and agency; humans as distinct from non-and-more-than-human. The potential in bodies—their capacity to express Life—seems to be a primary result of Wright’s keeping the things narrated in continuous relation and variation rather than *fixing* them with description. She expresses an ecology in which dynamic matrices of representation and relations connect and entangle humans, animals, country, spirits, space and time. Wright, as Virginia Woolf spoke of writing, seems to “put everything into it”, to “saturate every atom” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 280), and the text pulsates with moving bodies, interconnection and difference. Wright’s representational and narrative democracy privileges neither human nor non-

---

182 See Daley (2016b, p. 308) on proliferating and imbricated narration and points of view, expressing/producing collective, more-than-human, enunciation.
and-more-than-human—sentient or seemingly otherwise—as things cannot be separated and their separation would be to diminish their living. There is little opportunity to steady ourselves upon a familiar image before it flows into another: “Anyone daring to look back into the lake’s echoes heard voices like dogs barking out of the mouths of fish skimming across the surface as they chased after the hordes of mosquitoes – around four o’clock” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 8). One effect of Wright’s imagery is to swamp the reader with dynamic multiplicity. Beginning with the “massive sand storms that cursed the place after the arrival of the strangers from the sea” (p. 8), the narration goes on to weave more threads into the rope:

voices were heard arching across the heavy waves in the middle of the night. All their shouting ended up on ribbons of salt mist that went idling from the sea along an ancient breezeway - travelling with sand flies and tumbling bats through kilometres of inlet, along a serpentine track, dumped where it could dig into the resting place of the old story that lived inside the ancestral people of the lake. (p. 8)

_The Swan Book’s_ attention to the movements of dynamic bodies, not only as metaphors but as material forces, resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) conceptualisation of the spiral—a movement that traverses points and straight lines—as a mode of escape: as “the vortex that overspills the striation” (p. 489). We encounter the work of the gyre (A. Wright, 2013, p.
Wright’s vision is full of bodies overspilling their constraints—including language, as I discuss later—and becoming uncontainable despite efforts to control and contain their existential lines of flight. *The Swan Book* enriches our sense of what might be involved in Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) exhortation for us to pursue a “streaming, spiralling, zigzagging, snaking, feverish line of variation, [that] liberates a power of life that human beings had rectified and organisms had confined, and which matter now expresses as the trait, or impulse traversing it” (p. 499). It exemplifies Muecke’s (2003b) observation that Indigenous cosmologies offer “an unexpected version of the posthumanism some have been looking for in contemporary philosophical thought” (p. 297) and more.

Manning (2009), in her studies of Indigenous art, also writes spatially of the creation involved in Indigenous story-telling: “A Dreaming is not an entity, not a place. It is a movement, a song and a dance, a practice of mark-making that does not represent a space-time but creates it, again and again” (p. 163). As story-telling, Wright’s narration infuses Life into those bodies she calls up. The narrative focus is invariably on how bodies move and relate rather than on the production of lists of plants, animals, geology, and geography that set (indeed, fix) or set apart a scene. Wright draws upon these vital relations, producing what Manning calls liveliness rather than

---

183 Wright (2007a) has previously made reference to ‘a spinning multi-stranded helix of stories […] as] the condition of Indigenous storytelling […]’ (p. 6).
representation (p. 155). Desert country in *The Swan Book* is anything but extended sameness, stasis, and separateness: it is in process, full of potential and affect. Such enlivened space expresses the transformative capacities of bodies: their work of story-telling beyond words. Indeed, we encounter non-and-more-than-human capacities to affect as Oblivia finds herself, after days of hatred and fear in desert country, unexpectedly thinking, “*But I like it here now*” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 193). Wright’s literary productions of space carry the potential to unsettle—at least, non-indigenous—*common sense* and to enliven readers: to the degree to which some human perceptions have been diminished or are inadequate to the complexities and registers of Life beyond the Human; to what Potter (2009) calls the world’s “composing complexity” (p. 77); to the expanded perceptual capacities—or the different modes of attention—to which we might aspire in order to apprehend the movements, agencies and relations of non-and-more-than-human bodies that co-compose; and to the always already intimate entanglement of such bodies and humans. I discuss Wright’s writing of intimate entanglements and becomings further in the next section, with particular attention to Oblivia and swans.

**[B]eing a survivor swan (A. Wright, 2013, p. 332)**

The story about what had happened to the girl who was found in a tree became common knowledge through this large tribal nation. The story became a wild story. Everyone had an idea of what really
happened. Some people were saying firstly that the girl was taken, kidnapped by the tree from her people as punishment. Others said that she was really the tree itself. She had become the tree’s knowledge. Or, possibly she was related to the tree through Law, and the tree took her away from her people. (A. Wright, 2013, p. 95)

Oblivia, people, a sacred tree, Law, knowledge, and stories. As well as storying the “nonhuman landscapes of nature” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 169), Wright also fills her writing with the nonhuman becomings of the human (p. 169). Figures in The Swan Book are intensively enfolded with the non-and-more-than-human. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) notion of literary figures resonates with Wright’s writing: some “can only exist, and the author can only create them, because they do not perceive but have passed into the landscape and are themselves part of the compound of sensations” (p. 169). Wright’s writing of Oblivia is an expression of Life beyond the Human, beyond the Majoritarian words that speak her, and beyond the images of her that others produce. Oblivia carries, enacts and augments stories that precede and follow her. As material-discursive subject, she is

184 While I do not directly explore and reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous conceptualisations of the sacred in this thesis, I note that Rose (1996) provides valuable insights into the importance to Indigenous cultures, philosophies and living of Life-grounded and Life-nourishing sacred “origins […] places […] sites […] sources of life […] rituals” and beings (pp. 8, 9, 44, 9, 10, 23). Foley (2003) writes of Indigenous commitments to the irreducible enmeshment of peoples and earth and the sacred: “The sacred world is not based entirely in the metaphysical, as some would believe. Its foundation is in healing (both the spiritual and physical well being of all creatures), the lore (the retention and re-enforcement of oral history), care of country, the laws and their maintenance” (pp.46-47).

185 I acknowledge Barras’ (2015b), Daley’s (2016b), Gleeson-White’s (2016), and Skeat’s (2016) work on this approach to reading The Swan Book.
open to nonhuman intensities and relations with non-and-more-than human bodies; immersed in “encounters outside of the ordered conception of existence” (Roffe, 2005b, p. 186). Her becomings express capacities for taking-flight beyond the reach of capitalist-colonialism.\(^{186}\) She expresses futurity amid ecological crises: finding—not unlike Tom Keely in *Eyrie* (Winton, 2013)—Life amid ruin.

Wright explains that, for the novel *Carpentaria*, she worked on “the creation of Indigenous heroes, as a way of understanding through fiction the significance of the lives of the characters, and as lived with or through the ancestral land and sea spiritual creation heroes that I also created” (2011c, p. 39). *The Swan Book*’s story-telling of heroes, Oblivia and black swans among them, conveys “becoming with the world” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1994, p. 169), metamorphosis, re-emergence, resistance to annihilation, and endurance. Oblivia’s and the swans’ stories resonate with what Bogue (2010a) calls writing’s capacities to express “immanent possibilities of transformation” (p. 180).

Wright’s writing of Oblivia is at times allegorical, metaphorical, and metonymical.\(^{187}\) Bogue (2010a) observes that Jameson noted art’s potential for “national allegory” (p. 227), and much of Wright’s writing could be

\(^{186}\) Daley (2016b) refers to “Oblivia-swan relationships [...as] enabling of movement and transformations” (p. 305)

\(^{187}\) We read Oblivia as literary figuration of all Indigenous girls and women: the lost; the murdered; the abandoned (A. Wright, 2013, p. 319). Takolander (2016, p. 116) calls Oblivia “a synecdoche of the postcolonial nation” (p. 116).
characterised as purposeful, though hardly subtle, allegory.\(^{188}\) We might discern parallels in *The Swan Book* between black swans’ stories and the histories of Indigenous peoples: the novelty of discovery and the denial of existence; displacement and movement; coloniser curiosity with the Other. It is also tempting—and possible—to enter the symbolic field that Wright constructs in *The Swan Book*, and concern ourselves with fairy-tale transformation as a way of telling Oblivia’s story: from ugly duckling, nameless girl to First Lady swan.\(^{189}\) Oblivia, in more than name, expresses collective memories of abandonment and killing; the perpetual trauma of violence and of being cast out by white Australians and by her own people; and the shame and fear among those same people who the Majoritarian stories hold accountable. However, Oblivia and swans are more-than-symbolic figurations, many of which Wright critiques in their very use. They are also affective bodies. Their becomings draw us out *and* into something as large as Life. Oblivia’s seeks sovereignty of mind via thoroughly *uncolonial* modes of becoming: via silence rather than voice; via movement, journey and return; and via affirmative relations and entanglements with the non-and-more-than-human (swans, country, and spirits). Oblivia’s story (her legend) folds (her) into and floats (her) across country: her own and beyond. She becomes story, though no story we humans might conventionally—or adequately—commit to mind or words.

\(^{188}\) I acknowledge Law’s (2004, pp. 97-98) proposition that allegory can convey the complexities of a world that are too often repressed.

\(^{189}\) And, perhaps, in employing these figurations of Oblivia, Wright is foregrounding the problems with romanticising and overlaying foreign narratives upon always singular lives.
Oblivia resists, and seeks escape—to get out, to return (A. Wright, 2013, p. 4), to fly (p. 69)—even amid the swamp’s diabolically extreme detention. To briefly return to my earlier discussion of smoothing space, it is, perhaps, Oblivia’s holding to her vision of escape, flight and return—even after Warren’s destruction of her home country’s (p. 318)—that performs what Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 482) call smoothing space without moving. She smooths, faces striation, smooths again; not least via her connections with black swans: “She wanted to fly. Dreams of stick wings attached to her arms that possibly grew feathers […] the lightness of being airborne […] to dream about all those invisible places she had heard about, that lay outside the swamp” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 69). In her mind, Oblivia cultivates a space for movement, and resists being storied by the Majoritarian and becoming just another, or an Other. She rejects the demands made of her to be “normal” (p. 21), to fit proliferating imposed identities and roles (wife, child, First Lady, dependant, animal), to forget (p. 221), to change colour (p. 221), not to be the one to ask, and not to have her own thoughts. Instead, she remains open: to the abnormal; to the non-and-more-than-human; to not playing a role; to remembering her wounds in her own way despite the trauma of those memories; to keeping her colour; to wondering/wandering and searching for what is missing; to relating to others; and to becoming-other.

An expansive sensuality, as we find in Oblivia, is a quality Bogue (2010a, p. 228) also calls “heroic and life affirming”. Oblivia stories herself, not with

---

190 Takolander (2016, p. 114) reads historical forgetting in Oblivia’s name.
spoken words but via movement, sensation, intensities, relations and connections to others, including ancestral bodies. Amid the ruins of the city, Oblivia exhibits an uncommon sensibility and finds Life in the endurance and, perhaps, return of the non-and-more-than-human. While Warren is “running” on about the city life of consumption, belongings, and plotting, Oblivia attends to the movement and sound of air (A. Wright, 2013, p. 209). The swamped “catastrophic city” (p. 252) crumbles and, as it does so, Oblivia glimpses different lives growing through the cracks in the state of affairs. Her attention is caught by “orange fungi” (p. 209), “moss and black lichen” (p. 239), “frogs croaking in the drains” (p. 209), the wind (pp. 209, 210), bird calls (pp. 212, 215), the fragrances of trees (p. 210), and the possibilities for Life amid/beyond urban ruin. We become aware of other agencies inhabiting the earth and of different notions of time to those espoused by mainstream Western cultures. To Oblivia and the narrator, cycles of overwriting, decline, return and reclamation occur over much longer timeframes and some forces—“the droning of ancestor country” (p. 264) beneath the ruinous city—will not be denied/silenced by human constructions.

Oblivia is quiet, but this is not to deny her intensities. Twice we read of her silent expression possessing the force of bushfires. She emits a message, or the sense of a message, via a most singular “screaming” (A. Wright, 2013, pp. 19, 78, 334). This screaming is, in part, an exhortation for a return to a care for human and non-and-more-than-human and Dreamings. Indeed, it is more than a human expression: “like listening to a sigh of a moth extending out over the landscape, or a whisper from a scrub
ancestor catching a little stick falling from a dead tree, although nothing that
could be truly heard” (p. 334). We might also find, in this narration of
Oblivia’s emissions, a force operating beyond the colonisers’ scope of
control and their perceptual range:

[sounds] of such low frequency that the old woman [Bella] strained
to distinguish what usually fell within a range of bushland humming,
such as leaves caught up in gusts of wind, or the rustling of the
wijarr spinifex grasses in the surrounding landscape as the wind
blew over them, or sometimes the flattened whine of distant bird
song, or a raging bush-fire-crackling and hissing from juju jungku
bayungu, a long way off, which the old woman heard coming out of
Oblivia’s angry mouth. (p. 20)

We can also explore Oblivia’s expansive sensuality via her
corporeal/incorporeal foldings with the non-and-more-than-human. Oblivia’s
relations with swans entail expressions of alternative perceptual modes to
those of the human and of capacities to resist and renew. Literary
becomings-swan are visions of potential, or, as Bogue (2010a) writes of
fabulation, “of real possibilities, human gods inhabiting a dimension
immanent within a world of coercion and violence but capable of
engendering something new” (p. 106). Oblivia becomes-more-than-human
and swans more-than-birds. In such “involutions”, as Deleuze and Guattari
describe becomings, untapped potentials are catalysed: escapes and returns become possible. Life expresses its capacity to outpace capitalist-colonialism.

Writing about Oblivia’s becomings-swan, as I mentioned with regard to Kai in chapter 4, is not to suggest an imitation, a turning into, or a coming to look like an animal. Nor are these becomings only human experiences: they are akin to Deleuze and Guattari’s mutual, “unnatural nuptials” (1987, p. 240). Swans are as central to Wright’s centre-less narrative as humans. Belonging and vitality are available beyond the Human. This is something Oblivia gestures toward in her repeated evocations of ascent as a trajectory towards belonging—“I must continue on, to reach that one last place in a tinder-dry nimbus where I once felt a sense of belonging” (A. Wright, 2013, pp. 209, 205)—and in her sense of where “peace” can be found: “in these grasslands where swans had preened themselves and slept in waves with long necks curled s-shaped over their backs, that life seemed the cleanest, and where the air filled her with a sense of peace” (p. 273). Oblivia’s becomings express trajectories: actual and virtual, in thought and action, corporeal and incorporeal. What primarily occur are moments of transformation in which swan and girl perceptions traverse each other and the two separate subjectivities enter into zones of indiscernibility: joint perceptions produced amid intimate relations. Oblivia becomes-other and finds trajectories of being, along which she can express care. Swans become-country via their relations with Oblivia. Their being spreads wider and deeper than the conceptualisations of black swans that we find in the minds of other characters in the novel and in the cosmopolitan, reductive
subjectivisations of black swans that Wright threads through her narrative. The becoming larger-than-life of Oblivia and swans takes place as they enter into transformative relations with each other. True to Indigenous onto-epistemologies, these are relations in which being and knowing overlap, traverse existential registers and flow between categories. They are also more than incorporeal/corporeal involutions between flesh and blood bodies; they are also incorporeal-spiritual, becoming-Dreamings.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, pp. 243-244) suggest that we are drawn to the animal by anomaly and, in *The Swan Book*, the black swans’ arrival in the north of the continent seems to be one such event. Black swans deterritorialise Oblivia’s notions of self and revitalise her affective capacities. She senses connections. As she is, so they are for her: “exiles” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 14), “gypsies” (p. 15), and “nomads” (p. 16). She is unsettled when black swans first arrive, because she senses that they know her differently, and more intimately than others claim. There is a meeting of eyes between Oblivia and swan during their first encounter, but the affect of the encounter is more than can be captured by vision: it is intensive and transformative. Oblivia becomes cold, confused, and stops breathing. She feels opened out: “exposed, hunted and found” (p. 14). There is also a perceptual opening out: of her “narrow prism of viewing something strange and unfamiliar” (p. 15). She is connected via the swan to bodies “at the other end of the world” (p. 15) and Wright’s passage is flush with a sense of travel and flight. The sensual connection occurring appears so highly attuned as to be beyond conventional understandings of the capacities of human senses. Oblivia’s
auditions and visions become attuned to swan thoughts, bodies, heartbeats and souls:

This was when the girl realised that she could hear the winnowing wings from other swans coming from far away. Their murmurings to one another were like angels whispering from the heavens. She wondered where they were coming from as they entered her dreams in this country. (p. 15)

Oblivia’s perceptions become timeless swan perceptions:

Oblivia thought she was in the sky, flying, and could not remember the journey. She and the swans were caught in the winds of a ghost net dragged forward by the spirits of the country. The long strands of hair flying among the swans, holding them together, and those long strands capturing her, made her fly too, close to the ground, across the country. (p. 326)

Country bears them forth and all are entangled. Oblivia and swans enter into visual, auditory, haptic, affective, and spiritual zones of indiscernibility. Oblivia “saw in their erratic and chaotic struggle their desperation to flee, and understood the very same nervousness running through her body” (p.
The swans’ sound comes “from the air of her breath. The air was wrapping breath with breath” (p. 244). Oblivia is able to “feel the presence of their bodies, of beating wings from lean-chested birds, lightened from the long journey, with necks stretched in flight” (p. 244). The swans and Oblivia become part of each other’s story; each carrying that story.

Swans’ and Oblivia’s foldings into each other enable lines of flight. Fleeing the collapsing city, the girl and the hovering “cloud” of swans fold together, and Oblivia, rendered invisible, escapes from the ill-fated refugees travelling north:

she disappeared quietly, in the moments when the black swan cloud flew across the line of travelling people, covering the moonlit water. She closed her ears to the sounds of the collapsing world behind her, and kept walking under the cloud of swans moving slowly just above the water, their loud beating wings creating a mad turbulence in the water that kept her camouflaged. (A. Wright, 2013, p. 310)

Wright’s narrative dwells upon folding, entanglement, and transversal, affective relations between corporeal (and incorporeal) bodies. A passage begins with a vibrant collective of swans (they “wove in and out of the tight pack” (p. 303)), rather than humans, connecting with Oblivia, and rising up:
They had found each other’s heartbeat, the pulse humming through the land from one to the other, like the sound of distant clap sticks beating through ceremony, connecting together the spirits, people and place of all times into one. (p. 303)

Forces flow, traversing wind-swan-Human, and are sensed on the body, or, perhaps, all bodies are co-constructed/coextensive: such that there can be no swan or human without wind, no wind without swan and Human, and so on. Although, it is not only swans, wind and humans, but also time, spirits, and place folding into complex, vibrant, and dynamic assemblage. These affirmative relations suggest a powerful collectivity that is more-than-human: a cohering of complexity, with a capacity for and an orientation towards renewal. In assemblage, Oblivia finds a resolve, or the augmentation of her affective capacities, and she is able to keep moving: “There was no going back. She would follow them. They were heading north, on the way home” (p. 303).

To return to Deleuze and Guattari’s “feverish line of variation” (1987, p. 499), the corporeal/incorporeal folding of swans, Oblivia, and country is expressed as gyric, cyclic, spiral, vortex-like, and whorl-like: “together in mass blackness, they swam in circles [...] the white tipped wings that beat quicker, faster, as more circles are made” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 325). Swans are “welcomed into the country’s song” (p. 325) and they dance its “yellow
dust song cycles of drought” (p. 329) and perform water ceremony (p. 325). They communicate with each other: swans and swans; swans and Oblivia. In alliance, Oblivia gains knowledge from the swans—“how she must read the country now as they do to follow them home” (p. 325)—while the swans cannot move without Oblivia, nor without the assistance of country: “the old wind people” (p. 327). Swans compete with the capitalist-colonial virus for space in Oblivia’s mind, but they do so affectively, via the body; via their deportment and movement. Swans and Oblivia participate in vibrant acts of creation, commitment, collectivity and connection. These acts carry a “pulse”; have “body”; have “mass”; and make “music” (p. 325). This is a singular music and it occurs alongside the rebirth or renewal of Oblivia: “as though she is a newly hatched cygnet” (p. 326). Wright restores mind, or certain notions of mind, in telling these stories. Mind is not an engine of progress, separate from the world, superior in certain beings rather than others, subject to hierarchies across races, perfectible, infallible, and of an Other “nation”. Rather, mind is connected, embodied, in continuous variation, collective, open, and full of possibilities.

Swans also become-other via their relations with country and Oblivia. Black swans’ stories involve reconnections to, and renewal of, ancestral spirits and stories. Their arrival at the swamp, unknown to country, contains a physical descent and Wright’s narrator notes that “Maybe, it was in those moments of falling, that the big bird placed itself within the stories of this country” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 19). As swans move, they lay down stories “in the earth” and these relations overcome their having “no story for
themselves” in that country (p. 59). Allied with Oblivia, they become custodians and are “welcomed into the country’s song” (p. 325). They become both carers for Oblivia and in her care: “cooing to be pacified by her” (p. 161); healed of their wounds in the city apartment; carried by her on the dangerous journey north; protecting her; entangling their bodies with hers; each guiding the other (pp. 247-248, 296). Oblivia is transformed too: from useless “thing” (p. 36) to carer; from fatalistic thoughts of the difficulty of return to country, to acting to return (p. 196). Thought of swans, we read, “soothes her, instructs her in endurance and perseverance” (p. 240).

Becomings-other are Oblivia’s escape from, and her overcoming of, the force of the virus to isolate and dissociate bodies. Where there have so far appeared to be only the narrow realms of fear, occupation and control, her relations with swans produce perceptions of “great space” (p. 69); sensations of flight amid detention; the return of omitted memories (p. 248); and transformations in thought. In *The Swan* Book we find that the sovereign Indigenous mind is a function of a relational existence, not isolation, and can be nurtured via becomings-other.

Oblivia’s and swans’ capacities to affect each other affirmatively are embodied in story. Wright’s narrator calls it “a really deadly love story” (2013, p. 334). Nurtured by her relationships with swans, and having returned to country, Oblivia becomes a timeless force for care and love, and for resistance to the virus of the colonised mind: the “mind of the nation” (p. 165). She endures and seems impervious to time: “she always stayed like a

---

191 Although, Wright’s narrator acknowledges that “perhaps […] their ancestors of long ago […] had travelled their law stories over the land” (p. 16).
wulumbarra, teenage girl” (p. 334). As legend, her story becomes temporally transversal: operable outside of chronological time that might cut it off and make it past. We read that it “might be the same story about some important person carrying a swan centuries ago and it might be the same story in centuries to come” (p. 333). This story’s capacity to be retold and affect others resonates with Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) conceptualisation of art as an affective vehicle. Story-telling enables the novel to become “monumental” (p. 168): enduring over time and space, and capable of entering into affective encounters with other bodies. For the visitors to swamp country mentioned in the novel’s final passages, Oblivia’s non-and-more-than-human call is a call to the imagination, and to certain of the qualities of Indigenous culture—not least care, collectivity, and continuity with country—underpinning practices of endurance that are more affirmative than silence, separation and shame: “kayi, kayi kala-wurry nganyi, your country is calling out for you” (p. 334). On these matters of care, calling out, and collectivity, I argue in what remains of this chapter that Wright’s literary practice in The Swan Book—her care for the vitality of expression—constitutes a calling out to a people to come and, thereby, an expression of resistance and renewal amid Crises of Ecologies. Wright’s style cultivates (tends to) the health of expression and Indigenous sovereignty precisely via what the coloniser virus might sense as its madness.

Tending to expression and peoples to come
Was it possible for her voice to be heard by imaginary people too?

(A. Wright, 2013, p. 23, italics in original)

To tend to the stretch of expression, to foster and inflect it rather than trying to own it, is to enter the stream, contributing to its probings. (Massumi, 2002b, p. xxii)

For Wright (2002), literature helps answer Galleano’s question: “what makes a people” (p. 12); although she acknowledges in her critical writing that the question of who Indigenous writers write for is “vexed” (A. Wright, 2008b, p. 24). One of her responses to this challenge is to concern herself and her writing with the violence that began with colonisation (p. 24) and which continues to be experienced by Indigenous communities: as “political domination; theft of land; widespread suffering” (2006b, p. 105); and oppression and silencing (A. Wright, 2008a, p. 136) by the “forces of homogenisation” (2007b, p. np). Those suffering, Wright notes, include not only the living but the unsung lost: the “voice that is silent or elusive” (2002, p. 20).

Wright (2007a, p. 17) explains, also, that she works for the emancipation of the collective Indigenous sovereign mind and imagination. Resonating with the symptomatology of the “cut snake virus” (p. 1) we find in The Swan Book, Wright refers, elsewhere, to “besieged principles that matter most to Indigenous peoples” (2011b, p. np); to popularised perceptions of
Indigenous people’s inability to govern themselves (2007a, p. 7) that also infect bodies and minds; to the material/bodily impact of the climate of fear that pervades Australian and Indigenous societies (2008a, pp. 149-150); and to mind as the “last frontier of colonisation” (2011c, p. 5). She argues that her work as writer entails enunciating the aspirations of that collectivity, and rehabilitating and reclaiming “existence” (2002, p. 18). She aspires, then, to make a contribution to consciousness raising and to enhancing capacities to reconceptualise Indigenous rights outside of colonial binds put upon bodies and thought (2007a, p. 6; 2008a, p. 15).

Wright also comments on the demands upon artists to invoke a collective attunement—beyond Indigenous peoples—to ecological crises, and to fear as a weapon of social and material domination (2008a). She asserts that “it will be artists […] who must imagine the future, to explain what science is telling us in cold, hard language: that we will all become the earth’s refugees” (2008a, p. 155). In her discussion of psychically, physically and socially pervasive fear—“trying to understand Australia’s phobias” (p. 166)—Wright offers a widened conceptualisation of both the scope of the community of the suffering and of how Indigenous communities suffer. Fear, Wright argues, is a quality of not only the silenced and self-silencing Indigenous mind but also of “countless others globally” (2008a, p. 160). She expresses interest in writers—Darwish, for example—who seek to express the “experience of ‘every exiled psyche’” (2008a, p. 137) and she suspects that the exiled people to come will be all of us (p. 155), not just the human us. Rather than becoming islands of imprisonment (Bogue, 2010a, p. 195), disconnection (A. Wright, 2007a, p. 16), exile (2008a, p. 137), and
inhumanity (2011c, p. 42), that do “not seem to gel” (2002, p. 12), Wright evokes the capacity for connection, vitality and renewal in even the most ruined body and mind (2008a, p. 137) and between islands of exile (2008b, p. 22). She writes that “An island can easily destroy and remake itself from its own debris” (2007a, p. 16) and “A person could always be something else” (p. 9).

There is little doubt that Wright’s words are expressions of, and calls to, Indigenous resistance and renewal. She asserts that writing is a collective act (2008a, p. 161) and that there exist pathways, including literature, along which differences can be imbued with affirmative potentials (p. 138). Writing is a practice of resistance against assimilation and annihilation (1997, p. 74; 2002, p. 15): nourishing the mind (2011c), preserving “integrity” (p. 38), and revitalising “lost symbols of culture” (2008b, p. 22). In these ways, Deleuze’s and Wright’s hopes for literature resonate: namely, with regard to its potential to energise “a will to form and create, to enhance affectivity, to induce and undergo metamorphosis and transformation” (Bogue, 2012, p. 12). Wright’s focus, through writing, on engendering a quality of consciousness, and different ways of relating and thinking, constitute efforts to instantiate a people to come.

For Wright, the people to come are: carriers of possibility; stretchers of imagination; full of agency, creativity and authenticity; revitalisers of country, story and language; and active custodians of past, present and future. Having begun this chapter exploring Wright’s symptomatology and characterisations of this people to come as a collective of the oppressed, I
return, here, to the contention that Wright’s literary practice draws energy for such renewals from the forces shaping the Indigenous state of affairs in *The Swan Book* and nurtures the forces of expression that always already outpace oppression. In this regard, Wright’s literary practice resonates with and enriches Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist ideas on how the writer might tend to the health of expression. Specifically, Wright “repotentialise[s]” expression (Massumi, 2002b, p. xxxi) that others attempt to capture, stratify, violate, oppress, and diminish amid capitalist-colonialism, and she employs what might prima facie be perceived as the symptoms of Indigenous Crises to pursue variation: in particular, the condition of not being known.

A Deleuzo-Guattarian onto-epistemology that gives primacy to relation and transformation, rather than pre-existing “composed forms” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xvii), embraces the flow of the “extra-linguistic […] impersonal” (p. xvi) forces of expression. For Massumi (2002a), expression is not a reference to the propositional model of language, to communication or to the representation of any thing, feeling, structure, process, or system. Nor should we attend to the expression of ideological structures. Rather, expression consists of all the nonhuman forces of difference that move and relate, that differ, are captured, and that continue to move—or at least are capable of moving on—and produce the world.¹⁹² Expression is, in this

---

¹⁹² Human language operates as one vehicle for the furtherance—and sometimes, though not always, the capture or curtailment—of these forces.
respect, autonomous, and bodies and subjects are “conduits through which a movement of expression streams” (p. xxi):

Expression is not in a language-using mind, or in a speaking subject vis a vis its objects. Nor is it rooted in an individual body. It is not even in a particular institution […] Expression is abroad in the world – where the potential is for what may become. (p. xxi)

To expand on the potentials in Life, and to forestall their closing down, Massumi suggests we keep expression “abroad in the world” (p. xxi), saving it from capture and the negation of its force. To tend to expression’s flow is “to save change” and difference from stratification, from being constrained to “Half Life, [or] No Life” (p. xvii). One way to tend to expression’s charge is to proliferate creative processes that engage with, prolong and invigorate it: to cultivate “heterogenesis” (p. xxvi). Literary practices, including, I propose, those we find in *The Swan Book*, can keep expression going.

*The Swan Book* is an act of resistance to annihilation of the forces of expression to which Indigenous people attend when in country, and of the diversity of subjective pathways available to Indigenous people. The novel is also a work of tending:¹⁹³ (re)making connections along which expression

¹⁹³ I noted earlier that Indigenous people relate custodially to country and to the nonhuman expressions that flow through/produce country. They tend to the vitality of Dreamings through land management, story, dance, song, movement, painting and writing.
can flow; energising stories and Dreamings that contribute to the health of peoples and country; and fostering and revitalising the sovereignty—autonomy—of expression that contributes to the Indigenous mind. As Wright’s narrator puts it, “encroach[ing] on and destroy[ing] the wide-open vista of the virus’s real estate” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 4). This is the work of reenergising “imagination” as Wright puts it (2011c, p. 40), and tending to “sovereignty over my own brain” (2013, p. 4), as Oblivia puts it.

Repeated performances—singing, dancing, painting, calling, telling, walking, and writing—constitute responses to the question of “how to keep emplaced life flourishing” (Rose, 2005, para. 6). Rose (2005) recorded Indigenous elder, Mussolini Harvey’s words on this tending to expression:

In our ceremonies we wear marks on our bodies, they come from the Dreaming too, we carry the design that the Dreamings gave to us. When we wear that Dreaming mark we are carrying the country, we are keeping the Dreaming held up, we are keeping the country and the Dreaming alive. That is the most important thing, we have to keep up the country, the Dreamings, our Law, our people, it can’t change. Our Law has been handed on from generation to generation and it is our job to keep it going, to keep it safe. (para. 3)

Wright’s writing in *The Swan Book* is performative just as Harvey, here, acknowledges the performative (onto-episto-genetic) function of Indigenous
ceremony. Writing—telling stories to the ancestors as Wright phrases it (2008b, p. 24)—is a practice of custodianship. *The Swan Book* stories preserve, enliven and re-energise expressive *particles* that Dreamings carry: keeping them alive, creative and productive.

Wright’s work of story-telling, re-storying the world, and revitalising the Dreaming, and her openness to the efficacies of other, non-indigenous, cultural expression, also suggests a conception of cultural preservation that involves renewal.¹⁹⁴ Custodianship is adaptable and mobile in *The Swan Book*, perhaps not out of choice but certainly in necessity. Wright’s drawing of the reader into literary spirals of repetition of difference, rather than repetition of the same, resonates with Massumi’s (2002b) warning that “if production is reproduction, then life is trapped in a vicious circle; that of the systemic repetition of its own formation” (p. xvii). Wright’s stories are a looking back to move forward: what Massumi, discussing expression, calls “a recursive futurity” (p. xxiii) that finds new pathways by drawing on the energies of the present and past. Wright’s symptomatology re-boots conceptualisations of Indigenous crises, and her writings of the continuously varying, nonhuman landscapes of nature, and the nonhuman becomings of the Human, project pathways along which Indigenous peoples and country might move, persevere and renew amid drastic psychical, social and environmental transformations. The possibilities for people and country are no longer—never were—“locked up” (A. Wright, 2013, p. 40). Wright finds capacities for movement by attending to what flows rather than to

---

¹⁹⁴ Christie (2015) refers to it as a pragmatism.
“composed forms” (Massumi, 2002a, p. xvii): by working upon the virus as the production of compositional forces rather than as an innate, irrevocable presence. One way by which Wright does this is to set her story in the future, allowing the seemingly stable institutions of today to vary, while still immersing readers in the horrifying repetitions produced by forces that have moved over hundreds of years: fear, hubris, violence and so on. Wright’s setting works to relax readers’ attachments to assumptions about states of affairs being fixed, and mitigates the risk, as Massumi describes it, that “Any potential the process may have had of tending to a significantly different product [or future] is lost in the overlay of what already is” (p. xviii). While institutions have transformed to some degree—including government structures, cities, infrastructure, the media, Treaties of recognition—we find that the forces damaging psyches, bodies and relations are continuous. Consequently, the future setting of *The Swan Book* helps highlight the opportunities to tend to these forces and to find ways in which they might produce other ways of living.

Oblivia’s and swans’ becomings-other are also productive tendencies to expression. Massumi (2002b) writes that “The highest operation of thought is not to choose, but to harbour and convey that felt force, repotentialized” (p. xxxi). Although Oblivia exhibits resolve in other ways, she is often unable to make choices: to move, to stay, to give up, to return, to live, to die. Nor does she reject or brush off the forces carried by the black swans, despite their being *foreign* to her. Rather, she becomes with them. We are given a sense of a swan’s intensive impingements upon Oblivia’s body—something akin to Massumi’s “expressive turbulence” (p. xxxi)—when black swans
arrive at the swamp (A. Wright, 2013, p. 14). The changing of Oblivia’s skin colour, her difficulty breathing, and her coldness, enrich our sense of what Massumi, writing on expression, calls “The wrackings of the thinking body [that] mimic the excess of potential it hosts” (p. xxxii). Oblivia cannot assimilate the affective force of the black swan, though she must choose to participate or not in the stretching and continuance or closing down of that affect (or expression). She is unable to “contain […] potential with resemblance” by relying upon a concept or a pre-existing known thing (p. xxxi): this is neither a white swan nor an animal of her country. We find the body attempting to rely on habit as a “defence against shocks of expression” (p. xxxi) but we also find attunements between bodies. Oblivia does not recognise the black swan’s difference as inferior, or dismiss its anomaly, but experiences it as charged with transformative potential. While the swan’s affect has not been “integrated as a functional life content” (p. xxxi) before, Oblivia embraces it, or is unable to avoid its transformational force, and thus the expression the swan carries is kept going. Oblivia is forced to thought and this thought, arriving from the non-and-more-than-human, is a flight from her “assigned class or type – the subject-position from which [she…] conventionally speaks [or doesn’t speak] or acts” (p. xxxii). She finds movement and return through the black swan and it through her. She participates, through involvement in transformation, in continuing the sovereignty of expression.

I have argued that The Swan Book works to decolonise the bodies and minds or, at least, to make space for something truer, and to get things moving again. I have also noted the recurrence of cyclic/spiral tropes,
symbols and style in the novel. Always in movement, Wright’s prose defies genre and withdraws the resolution of meaning. However, not knowing can be engaged with as an affirmative experience: the multiplicity and unknowability of *The Swan Book* being important functions. *Not to be known* must be a strange way to live. Nevertheless, this is a quality of Oblivia’s story, and of Wright’s unknowable novel. It is also a quality that resonates with the continuous variation that Deleuze and Guattari envisage among truly nomadic and free peoples to come. By remaining difficult to *nail down*, a novel and a people avoid being defined out of existence, being limited as to what they can do and might become, and being prevented from reinventing, renewing and repotentialising their collective subjectivities. Wright’s novel operates as a repotentialising machine in this regard, offering resources to people, particularly Indigenous people, to assist the work of a collective to remain affirmatively unknown, rather than stratified, subjectified and organised amid capitalist-colonialism.

It is in the *madness* of *The Swan Book* that the practices of—capacities for—resistance to the contraction of Life and subjective pathways resonate with Massumi’s (2002b) writings on expression, namely: insisting on defining one’s own traits; capturing and working with one’s own anomaly; retaining a shade of the unclassifiable to the Majority; inhabiting a margin of unpredictability; existing as a multiplicity in flux, in movement, always under formation and in assemblage; and shedding traits as confidently as cultivating them (p. xxviii). Oblivia and black swans resist “pick-up by an established stratum” (p. xxviii). If we oppose Oblivia’s becomings-other to Warren Finch’s subjective contractions—he, paradoxically and ever
ironically, becomes global—we find that Oblivia embraces her difference/differing and the anomaly of the black swans: “insisting on defining […her] own traits, in a self-capture of […her] own anomaly” (p. xxviii). Being “mad” (A. Wright, 2013, pp. 14, 100, 227, 262) is part of Oblivia’s line of flight: not only crazy from the virus but crazy to the virus. There is, as I have discussed, a repeated difficulty with nomenclature when it comes to this girl and nobody can quite pin her down via a name. Her behaviours exasperate all those who attempt and fail to (re)shape her to their desires. Her story remains in a state of flux, varying from teller to teller and telling to telling. She does not lose her past; although she progressively sheds aspects of it: to make space for new becomings rather than fall victim to memory, to trauma, and to retreats into the tree’s bowels. Eventually, she takes on “Will-o’-the-wisp” qualities (p. 334), moving beyond identity as multiplicity and toward becoming-imperceptible: almost indistinguishable from the non-and-more-than-human. She becomes collective, as the “country calling out for you” (p. 334).

In its own ways, and without wishing to suggest its separateness from Oblivia and swans, country in The Swan Book exhibits the endurance and repotentialisation of expression. While anthropogenic climate change’s violent affects traverse human and non-and-more-than-human bodies democratically, country—including weather spirits—still continues to move. Country accommodates the transformations, and flips its weather patterns (A. Wright, 2013, p. 18). Dreamings persevere despite the ruination and plagued state of desert and bush, and animals and plant-life find new rhythms and assemblages as climate change affects habitats: for example,
owl-rat-snake-spinifex-moth assemblages (pp. 165-194), as we find in the genies’ country. Cities are unable to excise/subsume country and the non-and-more-than-human resurfaces.

Wright’s style also exhibits un-catchable capacities: making itself mad. To employ a loaded colonial word, Wright’s writing refuses to settle: stylistically, linguistically, geographically, bodily, historically, temporally, perceptually, plotwise, ontologically, and culturally. Wright (2013) intensifies language: bringing it closer to “windstorms and wind gusts” (p. 21), producing what Massumi (2002b), writing on expression, refers to as “atypical expressions” (p. xxii): unconventional grammar; changes in tense; circuitous and rolling sentences traversing and folding together existential registers; Waanyi language and disruptions to Australia’s dominant language;\(^{195}\) lost prepositions; bodily movements as vehicles for expression (the swans or the brolgas dancing up country, for example); Oblivia’s charged silence; floating meanings energising the irony and satire of Wright’s narration; and gestures toward a music which, we read, cannot be heard but which nonetheless possesses a force. “[A]typical expressions“, Massumi suggests, “cause language to tend toward the limit of its elements, forms, or notions, toward a near side or beyond of language” (p. xxii). The complexity, slipperiness, multiplicity and kaleidoscopic imagery and prose in The Swan Book do more than withdraw meaning. Words and sentences, bodies, spaces, ideas, knowledge, relations, truth, and so on, become unresolvable and continue to play upon us or resonate differently with different readers: they are flushed

---

195 See Daley (2016b, p. 315) on Aboriginal English and pop song lyrics as among Wright’s disruptions.
with “futurity” (p. xxii) or potential to be different. As Wright’s narrator asks, “Who knows what madness will be calling them in the end?” (2013, p. 334). A passage in which Warren remembers his childhood offers just one of many instances of Wright’s prose rendering time, location, sound and sense multiple and indeterminate:

There was another time Warren Finch remembers from when he was still a boy learning how to be a man. He had stopped somewhere along the fisherman’s track above the high reddish grey earth bank of the river, and was listening to the silence of the middle of the day. He reflected on the pleasure of his thoughts about what the future held, where one day in another place and time, he would recall this time. And he wondered what he would feel then. (p. 108)

We can revisit these words, re-read them, and still find ourselves wound up or refolded with them: caught in another orbital trajectory or vortex from which we cannot escape to confirm “this is what is meant”, or “this is what that was”, or “this is when we are”.

Wright’s writing frees up of the forces of emergence. Albeit, such liberations are not without discomfort, given that they involve “stretching and twisting” (Massumi, 2002b, p. xxiii): of knowledge of the symptoms of current states of affairs; of histories, and of the form and trajectories of time;
of existential boundaries; of capacities to pursue other potential futures; and of language. Wright’s spiralling, gyric, cyclical style sets bodies, images and forces in motion and in relation but does not close them down. It releases them and encourages their variation: infusing them with the past but also with the potential to differ. The repetitive, unending story-telling of peoples and country and history and futures, keeps expression moving. Wright’s narrator’s suggestion that “it might be the same story in centuries to come” (2013, p. 333) can be read in more ways than one: as an expectation of both the endurance of the same and of the endurance of the capacity to differ; and as a gesture toward the capacities of Wright’s novel to tend to the health of difference.

*The Swan Book* does more than tend to expression because of oppression. It also calls-forth and repotentialises non-and-more-than-human Life which nurtures, is celebrated by, and is under the custodial care of Indigenous peoples. It is both an expression of the preservation of sovereignty and a preservation of the sovereignty of expression. It is writing of—and from—the “maelstrom” (Law, 2004, p. 7) of processes of connection, multiplicity, difference, liveliness, relationality, and care; processes which occur amid ecological crises. Indeed, we might argue that such writing starves Crises of things upon which they flourish: flawed conceptualisations/representations of disconnection, individuality,
sameness, lifelessness, independence, and progress.\textsuperscript{196} Wright produces a vital literary work which embodies the capacities, as Kwaymullina et al. describe them, for: “Aboriginal voices and stories [to] continue to connect to country and hold power even when translated into text, told outside of the contexts of the country where the knowledge is lived, and potentially circumscribed by Western understandings” (2013, p. 6). The Swan Book informs and enriches our sense of literary practices, as Deleuze (1997) describes them, that are “always a style of life too, not anything at all personal, but inventing a possibility of life, a way of existing” (p. xv).

\textsuperscript{196} After Latour, Muecke (2009, p. 405) points out that “concepts like objectivity, efficiency, and profitability” also drive “the colonising concept of progress, and [drive…] its material consequences to their planetary limits”.

261
Chapter 6 – Janette Turner Hospital’s *Oyster*

What you can do, your potential, is ultimately defined by your connectedness, the way you’re connected and how intensely, not your ability to separate off and decide by yourself. (Massumi, 2015, p. 40)

‘They thought that they were off the maps and off the edge of the world’. (Hospital, 1997, p. 265)

In *Oyster*, Janette Turner Hospital (Hospital) removes readers to Outer Maroo: a fictional, disconcertingly familiar, Australian outback, mining and grazier town; off the map and intentionally so. Inhabitants try to make sense of the forces at work in the world and their entanglements in calamitous events: the arrival and influence of the man, Oyster; the enslavement of people to his opal mining/religious cult; the cult’s violent end; and, one year later, Outer Maroo’s fiery destruction. Mercy Given, a teenager pursued and raped by Oyster, enters into transformative relations with “foreigners” (Hospital, 1997, p. 3): an iconoclastic schoolteacher (Susannah Rover); cult members desperate to escape; and parents seeking children lost to Oyster’s lure (Sarah seeking her stepdaughter, Amy, and Nick seeking his son, Angelo). The violence done to Mercy and her family, and these relations, fracture her belief that there is only one way-of-the-world. They fuel her
resistance to the extreme and oppressive forces of religion and greed, and her desire for escape. “Old Silence” (p. 25), Jess Hyde, is another Outer Maroovian wishing to be lost. She is drawn out of her silence and into resistance against Oyster and those driving Outer Maroo toward its end. Surviving the destruction, Jess reflects upon her inability to make sense of events, and her complicity in them. Oyster traverses numerous matters, among them: problems of maps and words and difficulties with finding and fixing meanings; hiding and becoming lost; cult and colonial violence, oppression and survival; fear and the desire for something other; hope and how far it can stretch; chaos, complexity, and indeterminacy; conflations of separation and unavoidable connection; repetitions of events over deep time; and forces exceeding the human and the social.

Morton (2007b) suggests that a piece of art need not be “environmental” in any explicit way for it to engender “ecological thought” (p. 12, 79). In keeping with this suggestion, I expand upon existing Hospital and Oyster scholarship and offer a fuller engagement with the materiality of Hospital’s writing: to give “matter its due” (Barad, 2003, p. 803). Oyster employs a passionate, porous poetics of the material: albeit one through which the material and what is conventionally deemed the discursive are irreducibly entailed. To again employ Barad’s (2003) ideas in a literary context, Hospital’s writing enacts “a contestation of the excessive power granted to

---

198 In Oyster, Hospital references violence towards animals, though not mass extinction, and writes extensively of planetary degradation. The novel does not directly reference climate change.
language to determine what is real” (p. 802) and expands the realms of what “matters” in the world’s becomings (p. 803) to encompass matter and the nonhuman, as well as the material qualities of discourse. Hospital’s poetics is a politics. Her expansionary and intensive poetics are to do as much with entanglement, breach, and permeation as separation, breakaways and escapes. In *Oyster*, transversal encounters constitute modes of liberation. Hospital writes Life and the productions of subjectivities across other registers: not only as processes involving minds, discourse, or language, but also as processes involving non-and-more-than-human agencies, and impersonal, nonhuman intensities. These are agencies and intensities that we try to excise from the map of the human though we cannot help sensing the continuation of their movement through, and their renewal of, that map. Language can gesture toward these agencies and intensities but cannot contain or fix them. *Oyster* expresses the intimate agency of the non-and-more-than-human: strange and familiar, foreign bodies—the Fuckatoo (1997, p. 3), opals, and heat—that traverse, permeate and shape subjectivities. The novel also attunes readers to flows of affect permeating bodies, shaping their trajectories and capacities: affect that is joyful and augmentative and traumatic and contractive. Hospital’s poetics also carries potentials to affect readers by making variation continuous, conveying other registers of perception and their limits, and informing an ecological ethics. In *Oyster*, there are other channels along which Life is distributed. There are other stories, conventionally almost inarticulable stories, interwoven with the novel’s unfinished and unfinishable narrations.
In what follows, I first undertake an analysis of how Hospital writes a dynamic, permeable, posthuman ecology. I then argue for the affective attributes and potentials of the novel. In each case, and in my concluding comments, I return to *Oyster*'s potentials to produce difference and cultivate ecological sense.

**Movement and permeability**

Things never pass where you think, nor along the paths you think.

(Deleuze & Parnet, 2007, p. 4)

[N]othing is supposed to move (Hospital, 1997, p. 298)

Attention to permeability—social, temporal, spatial, material, discursive—is not unexpected in Hospital’s writing, and it has been given some scholarly attention, particularly with respect to *Oyster*. A material-discursive attendance to permeability reveals, and attunes readers to, the paradox of Outer Maroo’s openness, despite attempts to disconnect from unwanted

---

intrusions, to ensure nobody leaves, to hide and protect what they value and what they have done, and to control movement, discourse and thought. Attempts to take Outer Maroo “off the map”, and to arrest movement that jeopardises sanctioned states of affairs, merely pull a veil over continuous, unsanctioned, permeations and flows. It proves impossible to “impose order on the ungovernable” (Hospital, 1997, pp. 154-155).

Permeability concerns Outer Maroovians: what gets in and out; what relations can occur; what is concealed and exposed. Storeowner, Ma Beresford and landowner, Andrew Godwin are among those trying to render Outer Maroo “nowhere to be found” (Hospital, 1997, p. 56), “outside time”, “lost” (p. 82), and “not […] on maps” (p. 56). The ungodly and the godly are united in their distrust of “all the people out there who are not in the little crucible of pastoral us” (p. 315). Heat and drought warp, smother, and deny Life, as do the material-discursive forces wielded by Godwin, Beresford, cult leader Oyster, preacher Dukke Prophet, and others. These “life-denying” forces (Greiner, 2007, p. 388)—what, after Bryant (2013), I characterise as “power structuring social relations” (p. 18)—include the material control of access to water, to transport, to fuel, and to flows of communication and sources of knowledge both inside and outside the town. The militarily armed Godwin, the predatory Oyster, and the men of the town use violence, its threat, and its return as trauma, to control thought, discourse and people’s capacities to act, to move, and to resist. The repetition of a narrowly framed religious, capitalist-colonial, and otherwise tightly bounded, discourse also limits and directs relations. Moreover, Hospital offers, at best, only unreliable narratives of deliverance from Outer Maroo’s oppressions and
repressions. Even the final vision of Mercy, Sarah and Nick fleeing to Brisbane in a truck is a product of Jess’ hopeful imagination (p. 431). And yet, amid all these constraints, an unavoidable permeability thrives in *Oyster* and Life continues to break through, relate and differ.

Despite the rhetoric, and the discursive and material practices of exclusion, excision and enclosure, it seems that quite a lot of people come and go. While, in the short-term, Murri’s have been separated from their land, the coloniser locals cannot control Indigenous movements and returns. For Jess, the dead still play on Country’s surfaces: “Absences in their ghostly thousands thrum against the skin of red clay like a pulse” (Hospital, 1997, p. 151). Ethel senses the continuing pulse of change and expresses the continuity of Murri presence as she tends to country, and communes with “Her mob” who, although they may be gone, are “still with us, all around us, and was, and ever shall be” (p. 152). She patiently anticipates returns amid the ruins of the lost township of Inner Maroo and the ultimately ephemeral Outer Maroo: “‘They been waiting…’ […] She is waiting […]. She is waiting […]. She is waiting […]. She is waiting […] She waits” (p. 44) the narrative repeats.

While *locals* make *foreigners* disappear “without a trace” (Hospital, 1997, p. 13), this does not stop others arriving. Jess recalls Oyster’s arrival in Outer Maroo and the “palpable sense of shock that it was possible for someone unknown to be out there, just beyond the verandah railing, without

---

200 Mercy contextualises the period since colonisation as a “hiccup in time” (Hospital, 1997, p. 44) compared to Indigenous inhabitation.
having given any advance warning whatsoever” (p. 298). His “manifestation”
(p. 309) punctures townspeople’s belief that their vigilance for intruders is
effective. Locals watch the east, the direction from which they believe
*foreigners* will arrive, but Oyster walks into town from the west, out of the
“broiling heart of the country” (p. 298), at a time of day “when nothing is
supposed to move” (p. 298). His arrival precedes a flood of acolytes and
“young seekers” (p. 327) to his *Reef* on Outer Maroo’s outskirts, further
disrupting the community’s solitude. Jess observes that “we had more
strangers in town than we’d had in the previous ten years” (p. 327). The
Reef’s destruction leads to further arrivals, including Sarah and Nick,
“looking for the missing” (p. 25). Andrew Godwin works to keep out the
government, the “Abos”, the “greenies”, the unions, the communists (p.
265)—all *foreigners*—and preserve grazier ways of working the land.
Nevertheless, we read that global capital has permeated community and
country: “nobody comments that some American bank practically owns
Andrew Godwin, hook, line, and ding-dong” (p. 81).

Ma Beresford systematically controls Outer Maroo’s mail flow. She
consumes outbound letters and postcards, leaving the outside world
unaware of events: “‘Foreigners mean trouble,’ [...] ‘Better for everyone
concerned,’ she said, patting the mailroom door in her sage and proprietary
way, ‘if this lot stays in Pandora’s Box’” (Hospital, 1997, p. 10). However, we
read that “occasionally, in spite of everyone’s best efforts, mail gets through”
(p. 8). Words and images escape “Pandora’s Box”. Mercy and Jess secretly
preserve letters and photographs that, in some cases, find their intended
recipients or at least find a reader. Jess holds on to a photograph of Amy
and gives it to Sarah. Susannah challenges Outer Maroovians’ ability to disappear and put “a lid on” things because “sooner or later, they are going to leach their way out through this frangible soil and leave their mark” (p. 66). Shortly before her murder, Susannah warns the locals that her words, revealing the town’s horrific taboos and secrets, will find their way out because she has entrusted certain letters with Murri people: “[…] you won’t shut me up so easily. I think that you don’t realise just how many messages are getting out.” (p. 70).

The control of discursive processes—determining what can and cannot be said, by whom, where and how, and what counts as knowledge—is critical to efforts to separate Outer Maroo and to shape and control meaning, bodies, subjectivities, material relations and country. Inhabitants tell themselves that outside voices are not countenanced. Their willed ignorance and amnesia, and their fear of intruding authorities and foreigners, cultivate a susceptibility to millennial religious and oppositional language (and vice versa). 201 A blunt though flexible moral logic is used to support the status quo: all foreigners are hated and all are foreigners, except we who are allowed to designate what is foreign. Books are burned (Hospital, 1997, p. 145). Dissent is put down to madness: “She’s off her rocker,” (p. 71) Pete declares as Susannah continues to voice taboos. He warns her “jokily” that “Words’ll get you into trouble, luv,”(p. 71). There is, though, no jokiness to the lethal violence that is eventually inflicted upon Susannah to silence her challenge to the silences that are preserved by—

201 See Steacy (1996) on Dukke Prophet and the biblical discourse of control.
and preserve—the town. Nevertheless, these imposed discursive boundaries are porous. As with the permeations of mail messages, so "Outer Maroo is thick with coded testaments" (p. 6). Although they court danger, some are able to resist, transgress and escape these constraints. Mercy is flooded with anxieties as she attempts to assimilate the other ways of speaking, writing, thinking, and knowing she encounters in her interactions with Susannah, Sarah, Nick, and others. Mercy is sensitive to what can be known and said in other "worlds" (p. 37) and we find these discursive variations leaching into her relations inside Outer Maroo.

Susannah, like Jess, has a radio. Susannah’s transgressive words—diaries and other writing—remain alive and active in the events that transpire, although they remain hidden down a mineshaft, and only accessible to Mercy: a book "smoulders away" down there (p. 205). They open Mercy to other ways of knowing and being, and augment her capacity to resist. For each Outer Maroovian sermonising on the need to cast out difference, there is a "deviant" (p. 151) embodying the continuity of variation, and the vibrancy of dissent. Ethel remains seated by a sacred tree, nurturing country and anticipating returns, and offering portentous wisdom to Outer Maroovians who want to silence stories of transformation: violent and otherwise. She exceeds dominant discourses; singing in “tones from an unknown scale” (p. 153). Nick’s son, Angelo, revolts against Oyster’s oppression, and Susannah knowingly places herself in harm’s way to voice taboos. Junior Godwin embraces Indigenous agricultural practices in

202 Though not explored in detail in this thesis, I acknowledge Hospital’s attendance to the ‘testaments’ to colonial violence against Indigenous peoples and country.
contrast to coloniser graziers’ “raping” (pp. 268, 377) the land. Bugger Harvey traverses the estranged Murri and coloniser communities and espouses Indigenous relational philosophies. Major Miner, we read, “can well imagine Bugger Harvey making his way through the gaps” (p. 348).

Hospital also writes—and writes us into—ecologies of spatial, temporal, and sensory transversality and permeability. Early in Oyster, we are warned of the folly of attempts to control space and time: “Time is a trickster and so is space” (Hospital, 1997, p. 7). The two are dynamic and co-constitutive, and co-constituted with other non-and-more-than-human agencies: the air (pp. 4, 7); and silence. We read, in this respect, that Jess perceives the interpenetration and co-constitution of time, space and sound—or soundlessness—and:

[finds] it difficult, out here among the breakaways [a local rock formation], out here in the country of mirages and salt pans and lost languages, to separate the notions of time and space and sound. They seem interchangeable. […] time and space and sound are merely functions of one another […] they are related as solid and liquid and gas […]. They sneak across their own boundary lines […]. (p. 150)

For Hospital, Australia’s silent spaces also carry sensuous force. Jess attempts to articulate the qualities of the experience sensed:
in the inner ear and under conscious memory and along the arteries
and lymph glands and on the skin, a sound like a heartbeat, like a
drumbeat, like the feet of dancers in the corroboree, like time
passing, like the wind blowing across thousands of miles of bare
rock[…]. (p. 150)

The sentence traverses sensuous registers experiencing dynamic, rhythmic
phenomena, and the conjunctive repetition of “and” and “like” convey a
sense of continuity and heterogeneity. The recurrence of “like” also
suggests something multiple and ultimately inarticulable. Space is likely to
deceive us and evade our attempts at control. We cannot, Jess tells us,
stabilise, or “get a foothold” (p. 154) on space; neither with words nor
images (map-making) (pp. 154-155).

The substantiation of the gaps—rather than the non-gaps—that constitute
bodies in Oyster also gestures toward conceptualisations of permeable
spatiality and materiality. We find such gestures in Mercy’s meditation on
the “pointillist” wounds (Hospital, 1997, p. 201) she sustains by jumping
from a speeding car. She thinks that “People are full of flashbulb spots and
blank spaces” (p. 205). Major Miner too recounts ideas of Taoist notions of
bodies made of gaps (p. 233) and memories of Bugger Harvey accessing
almost imperceptible openings in the breakaways when opal mining (p.

The material that ostensibly constitutes a thing is no more important to that constitution, or more vibrant, than “the spaces in between” (p. 206) the material. Albeit, what moves through these spaces is often less easily perceptible. We read of sound “waves of a frequency far too high for the human ear” (p. 236), and “void spaces between the silica particles [in opal] that cause the light to be diffracted” (p. 386).

Hospital’s disruptions to the temporal structure, plot, and narrative of Oyster produce a sense of inhabiting an enduring, inescapable present folding with an unavoidable and still-vibrant past. The novel’s chapter order delivers events out of temporal sequence, and narration within chapters often spans past and present: sometimes collapsing them into each other. While the storied events stretch back four years to Oyster’s arrival, the novel’s opening passages occur one week prior to the fiery destruction of Outer Maroo: the end-point of the novel’s timeline. The narrative then moves on to “Last Week”. Jess asks of beginnings and endings: “How can we tell one from the other, since they inevitably swallow their own tails, their own tales?” (p. 43). Oyster’s narration is often in the present tense. Where narration uses the past tense, retellings conjure the persistent force (the virtuality) of past events. Vivid memories surge up and fold into the narrative and become lived present. These permeations incapacitate some bodies: including Mercy, Sarah, and Major Miner. Mercy is flooded by, and finds herself repeatedly drowning in, traumatic sensations that return from the loss of her brother (pp. 138-143), attacks upon her father (pp. 145-146), and

204 Alongside characters’ own histories prior to the narrated events at Outer Maroo and the Reef, the novel engages allusively with deep-histories of Indigenous peoples.
her rape by Oyster (p. 398). Hospital’s literary disruptions sensitise readers to time, as Mercy describes it: “not a line, not a circle, but a fog” (p. 83). It is a fog that seeps in through the pores; a fog that suggests our blind enfolding in a world upon which we can never truly impose order and clarity and in which past, present and future interweave.

While, in Life, membranes protect and separate, they also exhibit particular capacities for connection: selective permeability; relative porosity. Membranes recur throughout Oyster as a material-discursive trope. As well as operating as a metaphor for permeability, Hospital’s membranes function as indexes for sensation and relation, reinforcing the sense of material, perceptual and ethical realms that are irreducibly multiple and inseparable. There are, in Outer Maroo, degrees of separation and degrees of relation. Sheltering at the Givens’ house, the exhausted Sarah sleeps fitfully. She floats amid dreams, memories, and the morning’s oppressive heat. She contemplates and senses permeability. Light filters through the curtain that “has become more or less invisible, has become a radiant membrane between what is Sarah’s side of the window and what is beyond” (Hospital, 1997, p. 179). She senses her body’s permeability: “her flesh is translucent, and she sees through the luminous membrane, her body’s present anchorage” (the location of her dream/memory) at her husband’s cottage on a lake in Maine (pp. 183-184). Hospital writes of light, space and bodies relating through membranes and films, and of translucence. These relations emphasise sensations of touch, and material permeation, even though the
experience is conveyed, first, as words, and received optically. In Ma
Beresford’s store, Mercy serves Dukke Prophet and confronts him about his
complicity in her friend Donny Becker’s death, and in the attempt on Mercy’s
family’s lives. Mercy and Prophet become captive to this confrontation until
Ma Beresford intervenes. Broken from her “trance” (p. 228), Mercy
contemplates the “strange” worlds existing on either side of a membrane,
seeping through it, and traversing each other:

There is just a membrane, she thinks, between one world and
another. When you pass through that membrane, the meaning of
everything changes. Gestures, words, thoughts, emotions: none of
these things are translatable. On one side of the membrane, Mr
Prophet is powerful and dangerous; on the other side, he is
ridiculous; he is just a pathetic old man as frightened of the world as
anyone else. But is it not possible, Mercy asks herself, that he is
both these things at once? (pp. 228-229)

Mercy’s thoughts suggest the multiplicity that is often veiled by assertions of
identity. Our affective capacities are transformed by our different relations
and there are different, co-existing ways of being-becoming in the world. To
encounter a membrane is to apprehend the exteriority of Life and the
contingency in conceptualisations of Life that consign things to sides of a
boundary. It may be that we are always and already exposed to and
permeated by—brought to Life in—multiple worlds. While Mercy wonders if she is the only one in Outer Maroo “who moves back and forth across the membrane” (p. 229), we know she is not.

It is not the case, though, that things only flow through permeable borders in *Oyster*. Perhaps, as Mercy senses, there are no borders and Life expresses a series of folds. Folds and folding proliferate in *Oyster*, and Deleuze’s (1993, p. 3) concept of the fold\(^\text{205}\) assists with articulating both relations in the novel, and Hospital’s poetics of material-discursive permeability, coexistence, co-constitution, complicity, and unavoidable responsibility: “The entire punctured web folds in on itself” (Hospital, 1997, p. 275). Conley (2005) summarises Deleuze’s four folds as: of the body (corporeal); of the social (“the fold of the relation of forces”); the “‘fold of knowledge, or the fold of truth insofar as it constitutes a relation of veracity with our being’ [...] and vice versa”; and the ultimate “‘fold of the limits of life and death’” (p. 172). These folds do not occur mutually exclusively in *Oyster*. After Donny Becker’s death, Jess comforts Mercy, and bodies, ghosts, memories, and bed sheets fold and transform. Jess washes sheets in a large cauldron and tends to Mercy’s shock:

> she sees Jess folding sheets. ‘Jess,’ she says, ‘oh, Jess,’ and gets folded into Jess’ arms and the fitted corners of a double sheet. Jess folds and folds and for the first time Mercy weeps [...]. Jess puts a

\(^{205}\) See Chapter 3.
finger against Mercy’s lips. She does not try to stop Mercy’s tears, but croons something deep in her throat […]. Weep on to the sheets, wrap them around Donny in your mind, and then you can brush his skin with your eyelashes while he sleeps. She sets Mercy to stirring the wet sheets […] until she is sweat and tears and steam.

[…]

Double, double, toil and trouble, Mercy thinks, seeing Donny Becker’s face folded into white and washing blue, seeing his eyes and his lips, seeing Jess’s reflection and her own in the spinning galaxies of the sheet […].

[…]

The living float around Mercy like points of light, and so do the dead. She and Jess wrap them in sheets. (Hospital, 1997, pp. 213-214)

Folding, stirring, and wrapping are enacted linguistically, materially, metaphorically, psychologically, and spiritually. Dread-full sensations are enfolded (dissolved), perhaps to diminish the trauma they carry. The corporeal and the incorporeal, the folds of life and the ultimate fold of death, are inseparable.
Memories and bodies and knowing fold in *Oyster*, enriching Hospital’s spatio-temporal literary ecology. As Dorothy and Alice Godwin, and others in Ma Beresford’s store, become aware of foreigners arriving, the unexpected release of a bolt of blue cloth precipitates an enfolding, both of the senses of those present, and of the store physically. The cloth “gallops off the counter and over the floor. Blue billows east and west, soft masses of it puckering at tea-chests, frothing over booted feet, pleating up against saddlery and sorghum sacks and tubs of rice” (Hospital, 1997, p. 22). For Mercy, the folding cloth becomes a matter-memory of her thoughts of future release, and “She folds it away for safe keeping in those same dream niches where she stores the pinfire opal and the gem-seamed book-rich tunnels of Aladdin’s Rush” (p. 23). In Sarah’s dream of Amy, her body folds itself with sheets and netting, and enfolds sleep, dream, memory, and the features and forces of the waking world together. She finds Amy’s “face undulating in its [the dream’s] folds” (p. 174) before Amy’s body slips away. As Sarah loses the images and the memories of the images, the folding continues: “she can see fleetingly and intermittently backwards into the folds of the dream” (p. 174) where the words that she is seeking lie: “what was written” (p. 174) on a postcard sent to her by Amy but not received. She begins to fold into herself—waking-Sarah into dream-Sarah: “Sarah outside-the-dream can almost touch her own outstretched hand” (p. 175).

Hospital also conveys the “relations of forces” (Conley, 2005, p. 194) in Outer Maroo: the social foldings, unfoldings and refoldings. Jess narrates Oyster’s first manifestation as the event that the community hoped would “unfold itself out of the burning nothing to save us” (Hospital, 1997, p. 3).
Folds are also processes of social excision, exclusion and enclosure, as we find when Dukke Prophet “urged: the one hundred and forty-four thousand, figured symbolically, were already within the fold, and the gates of the city should now be closed” (p. 63). Bodies in *Oyster* explore and undergo the ultimate and eroticised folds of imperceptibility and death. Mining for opals, Major Miner disappears into the body of the breakaways. He seeks out “vaginal folds” in the rocks (p. 232), into which he plants explosives. Later in the novel, he “loses himself in a fold in the breakaways” (p. 361). The worn-out bodies of followers at Oyster’s Reef—“the living dead” (p. 388)—are already enfolded by the earth. The mullock dust “shrouded” them. Collapsing, they fold into the least substantive of things: “Sometimes one or another of them drops soundlessly in the heat, folding neatly into itself like a silk scarf” (p. 389).

In *Oyster*, Hospital brings readers (to) a permeable, membranous, folding world. Outer Maroo is never “off the map” (Hospital, 1997, p. 265). Hospital conveys Outer Maroo’s dynamic relationality, the resilience of its inseparability, and its co-constituted bodies, subjectivities, and socius. To utilise Massumi’s (2002a, p. 38) conceptualisation, Hospital’s writing conveys a sense of Life as “a continuum of existence differentiated into levels, or regions of potential, between which there are no boundaries or thresholds”. Hospital’s literary topology is one through which, as Conley describes the Deleuzian fold, “inner and outer spaces are in contact with each other” (2005, p. 196). Inner and outer become indiscernable in *Oyster*, though this is not the only quality of Life that is important to Hospital’s
writing. Also important are non-and-more-than-human things’ abilities to flow, to relate transversally, to transform, and to move on.

On reading “‘It’s the Old Fuckatoo,’ […] ‘It’s roosting again’” (Hospital, 1997, p. 109), I am reminded of Barad’s (2007, p. 34) observations: that the forces at work in the materialisation of bodies are not only social; and that the bodies produced are not all Human. The non-and-more-than-human is a more-than-metaphorical presence in *Oyster*. Non-and-more-than-human bodies express agency and attest to Outer Maroo’s permeability: intruding into and shaping other bodies, lives and narratives. These *intrusions* are suggestive of Braidotti’s (2002, p. 133) conceptualisation of becomings as breaches of the boundaries—interferences—between reason and matter, and between control and chaos. They resonate with her notion of a Life that “makes me tick” but is beyond my will (p. 132). Whereas Wright’s *The Swan Book* incorporates the non-and-more-than-human as focalising figures, humans remain the primary narrative channel in *Oyster*. Nevertheless, Hospital’s privileging of human perception is not comprehensive, nor does it exclude the agencies of non-and-more-than-human bodies and forces. Hospital’s narrators and focalisers are evidently attuned to what Jane Bennett (2004) in her work on matter agency calls “the capacity of things to move, threaten, inspire, and animate the more obviously animated things called humans” (p. 357). Subjectivities in *Oyster* are assemblages: dynamically constituted in relations with thoroughly non-and-more-than-human bodies—themselves also assemblages—including The Fuckatoo,
heated air, rocks, opals, books, letters, photographs, dust, odours, and carcasses. While not bound to the Human, these bodies are involved, not least, in the productions of Mercy, Major Miner, and Oyster. The non-and-more-than-human in *Oyster* expresses the “radical liveliness” Oppermann (1997, p. 35) finds in the material world. As Barad describes matter, these non-and-more-than-human bodies “feel […] converse […] suffer […] desire […] yearn […] and […] remember” (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 59).

While Outer Maroovians often evoke the Fuckatoo metaphorically—as bird, or bird of prey: rapacious, roosting, brooding, nesting, with claws, wings, and breast feathers (Hospital, 1997, pp. 407, 352, 404, 238, 405, 353, 415)—it is a more-than-metaphorical body. It relates across multiple existential registers: folding into, enfolding, and unfolding with, Outer Maroovian bodies. It is, as Jess assures us, “extremely present, that was certain” (1997, p. 14), and its multiplicity informs its affective force. The Fuckatoo is neither one thing, the same thing, nor nothing. People relate to, and become with, the Fuckatoo differently. For Major Miner, it is the smell of decay, destruction, imprisonment, death and fear (p. 236). For Susannah, it is a “ghastly and omnipresent smell of death” (p. 83). For Dorothy Godwin, it is a “moral stench” (p. 264). For Mercy, it is hate (p. 214). The Fuckatoo emanates from the human as an expression of guilt, and it is a separately emanative thing, accruing blame (p. 88). Junior Godwin complains: “It’s the drought that’s done this to people. The bloody Old Fuckatoo” (p. 217). The Fuckatoo is tangible and intangible. It is animal, organic, and inorganic. While the Fuckatoo inhabits a physical body—a “toxic gas” (p. 264)—that assaults and haunts the town, it is also incorporeal and no less intensive. It
is an expression of the acts of the past—a well of memories and a store of bodily relations—and an embodiment of the force of those pasts to surge forth and shape futures. Drought, mining and murder produce bodies that participate in the constitution of the Fuckatoo: most arresting the odours of cattle and foreigner rotting flesh. As Dorothy Godwin says, “‘The whole town is smelling rotten’” (p. 270). This malevolent presence is intensified by and intensifies the fear, guilt, shame, hate, and secrets, and the social and psychological decay felt by Outer Maroo’s inhabitants. Its affective force diminishes what bodies can do. It constricts the breath and makes Mercy queasy. The Fuckatoo enfolds—“we hunched into the smelly breast feathers” (p. 15)—and it seems there is “no escaping it” (p. 4). In addition, the Fuckatoo’s multiplicity should also attune readers to the inarticulable registers of existence (those agentic somethings) that cannot be reduced to conventional representations. They might, though, be gestured toward via a language that varies, shifts, and works transversally to express their potentials. Jess attunes readers to these potentials when she explains that “On other days […] an altogether more disturbing trace prevailed, some terrible and indefinable emanation that suggested…but no one wished to think about what it suggested” (p. 4). We should be cautious not to conclude upon what the Fuckatoo is. We should, instead, be open to its becomings because “it has not been possible to predict what the Old Fuckatoo might do” (p. 172), though, do it does.

Major Miner feels-hears rock and opal: on the skin and deep within his body. He senses expressive capacities in the inorganic:
If he feels the walls of his tunnel, he can tell immediately where its weaknesses run, he can press his ear against the rock and hear the soft hum of restive fault lines and feel them shifting and stretching and resettling themselves. (Hospital, 1997, p. 231)

Indeed, conventional notions of separable Human/Nature do not constrain the expressive, relational, and agentic qualities of bodies in Hospital’s prose. Opals carry and express vitality as resonances that are felt via some indescribable, un-locatable sensory register. Opals are “never still” (p. 84); they mesmerise; they call out in alien tones; they foster addiction; and they participate—though this is not to blame them—in the production of material-discursive assemblages that bring destruction to Indigenous peoples and Country, to foreigners, and to Inner and Outer Maroo. Rock and opal bodies hum, shift and stretch, pulse, vibrate, signal, and sing notes but not words: all expressions that can be written, and read, but which exceed meaning. The earth expresses itself in relation with Major Miner:

he presses his whole body against the earth and his heartbeat sends out a signal and a signal comes back, and so it is that the opal and the Major commune like two fax machines whistling to each other, cooing in their upper electronic registers [...] and then the capillaries of glittering, colour-jangled, water-spiked silica sing to
major Miner like choirs of angelic children, their plaintive voices
descant, otherworldly, and pure. (pp. 232-233)

Hospital’s narrator doesn’t work towards the clarification of a rational,
interpretable meaning in this passage. Rather, she conveys a non-and-
more-than-human register of communication that remains substantive and
transformative for Major Miner. Admittedly, with stones becoming “children”,
Hospital’s writing exhibits anthropomorphism. However, they are not only
children. They are equally machines, or simply stones and the lively
elements that comprise stones. What these signals and voices mean are
the sensations they produce; the becomings into which Major and the rocks
enter; their communions. These communions are affirmative for Major
Miner: they augment what his body can do.

Major Miner’s Taoist learning also encourages and cultivates an
attunement to the non-and-more-than-human (a knife, an ox, a mountain).
This attunement suggests a perceptual sensitivity—an attunement to Life—
stretching beyond conventional notions of human capabilities, and the
importance to materiality of what is not there: the gaps. In Major Miner’s
recollection of a friend’s story of a Taoist approach to cutting meat, we
encounter gestures toward these micropereceptions:206

206 For Massumi (2015, p. 53) microperception is: “something that is felt without registering
consciously. It registers only in its effects”.

284
I see nothing with my eye, but instead with my whole being, I give myself attentively to the mystery of the body of the ox. Then I let the blade follow its instinct. It finds the secret openings and the fine spaces between joints [...] That is how it is with explosives [...] It is a matter of listening to the rock with the body and the mind and the sixth intuitive sense, and then the mountainside parts itself in a slow and exquisite ballet. (Hospital, 1997, p. 234)

Apprehending the agency of opal involves writing humans’ entries into almost inarticulable relations with non-and-more-than-human bodies. Perceptions are stretched, refined, and traverse not conventionally human registers: the opal’s song “could not be attached to any known scale” (p. 331). Major Miner opens himself, or is unavoidably open, to the capacities of the non-and-more-than-human to transform. Hospital’s narrator’s description of Major Miner becoming “an opal man” (pp. 235-236) carries a sense of becomings rather than merely conveying Major’s rational interest in the stones. It is a matter of him becoming “scarcely [able] to tell where his own vein ended and a vein of opal began” (p. 235).

As with Winton’s Fremantle (2013), hot air shapes what bodies can do in Outer Maroo. It participates in the Fuckatoo assemblage: harbouring and carrying the odours that so debilitate, distort, and diminish bodies (Hospital, 1997, p. 57). Even though the heat seems not to move, bodies are “twisted and pulled into thin wavery shapes” (p. 29) by it. Through the heat, Mercy sees Sarah and Nick:
[... ] pleated diagonally like Japanese dolls, rice-papered, their heads stretched out into points that slant away to the right of their feet. When they move the lines shift in slow motion, and new points form, new angles, new shapes. They rearrange themselves like coloured chips in a kaleidoscope. (p. 32)

Sarah arrives in Outer Maroo and the heat defeats Mercy’s attempts to see her clearly: she “goes out of focus again” (p. 33). The heat drowns bodies and dulls perceptions. Nick feels this “lethargic sense of being under water” (p. 122) as he finds it hard to gauge the mood of the others who greet him warily in Bernie’s pub. Sarah, too, finds her energy sapped: “‘I feel,’ Sarah says, ‘as though I’m living on the moon [... ]’” (p. 247). Heat contributes to the stifling of Outer Maroo. It is Outer Maroo’s protective blanket, pressing down on the prospects for unwanted revelations, cultivating breathlessness (p. 57), blankness (p. 4), lassitude (p. 138), faintness (p. 294), dizziness (p. 388), inarticulateness (p. 101), blindness (p. 4), and silence (pp. 149-165). Sarah senses it: “No doubt the fierce heat is responsible for this opaque film that covers everything, for the fuzziness, for the lack of clarity” (p. 184). The heat demands a ruthlessly parsimonious approach to movement. For some Reef acolytes it is deadly (p. 368).

While Davies (2000a, p. 195) draws our attention to Hospital’s writing as engaged with an “embodiment in landscape” that is “beyond words”,
Hospital scholarship focuses predominantly upon the implications of this engagement for language. However, Hospital’s writing also explores and evokes the material relations of the non-and-more-than-human and the Human. While not losing the Human, Hospital relocates humans in a larger material-semiotic “collective” (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p. 6). The participation of the non-and-more-than-human in the becomings of Outer Maroo is not always directly and conventionally articulable, but it is undeniable. As with *Eyrie* and *The Swan* Book, *Oyster* inhabits what Abram (2011, p. 173), in his work on becoming, calls “an articulate landscape […] a community of expressive presences”. Writing the agency of the non-and-more-than-human in *Oyster* gestures toward non-western ontologies, as Dunlop (2010) argues, though it is not directed explicitly at matters of ecological crises. To use Jane Bennett’s words on material agency (cited in Iovino & Oppermann (2014), Hospital offers up other “regimes of perception” that allow readers to “consult non-humans more closely, or to listen and respond more carefully to their outbreaks, objections, testimonies, and propositions” (p. 26); so few of which will be conveyed in the form of human language. Hospital’s almost enchanted evocations of bodies in productive communion, forces, at least, an ecological thought. It raises a question that Iovino and Oppermann (2014, p. 34) ask more broadly: what exactly is alive? Ethically, a fuller attunement to the non-and-more-than-human agencies flowing around and through us—constituting us—may encourage greater attention to our human acts as they affect and effect the communities that enfold and stretch beyond us.
Hospital’s writing of permeability and material vitality in *Oyster* encourages what Braidotti (2002, p. 156) describes, more generally, as the actualisation of “an ethics based on the primacy of relation, of interdependence, [and] which values nonhuman or apersonal Life […] Zoe itself”. While Hospital does not directly address Braidotti’s notions of Zoe in *Oyster*, her writing reinforces a sense that our life is never entirely our own. However, this reading experience is not comfortable because such incessant breaching of presumed boundaries, along with our openness to forces and bodies we might commonly seek to avoid, attests to our vulnerability (Davies, 2000a, p. 190). As Alaimo (2010, p. 19) and others suggest, cultivating a sense of vulnerability is an important act amid Crises from which we might presume ourselves separated and protected. Albeit, when drawing readers into this *other* ecology, Hospital does more than immerse us in “mess” and “fuzz” (Callahan, 2009). She offers opportunities for the cultivation of readers’ attunement to other versions of subjective constitution, and other registers of relation and existence: opportunities with which I engage next.

207 Hughes-d’Aeth and Nabizadeh (2017, p. 441) suggest that “precariousness might operate as a basis for ethical action” (p. 441).
Affect

[A]ffects […] are […] ways of connecting, to others and to other situations. They are our angle of participation in processes larger than ourselves. (Massumi, 2015, p. 6)

The modest scholarly attention given to affect in *Oyster* belies the extent to which affect flows through the novel. Hospital’s writing inhabits and expresses intensive registers of relations and subjectivity. The novel is flooded with “threshold effects and reversals in polarity” as Genosko (1996, p. 158) characterises affect’s work: transformations of the affective capacities of those involved. These relations and variations—Mercy’s, Jess’, Sarah’s, Major Miner’s, Vi Given’s, Dorothy Godwin’s, Oyster’s, and others’ in *Outer Maroo*—tell stories other than those to be found on the surface of the novel’s narrative. They are *conducted* via permeable bodies, as much as, and often prior to, their being registered in the mind, or being put into words. Using Massumi’s (2002a) words on affect, I suggest that Hospital’s writing involves an attempt at a “vocabulary […] for that which is imperceptible but whose escape from perception cannot but be perceived” (p. 36). The stories of what becomes from these relations are often barely articulable—beyond what can be spoken or given adequate representation, and often beyond what the body can assimilate—but they are nonetheless real and worthy of attention. Further, Hospital’s writing attunes readers to affect as Bourassa (2009, p. 26) describes it: “what surpasses [the human
[...], undermines it, fragments it, [and...] what simultaneously supports it, energizes it, and holds it together”. Hospital’s writing of affect is another way by which she explores the possible: a recurring idea in *Oyster*. It resonates with Deleuze’s hope for finding “possibility in even the most oppressive conditions” (Slack, 2005, p. 139) via an expanded attunement to sensation: offering “new ways to appreciate life and new ways to live” (p. 140).

We can find affect at work in *Oyster* by attending to moments of suspension; to sensations felt first on the skin; to zones of indiscernibility produced by bodies in relation; and to the forces of transformation that flow between and impinge upon those bodies. Addressing suspension first, Massumi (2002a) notes that affective relations become perceivable because they are flush with potential. We find ourselves in:

[...] a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It is like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it. It is not exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonation. (p. 26)

Suspensions recur in *Oyster*, though they are not signs of Life being shut down. Like the bodies in the novel, our reading is suspended. For a moment, the narrative hangs rather than moves linearly, and yet, this suspension carries what Bourassa (2009, p. 26), writing on affect, calls “the gift of possibility”. These moments are indexes to a Life that words cannot
adequately articulate or contain; moments during which bodies’ powers of living transform. Hospital writes Mercy and Sarah’s first encounter intensively. Mercy is sensuously charged by Sarah and the moment is one of suspension:

Dust motes, gold in the afternoon sun, dance between them. Now Mercy is aware of the yeasty smell of the grain, of the sharp tight stink of saddles and boots, of the fragrance of cinnamon, of thyme, of rosemary, all of them reaching her singly and in concert from the spice shelves, as though all her senses are on tiptoe, waiting, and the blue rush of the spiled bolt of cloth is like surf in her ears, and each white thread of the dress of the woman opposite is as keen and fine as piano wire and cuts Mercy’s skin. (Hospital, 1997, p. 103)

While Mercy’s senses—smell, sight, hearing, touch—are stirred, readers might also orient themselves to the dust motes that “dance between them”, to those senses “waiting”, and to Sarah, “very still and observant” (p. 103). It is a moment flush with potential. We also read that Mercy’s “mother [Vi], committed to denial of the flesh, earnestly deaf to all private desire, nevertheless knows the language of the senses instinctively” (p. 134). Indeed, Vi seems to be almost permanently in suspension: continuously at the mercy of intensities—mostly traumatic—that draw her into reveries.
Readers are made aware that Vi and Sarah have something in common: both have lost a child. It is, not least, via an affective register that readers are attuned to this relation. At the dinner table, Vi recounts a memory of her son, Brian (p. 143)—also lost at the Reef—and Sarah responds to Vi, though she is unable to find words to articulate that response coherently. A moment of suspension and intensive relation ensues:

Vi is suspended in sudden knowledge. ‘Your Amy…?’

‘I’m sorry,’ Sarah says. ‘I’m not myself. It was when you mentioned the moon.’

Vi reaches over and places her hand on Sarah’s wrist. Sarah stares at it. The two women seem to exchange information through the surfaces of their skin. They seem to discover all that they need to know about each other. (p. 143)

When Mercy confronts Dukke Prophet about his complicity in Donny Becker’s death and the attack on her home, the question makes him “go still” and is felt like a slap “in the face” (p. 228). At the same time, Mercy’s affective capacities are amplified:

Mercy can feel a sudden throbbing in her arms, she can feel her spirit of rebellion beating its wings, she can feel the same
dangerous thing that beat in her as she revved Tim Doolan’s car to one hundred and thirty and jumped. She understands, suddenly, what Miss Rover was drunk on that day on the verandah at Bernie’s, that day of her transfer, she understands what kept her so apparently lighthearted, what kept her so calm. It is an unnatural calm, Mercy knows that now. It is a dangerous calm. It is something one feels like a shimmer on the surface of one’s skin […] her eyes are glittering […] this is what was happening to Oyster when his blue eyes burned, when he mesmerised anyone who looked, and the thought that she and Miss Rover and Oyster might all have something in common brings on such a shock of nausea that she tastes a thin bitter liquid in her mouth. (p. 227)

Here, again, is a moment of “calm” suspension packed with transformational energy. A sensation begins in Mercy’s arms and she attempts to name it: “it pushes up inside her like a cyclone and she cannot resist” (p. 227). The sensation has a recurrent pulse. Although it remains difficult to articulate in words, it gains force; becoming, we read, unnatural, dangerous, “like a shimmer”. It is an impersonal force, permeating multiple bodies but not particular to or assimilable by any of them. Paradoxically, while it is an irresistible sensation—rendering bodies vulnerable, nauseated and disoriented—Mercy’s affection also involves the augmentation of her capacities to resist.
Bodies, in relation, affect each other. As Massumi (2002a) notes more generally, and as we find in these passages, “[i]ntensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things” (p. 25). Again referring to suspension, Massumi expands upon this idea of an interface:

the body, when impinged upon, is described by Spinoza as being in a state of passional suspension in which it exists more outside of itself, more in the abstracted action of the impinging thing and the abstracted context of that action, than within itself [...]. (p. 31)

Oyster is as much a novel of intensities inscribed on the skin (or the body) as it is of words written on pages, of words spoken or not spoken, and of thoughts. This materiality of experience proliferates, compounding a sense of permeability and expressing relations occurring across other registers. We encounter affect via the body, via sensations on the skin, rather than as an emotion articulated by/for a character in a novel. We also gain a sense of affect’s autonomy: sensible in part to bodies in the novel as shock, dislocation or disruption; not entirely assimilable; colonising them, but still flowing beyond them; not ownable, recognisable, or qualifiable. Mercy and Sarah are among those with sensitive, permeable skin.

For Mercy, Life’s intensities are felt corporeally. We read that “From time to time, she can feel on her skin a possibility of change in the weather”
(Hospital, 1997, p. 171); that “She could feel Donny’s nervousness seeping into her” (p. 393); and, as she waits in the tunnel at the Reef for Oyster, that “The darkness is like something crawling on her skin” (p. 394). For Mercy, the possibility of alterity, of liberating her “real self”, is an intensive “hum” that “has always been smouldering and fizzing away somewhere under her skin” (p. 28). Aberrant thought, as far as Outer Maroo goes—of escape, of difference, or of “unlimited possibilities” (p. 28)—is felt by Mercy on and through the body. It makes her “dizzy” (p. 28). We read that “Anxiety drums against the underside of her skin […] there seems to be a low electric humming in her veins like pins and needles, like hope perhaps” (p. 28).

When Sarah recalls seeing Amy for the last time at her husband’s lakeside cottage, there is a sense of suspension: “Around her the air is ominously still” (Hospital, 1997, p. 185). The narration signals bodily impingements, disruptions and deterritorialisations. We read of Sarah’s body being pulled (p. 185), not only her mind. Skin and body process the intensities of the memory and carry the knowledge of that which is yet to come. Sarah “can feel, with a certain amount of dread, the sticky future, the burrs of obligation, the rush of protectiveness spreading like a contusion beneath the skin” (p. 193). Fearing that Amy has drowned, the surrounding silence becomes “as loud as Sarah’s heartbeat and thuds against her skin” (p. 187). Hospital’s writing, of Sarah’s attempt to articulate the materiality of a Life that is felt on the body, disrupts common sense (and) notions of space and time and, again, evokes microperceptions:
There can be no doubt, Sarah thinks, that cataclysm sends out shock waves in advance of a strike, and that those who are about to be most closely affected can sense the vibrations just as surely as a delicate seismograph can detect earthquakes before they arrive. (p. 191)

To be affected is to become and to become is always collective. Bodies, Deleuze and Guattari (1987) suggest, enter—fold—into and produce a shared “no-man’s-land, a nonlocalizable relation sweeping up the two distant or contiguous points, carrying one into the proximity of the other […]” (p. 293). As with Oblivia and swans in The Swan Book, and Keely, birds and Kai in Eyrie, the perceptions of one and another come together to produce mutual, new perceptions: “something shared or indiscernible” that permeates and confounds boundaries (p. 273). In Oyster, we find the flow of affect in these shared deterritorialisations: in a sense of liberation and co-existence and new possibilities. Sarah arrives in Outer Maroo and enters Ma Beresford’s store. Feeling faint from the heat, she collapses. Mercy’s tending to Sarah produces a joyous affective relation: an “involution” (p. 238). Hoping to revive her, Mercy drops ice cubes down inside Sarah’s dress, and onto her skin. Mercy giggles “in spite of herself” (Hospital, 1997, p. 101) at Sarah’s shocked bodily response, which is filled with energy: “At the sight of the woman dancing, lifting her dress away from herself with thumbs and index fingers, lifting her sandalled feet in quick tempo” (p. 101). A force possesses them both, as they are drawn into relations that are
productive of something entirely new. This is an impersonal force, with “a life of its own”:

The woman’s eyes widen with distress … and then, quite suddenly, with shared mirth. She begins to laugh, and Mercy laughs with her, sedately, but their twinned laughter takes on a life of its own, and it spins and spirals upwards and begins to twist faster and faster, like a thing separate from them, out of their control, and it skitters and dances and bends its funnel of hilarity toward them and sucks them into its vortex and they cling to each other, exhausted. (pp. 101-102)

There is a becoming-other; an intensive bonding of Sarah-Mercy. There is affection, enfolding and escape. Hospital articulates the perceptions of a nonhuman force that shapes, augments, and, perhaps itself augmented, moves on from the Human. Things move on to Sarah weeping, permeated by another affect: weeping, not “with mirth, but simply weeping” (p. 102). Hospital’s writing does not attempt to reduce these relations and the affective charge flowing from them to something humans can capture: something entirely resolvable into/by words. Instead, she gestures toward a force articulable via bodily responses and transformations: uncatchable, though no less real for its evanescence.
Later that day, Mercy and her parents dine with Sarah (Hospital, 1997, pp. 127-146). Ostensibly, the narration of the dialogue in these passages might suggest that silence, drowsiness, awkwardness, inarticulateness, talking at cross-purposes, and failings to connect are substantial qualities of the relations between the people around the table. Indeed, until her outburst of warning to Sarah at the end of the chapter, Mercy says very little. However, encountered across other registers, the scene teems with connections, affective relations, and transformations. Sarah is both alien and familiar. While the climate and cultural differences render her incoherent and distant (p. 130), there is an increasing awareness of a collectivity in almost inarticulable loss and grief. Again, Sarah and Mercy enter into a zone of indiscernibility. It is, we read, an “electrifying” experience (p. 129). Mercy feels, via the skin, “pins and needles of excitement along her arms” (p. 129). She is drawn to Sarah and into other perceptual realms. She wants to access the “vantage point from which she, Mercy, is foreign. She wants to look at the dining room, to look at her parents, to look at herself from Sarah’s eyes” (p. 129). Mercy’s perceptions increasingly become Sarah’s. A collective bloc of sensation is produced and moves through the world as Mercy imagines, intensively and sensuously, the journey of Sarah and Nick into Outer Maroo. There is no dialogue during this imagined journey. Instead, Mercy conjures sensuous relations and, as she folds into them, she senses that:
they are so aware of each other’s presence that Sarah can feel the kiss of his shirt [...] like a brush of lips against her forearm, and he can smell the talcum powder between her breasts and can taste the skin of her shoulders. (p. 132)

These are, undoubtedly, erotically charged moments of narration/imagination. However, this being “aware” seems more. Bodies mirror and map to each other. The plural (“They both”) is repeated extensively in the surrounding passage. There is a collective immersion; an imbrication; a traversing. Mercy folds herself into Sarah on the trip (p. 133) and in her family dining room, and it seems to be more than solely a distant observer’s imagination:

She watches Sarah. She can feel the pressure of words rising in Sarah, can see them pushing against Sarah’s throat. Then she can see Sarah’s thoughts on a screen inside her own head. More and more often, lately, this has been happening […]. It is not a good sign. (p. 145)

Hospital’s writing of Mercy, then, attunes readers to the nonhuman: to that which flows beneath or beyond what is easily articulable; to what Daniel Smith (2005) calls “the intensive reality of the body” (p. 190); and to the
literary constitution of characters as compounds of affects and percepts. While a reading of *Oyster*, and Mercy more particularly, could attest to the affective qualities of language—the intensities it carries and its capacities to transform what bodies can do—relationships in Outer Maroo do not begin or end with words alone. Language functions inadequately in articulating the inexpressible and we find Mercy all too frequently grasping for words; fearing to vary the dominant language; trailing off into ellipses; unable to say anything at all; or choosing to say nothing. For Mercy, Life is connective: relational and intensive beyond words. She is attuned to a world bursting with potential, and she is irredeemably exposed to (and pursues) multiplicity and difference. She is, we read, sensitive to:

> Insects on the walls of the Living Word [church building] and the patterns of nails in the floorboards and the play of light and the spinal knobs at the napes of necks bent in worship and the relative greasiness of one head of hair compared to another and the way some people rock and others shake and some roll on the floor in holy laughter and some are afflicted by weeping. (Hospital, 1997, p. 280)

Here, again, Hospital’s use of the conjunctive, “and”, enacts continuity and connectivity and multiplicity, both formally and expressively. As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) write of the “and”, 
it is the connection, the “and” produced between elements, between sets, and which belongs to neither, which eludes them and constitutes a line of flight. [It...] conveys “fuzzy,” nondenumerable, nonaxiomizable sets, in short, “masses,” multiplicities of escape and flux. (p. 470)

Mercy is overwhelmed by Life’s unstable fragility. Clarity of thought is difficult amid this turmoil: there is a play of instruments in her head that she describes as “discordant” (Hospital, 1997, p. 128). She is hyper-sensitive—literally raw-skinned after her jump from a speeding car onto an outback road and into spinifex grass (p. 199)—and sensuously exposed to the world’s uncontrollable flows and variation. She apprehends the chaos or disorder leaching through the orderly veneer that Outer Maroovians try to preserve. Via Mercy, Hospital explores microperceptions, in the Deleuzian (1994) sense that “Underneath the large noisy events lie the small events of silence” (p. 16):

Everywhere Mercy directs her eye or her ear there are contradictions so great that she cannot understand how the fabric of the world contains them. If she were to hear the air turn boisterous with the sound of ripping, the sound of life tearing itself apart at the seams, she would not be surprised. (Hospital, 1997, pp. 134-135)
She feels herself to be continuously in flow and open to intensities carried by thought, words, and other corporeal and incorporeal bodies. Albeit, as the passage below conveys, while these intensities and continuities are sensed, they are not always made sense of and they can be traumatic.

Standing outside her home in the morning heat:

She feels lighter than air. She can hear a sort of merriment in the dust motes, scudding around her. [...] *She asks herself why so often lately it is as though her body runs away with her thoughts.*

[...]. She is flushed and excited, she wants to take the whole world into herself greedily, she wants to embrace trees, cows, sheep, the sun, Donny Becker, she could dance, she could fly, but then just as suddenly she is tormented with shame because that must have been what Oyster saw, what he knew about her, this greediness, this wet heat, and if that...if that is what...and then she feels ill and confused. (p. 170, Italics added)

Although Mercy is open to and expresses the persistence of trauma, the affirmative affective encounters into which she and others enter also function as modes of resistance to it. Early in the novel's narrated order, Mercy senses the potential of such relations when she experiences the blue bolt of cloth unravelling in Ma Beresford's store: cloth that "gallops" and
“billows” and is “puckering […] frothing […] pleating” (Hospital, 1997, p. 22).

The intensities—“the lovely rush of colour unspinning itself” (p. 22)—make Mercy “lightheaded” (p. 23) but in this disruption she finds the almost inarticulable resources to resist the damaging traumatic intensities to which she remains exposed:

She feels that soon she will be able to build a fence with them, no, not a fence, a wall, that soon she will have enough pieces of…pieces of…?—what are they?—enough pieces of these things that cannot be turned into darkness, these pieces of light, enough of them to build a wall, four walls, and the walls will be high enough and potent enough to contain everything she knows about Oyster’s Reef […] with no possibility of leakage whatsoever, and then Mercy will be able to walk away […]. (p. 23)

As I observed earlier with regard to her altercation with Dukke Prophet, here too is a material transgression—the bolt leaving its table—yielding a sensuous reweaving of Mercy’s sense of self: an augmentation in her affective capacities; an “unspinning” (p. 23) of what has been spun. The repetition of “will be” and “enough”, and the use of free indirect discourse, lend the moment an affirmative tenor, rhythm, and sense of mobility and collectivity. Hospital’s intensive mode of writing Mercy connects to the virtual—to “as-yet unactualized modes of being” (Lorraine, 2011, p. 131)
that nonetheless arise from a history with trauma in it—and thereby to potentially different futures than the one to which traumatic forces flowing through Mercy’s past and present could consign her.

An affective study of Mercy offers an alternative register across which Hospital maps Life’s—and a life’s—movements. It is an alternative—though, of course, the two traverse each other—to the social-discursive terrain upon which Mercy’s life in Outer Maroo is oppressed, dominated and contracted by religion, muted by a discourse of fear, secrets and amnesia, and prevented from moving off the map. Mercy is permeable and non-unitary: her skin is penetrable; her mind the thought of the body; her subjectivity not inherently bounded and propertied but the production of open-ended, dynamic relations. Mercy is nomadic. Though stuck in place amid a repressive social system, she continues to travel and to relate. She cannot stop “at the station of Now” (Hospital, 1997, p. 282). Instead, she takes “tangents” (p. 282) and traverses, and is traversed by, other bodies. Mercy engages in continuous reaching-out or, as Davies’ (2000a, p. 196) refers to Hospital’s approach to relationality, she expresses an “eroticized desire to communicate”. Her foldings with others are collective participations in processes of sensuous discovery and revelation, and of resistance and renewal. As with all foldings (Conley, 2005, p. 171), they are acts of agency, expressing potentiality. They are also instructive in that they gesture toward the world’s more-than-cognitive intelligibility. In writing Mercy’s becomings, Hospital exceeds—and withholds, and reveals difficulties with—

_____208 A Spinozan concept (2009, p. 96).
representation. There is an intensive intelligibility to these relations that is accessed through Hospital’s writing of bodies. This intelligibility exceeds or evades the conventional intellect that might try to rationalise or name becomings. It operates along a relational register that is not so easily accessible to those seeking to oppress through discourse, rationality, and the mind. For Mercy, the struggles of Outer Maroo are displaced or deterritorialised: given a new mobility. She enlivens a stultified community. While some are left feeling uncomfortable, assaulted, and exposed when they interact with her—including Sarah, Jess, Amy, and Pete—they also find truths and knowledge, or the hope of unearthing such truths and knowledge. Mercy’s affective capacities are explosive and they bring to the surface—they mine—what “the fabric of the world [only just] contains” (p. 134). Massumi (2015, p. 3) writes that “‘affect’ is the word I use for ‘hope’ ” and, I propose that Hospital’s writing of affective openness suggests something affirmative, to do with ecological sense and possibilities for living: namely, a “lunatic hope” (p. 29) that we, as expressions of our relations, are not yet final.

Hospital writes other moments of suspension and processes of affection in _Oyster:_

No one moved. No one made a sound. We stared at him [Oyster], awed. There is a kind of excitement, you see, that gifted orators
Again, something inarticulable and nonhuman is at work. Affects move and shared affections are produced. The violent, manipulative figure Oyster reminds readers that affect is not solely an affirmative force—indeed it has no intent other than to continue—and that literary engagements with the nonhuman are not necessarily joyful. My contention is not made in order to reduce Oyster to pure affect, deny him his humanity, and thereby let humans off the hook for the horrifying violence of which he/we are capable. I make it, rather, to further assert that Hospital writes affect. Nor is my approach a denial of Hospital’s use of metaphorical, allegorical, and symbolic poetics in writing the figure of Oyster. Rather, I propose a more-than-representational engagement with Hospital’s writing that does not only look to the human and to representation to make sense of Oyster. We might also attune ourselves to the not entirely Human forces that flow through bodies and are carried and given continuity by them: what Nick calls “this dangerous buzz of intensity” (p. 422). As Jess suggests, “it does not seem possible to think about Oyster in only one way at a time” (p. 310).

Oyster functions as a present absence in Hospital’s narrative. Although, like the Fuckatoo, he ceaselessly broods over events, he does not appear in person until page 297. Not a conventionally narrated individual—detached from the collective, autonomous, asserting self, possessing interiority—Oyster seems only to exist with an audience. Jess reflects that people like
Oyster “must have an audience to watch the flickering theatre of their lives. [...] What, after all, would be the substance of a shadow with no one to see it?” (Hospital, 1997, p. 301). Oyster’s words are drawn from books, his character a veiled repetition of cult leaders elsewhere. We are offered no interiority, no focalisation and no sensuous register via which Oyster lives in his own right. Instead, we are offered a “ghost” (p. 308). To Jess, he seems to be without substance—“He was like an apparition, insubstantial. He was like a mirage” (p. 298)—and between sexes: “hover[ing] in the androgynous border zones” (p. 298). He is “ageless young-old, old-young” (p. 303). Jess cannot find a coherent, stable explanation of Oyster: to unpack his influence and attribute it to identifiable techniques. She gets as close as “perhaps” (p. 304) in her explanations, and “All I can vouch for is that we were mesmerised” (p. 319). She “saw him casting invisible lines, hooking people, winding them in” (p. 319); though she remains uncertain or is unable to articulate easily with words quite how. She reflects that “Perhaps because there was nothing at all at the core of Oyster (that is one of my theories) he had the fluid capacity of fitting the shape of everyone’s dreams” (p. 304).

Readers might wish to conclude that Oyster works his influence via the mind and is intelligent enough to “orchestrate” (Hospital, 1997, p. 323) and manipulate others (p. 312), just as all consummate tricksters do: to use what little he already knows, and what he gleans, to tap into their desires; and to theatrically draw others into his sphere of influence; even the more resistant Jess, Major Miner and Andrew Godwin. Oyster’s homily on opals and his revealing of rare black gems are what Jess calls his opening choreographical (p. 320) triumph over the crowd. It is combined with
Oyster’s seemingly miraculous insight into Andrew Godwin’s son’s suicide, the revelation of which transforms Andrew. Of course, Oyster’s sensuous language seduces Outer Maroovians, as do his references to monetary riches, his religious, anti-government rhetoric, and his apocalyptic imaginary. There is more, though, than oratory-rhetorical power. There is something substantive which escapes a purely discursive, rational explanation for Oyster, and Jess makes great and troubled efforts to articulate this affective register. While she cannot explain his impact—“I don’t know, I don’t know” she repeats (p. 302)—she gestures toward her sense of him and towards the sensations and transformations he produces in others. Jess recalls Oyster’s affective assemblage—clothes, trajectory (coming out of the West), time of first arrival, blood on trousers, opals held out, eyes, a gun, and words—and how he mesmerises the crowd, speaking of oysters, water, and the intense blue of distant places:

‘It’s extraordinary,’ he said dreamily, and everyone turned towards Broome, we all seemed to go under that blue sky like divers, the Indian Ocean lapping us; ‘so intense,’ Oyster said, ‘that blueness, that equatorial blueness, you can’t imagine…’ He made some graceful motion with his hand as though drawing back a curtain, parting the air – the magus, I remember thinking; or if I didn’t think it back then, I can see it now, the way he held the magician’s baton in his hand – and everyone swayed, we all leaned into his vision, we were stunned by the blue wave washing us, the tide coming in,
shussing back over lost sands, picking up fossilised shells it had
dropped on an ancient ebb. [...] we turned languid in the lush
coastal humidity of Oyster’s words. (p. 321)

Indeed, like his hand gesture, we might find Oyster’s greatest allure in
inaudibility, in inarticulateness, and in the almost secretive, and the
withdrawn, qualities of his oration: in what is “unspoken” (p. 322). It is,
perhaps, in something altogether beyond speech or non-speech:

Oyster said something, but very softly, as though he were giving
Donny a private answer. Maybe he did no more than move his lips.
Whatever he said, or didn’t say, no one heard it, and everyone
leaned closer. There was a shuffling, a kind of swarming together, a
hum of *What? We didn’t hear you. What did you say? What did he…? We couldn’t hear…* (p. 305)

Here, Oyster’s affective capacities are suggestive of what Protevi (2014, p.
329) describes more broadly as an ability to get a group to move “with the
same pulse”: entrainment. Indeed, Oyster gets them to collectively *not
move*, which is no less valid a form of affection.

There is something obscure *and* distinct about Oyster’s seduction of
others: Jess calls it “the impact on all of us [...] by that indefinable but
calculated aura that held us in thrall” (Hospital, 1997, p. 300). Some sense that Oyster has “a certain kind of stink” (p. 301); he “changed the air” (p. 302); he emits “a fizzing aura of compressed energy” (p. 304); he has “a way of gesturing with his hands, his eyes flashed opals [...]” (p. 326); and a “sweet-smelling skin” (p. 251). Others dwell upon his “primitive”, “primal” intensities: how a connection with him produces unfamiliar transformations in what bodies can do. His gaze is potent; what Jess describes as “intense” (p. 311). It signals, arrests, voids thought, unsettles, envelopes, and exposes. Jess senses that Oyster “saw all my selves”, though this “sensation of transparency” is also one of becoming, or entering into a common bloc of sensation with Oyster: what Jess calls a “momentary fusion” (p. 311).

Jess admits “a stirring of primitive sexual excitement” (Hospital, 1997, p. 313) in Oyster’s presence when, seemingly kissing her hand in thanks after she removes a splinter from his palm, he slips her fingertips into his mouth. Not exclusive to Jess, or Dorothy Godwin (pp. 256-257), it is a primitive sensation felt collectively: “We were dazed. Our breath fogging the hot air. Something steamy, something akin to desire slipped into all crevices: gaping mouths, wide eyes, minds reeling open” (p. 322). However, there are no words spoken and no clarity about this “Something”. The transformative force of the relations exceeds language. Nor do they need to be spoken to be expressed: “each person asked himself furtively, nervously, if such silences, such omissions, could possibly have been unspoken on the verandah of an outback pub” (p. 322). Mercy—sensuously attuned and affectively open—comes to know Oyster by more than what can be articulated as, or attributed confidently to, a human quality. Oyster
expresses an incipient violence. Mercy recalls his first sexual assault of her in the Beresford store, and taps into the forces running ahead of his body and diminishing her vitality. She stands on a ladder, facing shelves, sensing Oyster’s presence on her skin:

Oyster is there. He is moving between hardware and rows of canned beans. She knows it is Oyster, though her face is pressed against boxes on the highest shelves […]. There is someone at the foot of the ladder. She knows it is Oyster. She presses her legs together […]. She knows it is Oyster […]. Perhaps, from the top of the ladder, she saw him at the edge of her eye in the street without realising it. Or perhaps there was something about the sound of the door […], or the sound of his footsteps […]. Perhaps it was a faint and particular body smell that caused Mercy to stiffen. In any case, she knows it is Oyster. […] she can feel a layer of air against her skin turn hard, like a carapace. (p. 387)

Mercy reacts with “her mind and with her nerve ends” (p. 387). Again, it is the skin that responds, protectively it seems, anticipating the coming assault.

Affect offers a compelling way of engaging with the Oyster’s ostensible paradoxes. While his words promise emancipation, freedom and wealth, the transformations that bodies and subjectivities undergo in relations with him
are negating, denuding, contractive, and, ultimately, deadly. His impact is energising and soporific. While it seems that encounters with Oyster are initially enlivening—“He changed the air. He put a spring in everyone’s step” (Hospital, 1997, p. 302)—people become slaves, concubines, acolytes and prey. Oyster’s sermons at the Reef run for hours but it is not their scriptural content that transforms the bodies of followers forced to stay awake and listen after their daily hard labours. It is the exhausting, interminable barrage of words and the requirement to be there:

it seems to go on and on and Mercy realises that everyone is very tired, that everyone is exhausted, that the skin on everyone’s face is stretched very tight and shines as though a bulb was switched on under the bone, and they all just want to sleep to sleep to sleep. (p. 400)

For Oyster’s followers, to speak and to listen at the Reef is to be shorn of vitality, not to find freedom and Life. Their affective capacities are impoverished and their existential horizons contracted. Their bodies are violated. They lose their identities and are unable to think. They, too, become “ghosts, revenants, the living dead” (p. 388). The sensations characters have when encountering Oyster index the initial flush and then the drawing of Life and potential out of them; leaving them, at best, in an
empty state of the “still to come” (p. 302): a different kind of suspension forged by affect.

Oyster folds himself into, enfolds, and re-folds Outer Maroo. He participates in the folds of bodies, of knowledge, of the social, and in the ultimate folds of death. Indeed, an intensive reading of Oyster suggests the ease of his entanglement with Outer Maroo is a function of his affective resonance with the community. Taken to violent and destructive extremes, the affects he expresses—to fear, to possess, to consume, and to escape—are those prevalent in Outer Maroo before he arrives. He materially and discursively exploits—and, perhaps, is affirmed and strengthened by—the forces that shape Outer Maroo, revealing them to the collective who have cultivated them, while increasing their intensities. Major Miner gestures toward this symbiosis: “Oyster, he thinks, was like one of those bacterial forces that blindly and ruthlessly seek out the culture that will nourish them. […] Outer Maroo was his petri dish […]” (p. 413). Oyster and Outer Maroo are mutually catalytic; both “consumed by intensity” (p. 379) and not only by the intensity of the fires that burn it to the ground.

It is, no doubt, possible to read Oyster symbolically: as a human representing broader religious and capitalist extremist forces at work in the world; entangling the language of modern capitalism and religious fundamentalism; combining oppression and the expansion of capital wealth; conflating money and salvation and death. What Hospital’s writing of Oyster also offers, though, is an attunement to the affective modes of capitalism and religion; to the ways in which bodies are shaped to best meet the
objectives of wealth accumulation and the preservation of inequality; and to
the violence inflicted upon resistance and unsanctioned difference.
Massumi’s (2002a) work on affect and capitalism resonates here with this
idea of cult-capitalism, extreme though it is in *Oyster*: where religion and
rapacious wealth-seeking fuse. Massumi writes of “certain economic
theorists who, when called upon to explain to a nonspecialist audience the
ultimate foundation of the capitalist monetary system, answer ‘faith’” (p. 44).
An attunement to the affective modes of capitalism/religion can also enable
resistance against efforts to incorporeally and corporeally subjectify bodies.
Massumi (2015) writes on this matter: “alternative political action does not
have to fight against the idea that power has become more affective, but
rather has to learn to function itself on that same level” (p. 34). Hospital
works to expand the affective register beyond those sanctioned and utilised
by capitalism and by religion. Mercy, for example, is open to and expresses
affects which are not sanctioned by Outer Maroo’s cult-capitalism and,
indeed, that counteract the trauma and damage done to bodies where
consumption and greed and servitude are privileged. We find qualities of
Hospitals literary practice in Greenwald-Smith’s (2015, p. Foreword) more
general characterisation of resistant affective writing: as “concerned with
impersonal feelings: feelings that challenge the neoliberal notion that
emotions are the property of the self”. The ways in which bodies fold into
each other in *Oyster* counteracts neoliberal affects associated with the
separable individual: independent, self-defining and imbued with identity; a
stand-alone project of subjectivity that is entirely self-reliant; only entering
into arms-length transactional relations of mutual benefit with other subjects
where it decides. Hospital writes permeable subjectivities: “transindividual” living (Massumi, 2015, p. 94). They are open to the exterior and are collective productions. They are not in control of their trajectories, no matter how much they believe they are, and they are always reliant for their joy upon the affirmative qualities of their relations with other bodies. Hospital’s bodies are immersed, entangled, and irreducibly multiple; they live as Braidotti’s (2005/6, p. 16) subject: as “a cluster of complex and intensive forces”.

In *Oyster*, readers encounter affects’ capacities to produce effects—of joy *and* of sadness/pain—without initial reference to logic, reasoning, or communication, and more rapidly and in excess of characters’ abilities to cope. While these nonhuman flows participate in the (re)constitution of bodies, subjectivities and Life, their intensive qualities and work remain difficult to articulate. Hospital’s writing orients readers beyond metaphors for and images of some corporeal and stable thing, and towards a sense of these intensive flows: we become “sensually eroticised” (Davies, 2000a, pp. 187-188). Making these transformational flows and their elusiveness more *intelligible* to readers should, at least, instil a degree of humility in those who hope to capture the world, to know its entirety, to individualise it, or to bring it to a halt. To further explore flows in, and the flows of, *Oyster*, I turn, next, to Hospital’s extensive and intensive writing of water.
Water

Following water is a great way to think in the Deleuzean manner. (Protevi, 2007, para. 4)

Those are the seasons out here: drought or floods. (Hospital, 1997, p. 61)

Water is an active and transformative material. Halsey (2006) observes that “[t]o think [and I suggest, to write] machinically is to view the world in terms of an incessant mutability or flux” (p. 61), and water, he suggests, is one way to pursue such practices. After Nietzsche, Halsey notes that water conveys “the preponderance of Dionysian forces (flux, flow, change, chaos) over Apollonian forms (stasis, structure, sameness, order)” (p. 64). Water is “always arriving or exiting whereas Man is characterised by becoming-Still” (p. 61). It is “composed of infinitely varied speeds” rather than being “constant, predictable and habitual” (p. 64). It resists containment, fixing, control, contraction and oppression via its capacities for expansion, transformation, relation and escape: for instance, via evaporation and osmosis (p. 64). For Outer Maroovians, though, water is a scarce and almost mythical substance: “there were children in Outer Maroo who had never seen rain” (Hospital, 1997, p. 3). I noted earlier that drought, heat, desert, dry riverbeds, and parched earth and air, affect bodies in Oyster: slowing them down; contracting their movements; drawing them into a state
of torpor and sleepiness; diminishing what they can do and where they can move; changing how they relate; and killing them. Nonetheless, a striking quality of Hospital’s writing is its capacity to sensuously—not only metaphorically—immerse readers in a liquid, folding world. Water—like the figure Oyster—is a demonstrably present-absence in the novel’s plot and it is with water that Hospital affirms Life amid desiccated stasis and oppression. While *Oyster* offers water as a metaphor for variation—a symbol for Life continuing to move amid contraction, seeping through porous bodies, and being ultimately uncontainable—water also inhabits the novel as a lively, varying and relational material. Hospital’s writing of water expresses a world always in flow; always differing; and lived intensively on the body. The sensuous poetics of *Oyster* express these transformations: as becomings-water.

Chen, MacLeod and Neimenas (2013, p. 10) note that, for Bachelard, “our concepts always depend on material metaphors for their expression”, and I acknowledge that Hospital’s use of water in *Oyster* is extensively metaphorical. Water images substitute for, gesture toward, and assist readers to *imagine* folding, flowing, and fluid bodies; intimate relations; and open subjectivities. We find water tropes in their multitudes: from rivers, waves, swells, floods, flows and water itself, to floating, cresting, seeping, spilling, lapping, foaming and drowning. We find bodies of water, liquid flows, relations between liquid forms, water as catalyst, as threat, as vehicle or carrier, as destructive force, and as container. Non-liquid things are expressed via—and express—liquid qualities and potential: *splashing* light (Hospital, 1997, p. 128); *seeping* bravado (p. 107), messages (p. 300),
nervousness (p. 393) and defiance (p. 187); swimming thoughts (p. 189); liquid cloth (p. 22); time flowing into temporal seas in which we float (p. 22); and Amy carrying an “inner sea” (p. 175). Questions, laughter, spittle, air, and the world all “crest” (pp. 84, 102, 283, 433). Silence, laughter again, blood, and mouths “foam” (pp. 83, 102, 183, 279). Light, memories, desired things, and time “lap” against bodies and minds (pp. 128, 47, 13, 187).

Human figures regularly find themselves, other human figures, and non-and-more-than-human bodies, transformed into water and water vessels. An unnamed “someone” in Ma Beresford’s store “sees Digby’s truck float into view” (p. 21) and soon after it is “drifting toward anchor” (p. 22).

Mercy, who Hospital commonly writes via water, and as water, also perceives a liquid world. She is taken by the manner in which Nick walks: “Fluid, she thinks. As horses move; as water moves” (Hospital, 1997, p. 99). Fluidity is a matter of concern too for Charles Given, Oyster, Pete, Jess, and Nick. Fluidity pervades bodies, silence, time, desert, images, and thought. Ways of living are considered via liquid flows. At dinner, Vi drips gravy on to the tablecloth and those present witness the “dark splash that is bleeding in filaments along the gingham threads” (p. 137). The spread adheres to the straight lines of the thread and we are given an insight into how Mercy’s father, Charles, experiences and tries to find order in the world. He explains that the bleeding “adheres to the principle of conduction. All fluids are conducted along the available structural channels of distribution” (p. 138). This version of the world and its flows and relations is far from the proliferating, transversal, multiple flows of matter-discourse to which Mercy is attuned. For Mercy, a quality of living is the absolute impossibility of pre-
determining the directions, trajectories and flows of Life. In *Oyster*, there are those whose lives flow via other channels of distribution; whose lives flow transversally rather than true to common notions of order; and whose lives flow via collective blocs of sensation rather than down “structural channels”.

Water populates the world of *Oyster* materially and as matter-memory. Water trapped inside opals becomes the past locked away in the gem, still producing movement and finding expression though it cannot speak to us in any conventional human way (Hospital, 1997, p. 76). Bore water coats bodies in its “alkaline slick” (p. 36), as well as giving them a sulphurous scent (p. 13): here, Outer Maroovian skin carries the residue of the damned. Dried-out watercourses and waterbodies are flush with memories of flood and high water (p. 4-5). Rivers continue to run. Sea creatures abound, though they are fossils. The empty “Sea of Null” persists in the imaginary (p. 22). Hospital’s writing of water’s persistent, spatio-temporal transversality resonates with Deleuze’s (1994) words:

> We are made of contracted water, earth, light and air - not merely prior to the recognition or representation of these, but prior to their being sensed. Every organism, in its receptive and perceptual elements, but also in its viscera, is a sum of contractions, of retentions and expectations. At the level of this primary vital sensibility, the lived present constitutes a past and a future in time.
> (p. 73)
A liquid world, then, floods the prose in *Oyster*, but to stop at metaphor and matter-memory is to stem the flow prematurely. Hospital’s *hydro-literary* practice carries material, affective force. As Massumi (1995, p. 107) describes affect more generally, water in *Oyster* is not only infrastructural, it is transversal. Hospital writing of water’s intensities, qualities and movements function as indexes to the material and affective registers of relations and becomings. Water expresses transformations in the affective capacities of bodies produced via their relations with other bodies, even though (and, perhaps, especially where) the content and trajectory of those changes may not be easily articulable. As Massumi (2015, p. 54) puts it more generally: “in the instant of the affective hit, there is no content yet. All there is is the affective quality, coinciding with the feeling of the interruption, with the kind of felt transition [...].” Water also functions affectively because it works synesthetically, at least in literary terms: using one kind of sense impression to express sense impressions of other kinds.209 Davies (2000a) recalls Hospital’s words on *Oyster* and on finding a language that isn’t the language we have: on her “attempt to speak of a language that is sensually eroticized, quite profoundly communicative, but has to exist outside of established language forms because they’ve just not served the purpose of communicating” (pp. 187-188). In *Oyster*, we find Hospital’s affective, hydro-

---

209 Massumi (2002a) writes: “affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another. [...] Affects are virtual synesthetic perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing, particular things that embody them (p. 35).
literary attempt at such a vocabulary: a language of the sensible though barely articulable.

Where Mercy focalises, water flows. Two years before Outer Maroo’s demise, Amy visits Ma Beresford’s store and asks Mercy for help to escape Oyster’s Reef. She catalyses in Mercy a sense of the trauma of her own time at the Reef and Hospital’s writing of water expresses the sensations of a shift—a diminution—in Mercy’s capacities:

Mercy could feel a softness starting at her ankles, and then spreading, and she knew that in a second or so she would dwindle into nothing, she would simply leak away, she would disappear through the floor like the last waterhole in a creek bed seeping into sand. (Hospital, 1997, p. 89)

Amy offers a direct, though unwitting prompt to Mercy’s sense of her own complicity in the town’s turning away from the violence out at the Reef. Mercy, we read, feels “as though the air were unsafe. It was heaving. It was curling her into waves. She felt seasickness, air sickness, coming on” (p. 90). Mercy feels her body’s incapacitation: “she could feel herself turning blue” (p. 91) like the flowing bolt of cloth.

Water is also critical to the expression of traumatic affect in Oyster. Lorraine’s (2011) observations on trauma are helpful for a reading of Mercy.
For Mercy, the violence inflicted upon her and her family members persists in the present and threatens a dark future for them. Trauma surges up repeatedly to render Mercy incapable. Hospital writes this trauma affectively and synesthetically, via water. Shifts in Mercy’s psychical and physiological—and her affective—capacity are conveyed through sensations associated with powerful liquid flows, acceleration, inundation, immersion, and drowning. As the Givens’ awkward, ostensibly muted dinner with Sarah progresses, Mercy senses the sorrow, the desperation, and the trauma enveloping the room and its inhabitants and we read that:

She is awash in a familiar exhaustion. She experiences it as a lassitude of the body, but the sensation also presents itself visually: there are two currents of rushing water, black cold floodwater, sweeping down dry tributary arms of the Barcoo, hurtling towards a confluence at Cooper’s Creek. Mercy is flotsam. She is split in two. She is swept along both watercourses simultaneously. The speed of the rushing water is incredible. At the confluence, at the moment of collision, a great column of black water throws itself up like a tidal wall as though hitting concrete. There is nothing but darkness. All the water of the Barcoo flood plain explodes and annihilates itself in mist. (Hospital, 1997, pp. 138-139)
Though it is introduced as visual, the sensation, at least for Mercy, traverses the senses. Trauma enfolds Mercy as a liquid sensation that disrupts and deterritorialises the body. Beyond the visual, the water is cold and there are sensations of impact and fragmentation. Mercy feels-thinks in liquid folds and flows: in “currents”, in “cross-current”, “flood”, “confluence”, “tidal wave”, and “flow”; even in liquid transformations and annihilations in “mist” (p. 139). She becomes indiscernible from the sensed flows: she “is flotsam”. She is disoriented by this vision and she “hangs onto the edge of the dining-room table” and “cannot breathe” (p. 139). These intensities are unassimilable. She seeks out stable “details”—the “stitches in the tablecloth”—to try and reverse the potentially overwhelming sensory “flood” (p. 139). The liquid world that surges up and immerses Mercy indexes her inability to remain “absent”: to stay above or “anchor herself beyond the highwater line of flash floods” (p. 139). These floods signal the intensive surges felt on the body by Mercy, arising from her violation at the hands of Oyster, and from the experiences associated with her father’s assault, the disappearance and likely death of her brother, Brian, and the ostracising of the Given family by Outer Maroo’s religious community. But, for Hospital, such living traumas cannot be articulated directly, or in some “mainstream” way, as Lorraine (2011, p. 131) describes representational options open to writers, because they are “inadequate to the truths they want and need to tell” (p. 130). The traumas Mercy expresses still have life in them and they continue to participate in her becomings and those of others. Consequently, to attempt to close those off as past events would miss their intensive vitality in the present and the future. Furthermore, like water under pressure, these
intensities exceed a body’s capacity to contain, or assimilate them. Adapting Deleuze, water in *Oyster* might be read as sensation: as “that which exceeds intellectual control and works directly on and through the nervous system” (Deleuze, 1990b, p. 31).

The ongoing vitality of the trauma of losing a child (and brother), that connects Sarah and Vi and Mercy, becomes palpable when Vi turns the conversation to Brian, her missing son. Again, Mercy tries to avoid the ensuing liquid surge of traumatic affect, but she cannot and she returns, via the kettle that she seeks out for its calming details, to the “roiling boiling water like a river in flood” (Hospital, 1997, p. 142). Although Mercy craves conversational silence—“it is better to say nothing” (p. 145)—it does not stem the intensive flow. Rather than distract the mind and protect us from the past, details can carry and express its affective force. They are, to use Deleuze’s (2000) words on Proust, “sensuous material signs” (p. 14) and Hospital uses liquid to convey their capacities. Indeed, Sarah explains these “sensuous material signs” to Vi:

> It’s the details, isn’t it? Details that get stuck in the mind, they’re so potent, they’re like concentrated essence of the past. One drop, and a whole era mushrooms out, all these sensations you’d forgotten. (p. 144)
Over and above the importance of water to readers’ sense of the continuity and permeability of bodies, and of the intensive flows of relations that produce bodies in Oyster, the variation of Hospital’s writing can produce an unmooring, or deterritorialisation of readers. After Deleuze, Rizzo (2012, p. 142) notes that cinematic repetitions of water images produce “molecular perception […] that de-emphasises human subjectivity”, and that water can be valuable as what Deleuze (1986, p. 43) calls a “liquid-image” that offers pure flow. Rizzo (2012, p. 142) quotes Deleuze: “movement can be extracted from the thing moved, or mobility from movement itself”. A rhythm or the sense of a rhythm is produced from the repetition of water: “vibration in its deepest sense” (Deleuze, 1986, p. 78). We find these repetitions in Oyster. Although water is commonly written in connection with human relations and sensations, rather than written in itself (akin to cinematic water images without the Human), it is often the case that water images and water-sense overwhelm bodies and that characters become-water. Mercy, in particular, repeatedly loses her sense of coherent self, and we lose her, amid “flash floods” or water sensations. There is also poetic intensity to Hospital’s prolific use of water metaphors in Oyster. As should be evident from my earlier analysis, Hospital’s water metaphors do not alight upon a single object, subject, sensation, emotion or relation. Rather, they proliferate with differences: the objects to which they relate and their connotations are in continuous variation. This variation has the capacity to produce a feeling of fluidity and continuity in the reader.

Deleuze (1986) proposes that water perception is not tailored to the solid, or to the expectation of the solid. Water removes the solid “as object, as condition, as milieu” (p. 80), and as constraint on what a body can do.
*Oyster*, Hospital establishes Outer Maroo’s conditions as tending towards earth, the narrow, and the solid: fixed, separable, static, and controlled. However, as I have discussed, movement—difference—denies stasis. Without transforming the plot, narratives of events, discourse or actions, Hospital’s hydro-literary practice releases language and becomings from the grip of the prima facie dominant conditions of drought, stasis, lassitude, and separation. Hospital proliferates water in *Oyster*, producing sensations of flow, and offering access to expansive modes of perception\(^{210}\) and becomings-liquid that enfold and exceed humans. In this way, *Oyster* offers a literary version of what Deleuze (1986, pp. 80-81) hoped we might gain from cinema: access to “the system of universal variation” not available to those without the eyes to see it: not available to the Human. Moreover, Hospital’s writing of water carries potentials to cultivate readers’ sensitivity to continuity or co-implication: something more than interconnectedness; something closer to Morton’s “mesh […] the entanglement of all strangers” (2010b, p. 47), and to the Deleuzian fold, expressing the continuity of difference. I conclude this chapter by attending to the ethical and political potentials to be found in Hospital’s writing of difference and relationality.

\(^{210}\) For Deleuze (1986, p. 79), water expands—makes vaster—our perceptions: beyond what we can achieve on land.
Difference and hope-work

Is the positivity of difference, ‘difference in itself’, thinkable with this capitalist monster breathing in our face? (Braidotti & Dolphijn, 2015, p. 20)

Hospital’s literary practice in Oyster does not only narrate difference (what occurs within the story); it carries the capacity to introduce difference into the world and, in doing so, to cultivate aspects of ecological sense amid Crises of Ecologies. Adapting Massumi’s words, we might read Hospital’s writing as “[a] rendering of the dimension of the virtual. The organization of multiple levels that have different logics and temporal organizations, but are locked in resonance with each other and recapitulate the same event in divergent ways […]” (2002a, p. 33). While the novel’s multi-level logics, and its continuous variation, might appear “disorderly” (Greiner, 2007), its complexity is purposeful and affirmative. The bedevilling of beginnings and endings—of meaning, space, time, and bodies—carries more than cognitive potential; it also carries sensuous force. A reader might well feel suspended amid the never to be completed narratives, and left to float among the novel’s fragmented parts that are always in never-to-be-finalised relations. One opportunity, insofar as it relates to the cultivation of ecological sense, is to embrace this indeterminate condition not only cognitively but affectively. For example, while, at the novel’s close, Jess can only imagine Mercy, Sarah, and Nick in a truck moving towards safety, readers need not merely
leave them as Schrödinger left his hypothetical cat: neither/both dead
and/or alive. Hospital affords readers the opportunity to be “present at the
genesis of the contradiction[s]” (Deleuze, 1990b, p. 74) that her writing
produces. A sense of indeterminacy and openness are productions of
Oyster’s narratorial, temporal, spatial and material variation: things remain
unsettled and, therefore, incipient. Hospital, to the end, evokes a sense of a
multiple potentials and of return or cycling back.

Hospital’s writing (of) irresolution into Oyster produces a capacity for
continuous variation. Literary attempts to express matter-discursive
permeability, folding, indeterminacy, flow and transformation, recur
alongside, and resonate with, expressions of enclosure, separation,
certainty, stasis and preservation; leaving readers suspended between the
inarticulable and the unachievable. One potential effect of being drawn into
this state of lively suspension is ethical. Hospital holds at bay habitual
temptations: to close off, resolve, and territorialise an event, to judge it, and
separate ourselves from it as an independent observer. Instead, readers
remain entangled: unable to resolve the event, though still “response-able”
to it (Abel, 2007, p. 186). Abel suggests that not to conclude and judge, to
hold open how we respond, is an ethical mode of encountering events.
Hospital’s writing in Oyster—formally and poetically, representationally and
more-than-representationally—serves to “slow […] down the impetus to
declare what an event is” (p. 217). Citing Don DeLillo on such literary
practices, in particular where plot is rendered unable to “reduce the world”,
Abel asks: “what else is judgment if not a world-reducing plot?” (p. 202). In
Oyster, Hospital does not ask readers to mourn the failings of
representation, to reduce the world, or to judge events. She encourages readers to augment the world, and live with more of the chaos and complexity: to embrace difference as process.

Her writing attests to both the materiality of language/discourse and to the folly of seeking to use it to enforce order, or meaning, or control. Immerges readers in a non-and-more-than-human semiotics of bodies and attunes readers to other registers of existence and other agencies: agencies that images and words can gesture, or orient readers, towards but cannot articulate or capture adequately.
Conclusion

I make three returns to conclude this thesis: first, summarising its contributions to knowledge; second, discussing the possible research pathways to which it might contribute; and third, acknowledging that intensive literary practices include reading and writing and that they can constitute their own research pathways.

First return

In Chapter 1, I surveyed contemporary Australian novels’ engagements with the bodies, forces, entanglements and (trans)formations of Crises of Ecologies: climate change; mass extinction; planetary degradation; the agencies of capitalism; crises of subjectivity; and Indigenous Crises of Ecologies. This survey constitutes a new contribution to Australian literary studies. In Chapter 3, I argued that novels, in encounters with writers and readers, possess potentials to cultivate ecological sense: carrying and repotentialising expression and sensation; enhancing our apprehension of our entangled relations with Life beyond the Human; attuning us to other registers of existence; and offering resources to resist the forces of Crises of Ecologies and to pursue new subjective trajectories. In this context, I conceptualised literary practices—writing the posthuman, writing affect and becomings, and minor literature—that carry potentials to cultivate ecological
sense and expand our powers of living amid Crises of Ecologies. These conceptualisations build upon and complement Deleuzo-Guattarian and New Materialist philosophy, theory, and literary theory, and they map out pathways for literary studies in addition to those problematised in Chapter 2. In Chapters 4, 5, and 6 I undertook intensive studies of these practices and their potentials in three contemporary Australian novels: Tim Winton’s *Eyrie*; Alexis Wright’s *The Swan Book*; and Janette Turner Hospital’s *Oyster*. While the studies in this thesis attend to published literary criticism on these writers, they offer new insights into what these novels can do.

*Eyrie, The Swan Book,* and *Oyster* inform, affirm and enrich the conceptualisations of literary practices in this thesis. Each novel engages with Crises of Ecologies and Australia. Winton conveys the degradation associated with agriculture and mining, crises of the abject(ed) self amid capitalism, the trauma of violence toward the animal bound to capitalism’s urge for progress, and the annihilations of Indigenous peoples, country and cultures. Wright also touches upon many aspects of Crises, though I focus on her disruption of habitual perceptions of the nature of Indigenous Crises of Ecologies. Wright’s symptomatology renews readers’ understanding of the forces affecting Indigenous peoples and country (of the virus), and opens up new potentials for resistance and renewal. Hospital also maps the life-denying contractions of cult-capitalism, the environmental damage of colonial settlement, agriculture and mining, and the violence inflicted upon Indigenous peoples and country, and upon animals.
Each novel cultivates a sense of Life beyond and without the Human, and of the ways in which the irreducibly exterior, porous and dynamic subject is a production of, and irreducibly implicated with, non-and-more-than-human bodies. Each also expresses the (trans)formations of subjectivities in relations with these bodies and their forces. Winton’s Tom Keely is an open, vulnerable subjectivity, battered and reduced by what flows through and beyond him. Eyrie’s dark ecology immerses Keely and readers in non-and-more-than-human vitality, and subjective dissolution and indeterminacy. Wright’s writing via Indigenous onto-epistemologies begins in the middle, dissolving nature/culture, Human/non-and-more-than-human distinctions. Winton’s and Wright’s fictional figures enter into transformative becomings-animal. Hospital infuses Outer Maroo with lively non-and-more-than-human agencies: the Fuckatoo, rocks and opals, heat, and water.

Each novel engages readers with microperceptions and apprehensions of Life beyond fixed and separable forms. Winton’s Keely indexes the intimate impingements of the hyperobject global warming (Morton, 2013a). Wright’s Oblivia draws us into smooth space and the becoming lively, mobile and transversal of what is, at first, dismissed as sameness. Hospital’s Mercy orients us towards registers of perception and relation at the edge of enforced norms. Thick with sensuous relationality, each novel invites readers to participate in an affective bootcamp. Winton, Wright and Hospital’s writing inhabits registers of encounter and (trans)formation that infuse and exceed the linguistic-discursive and, while immaterial and affective, carry material effects. They write us into relations that cannot be easily articulated in language. They attune readers to Life’s potential to be
shaped by the forces of affective capitalism and to other trajectories for living, beyond capitalism’s reach.

Beyond conveying affect as part of Life within the novel’s narrative, each novel carries affect in its encounters with readers. Winton combines ruined writing and writing of the ruins to disrupt our sense of Life and world. His idiomatic persistence calls out to a collective and expresses resistance to forces of modernity stripping singularity from bodies. Wright’s style carries material force: it can be a weapon. It is an expression of resistance to capitalist-colonialism, and of the capacities for persistence and renewal of sovereign Indigenous bodies, minds and cultural practices. Her determinedly particular, gyric, Will-o’-the-wisp style tends to expression: drawing language off safe paths; keeping sense and bodies moving; repotentialising difference to exceed and outpace oppression. Hospital’s literary indeterminacy—formal, narrative, and poetic—functions intensively: suspending readers between the inarticulable and the unreachable. This suspension encourages a holding back of judgement and of the temptation readers might feel to reduce Life’s continuous variation to something controllable and predictable and lifeless.

While critiquing violence, oppression and resistance, Winton’s, Wright’s and Hospital’s novels do not mandate a conception of literary practices where all creativity is immanent to deficit and crises. They cultivate more than our sense of ecological crises. Their writing also exhibits what O’Sullivan (2001, p. 130) describes as the “deterritorialising function” of art: whereby the writer switches the reader’s register of experience. They
express and draw the reader into other planes of reality; into sensations felt on the skin; into microperceptions; into nonhuman intensities shaping bodies and catalysing non-and-more-than-human perceptions; into uncommon foldings of bodies (corporeal and incorporeal); into qualitative, dynamic spatialities traversing multiple temporalities; and into the haptic via the optic. To borrow O’Sullivan’s (2001, p. 127) reference to Bataille, their writing “takes the participant out of mundane consciousness”, making Life sensible. Without resorting to the filters of subjection, identity, molarity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 275), they “open […] us up to the nonhuman [and non-and-more-than-human] universe that we are part of […] if only for a moment” (p. 128). At their most potent, Eyrie, The Swan Book and Oyster produce in the reader a sensation of, as yet, uncompromised, un-surveilled, undefined, unsanctioned, un-axiomatised, unstratified relations (worlds) in which we are enfolded, that unfold, and into which we can fold, differently. At a minimum, these novels tell stories of worlds that disrupt habitual, conventional thought and prompt readers to question their senses. Either way, they are contagious. They are shaped by and carry potentials to infect readers with an appetite for other ways of knowing and relating. They can move thought past the idea of re-connection—which still implies separation—towards a sense of relationality, exteriority, and, therefore, inseparability as our initial condition: a sense of our unavoidable exposure to the contagions of others.
Second return

We can speak then of an empiricism of sensation, not an empiricism of the senses, not the sense knowledge underpinning methodological positivism, but an empiricism of the ‘in-experience’ of affect and the very limit of the phenomenal. (Clough, 2009, p. 51)

In this thesis, I conceptualise literary practices that possess subjective, social and political efficacies within a material-discursive context of Crises. I cite philosophy, theory, and, in particular, literary theory, and published literary studies attesting to these capacities. I identify these practices and capacities in encounters with three contemporary Australian novels. However, as I noted in my introduction, I have neither conducted the kinds of empirical research to be found in scientific and empirical studies of literary experience (SESLE), nor presented evidence from such research, to support my contentions. It might, then, be tempting to rush to research application at the completion of (or even in order to complete) such a thesis; to ask what research paths and methods might expand upon the studies of literature’s potentials in a world that Coleman and Ringrose (2013, p. 1) characterise as (socially, culturally, materially) “mobile, […] messy, […] creative, […] changing, […] open-ended, […] sensory and affective”? Albeit, it seems equally reasonable to interrogate the prospects for such real world research; particularly the ways in which research methods can intervene and make worlds (p. 1).
It may be that the propositions and analyses in this thesis could make useful contributions to the conceptualisation of transdisciplinary methods\footnote{Something Caracciolo (2016, p. 200) encourages.} for SESLE and the cultivation of ecological sense. Also, the fluid academic niches (Caracciolo & Van Duuren, 2015, p. 519) associated with SESLE appear to offer some prospects for research pathways that might add \textit{real world} evidence to the analyses in this thesis. Nevertheless, SESLE practitioners do not commonly position their work as having to do with responses to Crises of Ecologies, and only modest steps have been taken toward theorising posthuman research methodologies, and toward refined analyses of particular literary practices and their relationships with sensuous reader responses.\footnote{See Caracciolo (2016); Caracciolo and Van Duuren (2015); (2016); Jacobs (2017); Miall (2007); Popova (2014); Sikora, Kuiken, and Miall (2010).} More particularly, Deleuzo-Guattarian New Materialist onto-epistemologies and conceptualisations of literary practices serve to complicate and even confound matters of empirical/scientific research. Writing on the problematics of post-structural social science and humanities research practice, Elizabeth St Pierre (2016, p. 122) is candid: "The idea that one can design a study using Deleuzian concepts appears nonsensical".

Research problems include: defining which things and processes are present(ed)/absent(ed) to (and by) researchers; the (in)separability of the things studied; and the scope and qualities of the relations into which they enter and from which they arise. SESLE research, for example, privileges reading over writing practices (writer experience), and has, to date, given
little attention to the novel (Jacobs, 2015). Nor can researchers’ avoid interfering in the world (Clough, 2009, p. 49), not least with study-participants’ subjectively when they are asked to engage in particular reading encounters. Further, without engaging with sensation as prior to mind, studies of literature, sense, and cognition will risk re-inscribing the separable human mind and closing pathways to ecological sense.

Researchers face other difficulties: understanding and anticipating relations; attributing and mapping causes; and specifying, observing and measuring a/effects. Repeating results consistently, over time, across readers, and at different scales is confounded by the continuous variation in the assemblages into which the research enters. Research design, execution and evaluation cannot account adequately for immanence, complexity, and relationality (St. Pierre, Jackson, & Mazzei, 2016). Indeed, the literary practices studied, while exemplary, do not provide a model. Rather, they exemplify the potentials for the singular. We cannot know all that a body can do (writer, reader, and novel) as it enters into new encounters with other bodies in what, if we pay enough attention, are always varying contexts.

When conceiving of research into literary practices, we also need to reconceptualise value (Caracciolo & Van Duuren, 2015; Manning, 2017; St. Pierre, 2016). Not to define value in advance, nor to privilege quantitative

---

213 And vice versa (Muecke, 2009, p. 413).
214 See Colebrook (2014b) on related matters of mind.
215 See Caracciolo and Van Duuren (2015, p. 522) on Suzanne Keen’s work.
216 See Manning (2017) and St. Pierre (2016).
217 See also Chapter 2.
and financial conceptualisations, or the prospects for commoditisation, replication and mass dissemination of an idea. Rather, value might be experienced encounter by encounter, via rather than prior to each encounter. We can conceive of value as both in continuous variation and having precisely to do with encouraging continuous variation. Value might be conceived of as arising in relation and having to do with qualitative transformations in our powers of living and those of the bodies we encounter, the occurrences of which might be barely perceptible. Such questions of value return us to a less familiar empiricism of experiences, sensations, and transformations that are particular to each encounter (Deleuze, 1994, p. 57).

The challenges for SESLE research and the approach to value, noted above, might orient us toward particular literary practices—namely, embarking upon our own praxis as writers and readers (Deleuze, 1997, p. 3; 2004, p. 206)—that are, in themselves, not scholarship in any conventional sense but always and already singular, experiential acts of research into potentials. These would be acts of literary praxis as a technology of subjectivity (O'Sullivan, 2006, p. 17): writing and reading as processes of affirmative transformation, enabling shifts in registers of conception, perception, and powers of living amid Crises of Ecologies. Consequently, this thesis constitutes an aspirational call to action rather than a series of hypotheses to be scientifically/empirically tested. It is a call to investment in

---

218 See Manning (2017, p. 102) also on value.
creative work: to write and read differently, for difference, and differentially: to “expand the actual, inventively” (Coleman & Ringrose, 2013, p. 8).

Third return

This second way of reading’s intensive: something comes through or it doesn’t. There’s nothing to explain, nothing to understand, nothing to interpret. (Deleuze, 1995, pp. 7-8)

Much has been said in this thesis about writers’ literary practices carrying potentials to cultivate ecological sense in readers. Less has been said explicitly about readers’ literary practices. And yet, transformations occur where novels encounter readers.\textsuperscript{219} We cannot assume a passive reader upon whom cultivation is enacted; nor a lone reader uninfluenced by the assemblages in which they exist (which produce them); nor a common reader for whom particular effects can be deemed universally applicable (Baugh, 2000, p. 53). How, then, and in short, might we make moves toward reading practices that cultivate ecological sense?

We can enable alternative reading practices by allowing immanence and multiplicity into our relations and our notions of relations, rather than resting

\textsuperscript{219} See Clay (2010, p. 75) on poetry.
upon transcendentalism and unity. Where a reader is able to conceive of
themselves as a work in progress, encounters with novels can be
participations in Life production, rather than confirmations of identity or
verisimilar representations of Life. Consequently, novels are not misread via
“transcendent selections” (Haines, 2015, p. 546) that “arrest movement”
(Deleuze, 1995, p. 146), and stop experimentation. One aspect of reading to
cultivate ecological sense involves finding novels that disrupt and are at
odds with how we live and think (Augustine, 2010, p. 141): novels that
enable more than an interpretation (Baugh, 2000, p. 36) or a critique
(Bryant, 2013). We can, Mann-O’Donnell (2016, p. 138) notes, practice
patience and expansiveness when encountering a text: letting “texts ‘air
out’, letting one’s reading breathe”. We can bring an openness to our
reading, and “allow” for the language of the novel to disrupt our critical
tendencies to reduce it to something we know. In this way, we allow the
novel to differ and “to continue to flow against […] critics’ [and readers’]
attempts at reduction, oedipalisation and reunification” (p. 138).²²⁰ We can
ask how, if at all, the encounter with the novel “intensifies the feeling[s] of
Life” (Baugh, 2000, p. 53) and how, if at all, this augments or diminishes our
powers of living. A reading practice that is to do with creative
resingularisation, Augustine (2010) argues, is not to do with reading for
ideas to use, but for affects, intensities, concepts, and percepts that can be
folded into the reader; these enfoldings adding to the readers’ potential,
always relational, and collective, futures. Readerly practices of “propagating

²²⁰ See also Haines (2015, p. 548).
virtual collectives” (Tynan, 2012, p. 160) offer experiments in entering new assemblages that may be safer than those encompassing more than a reader-text encounter.221

Mann-O’Donnell (2016) suggests reading practices to cultivate affective athleticism. Texts, she argues, can be worked on as tasks of transformation: “to analyse the text in question, in such a manner as to become, to defect, to uproot” (p. 138). Augustine (2010, p. 45) notes, after Csikszentmihalyi, that reading practices might generate an experience of “flow”, during which a reader is unable to distinguish mental from physical forces, and exits from conventional realms of consciousness: losing sense of self as demarcated body; losing spatial and temporal bearings; and experiencing complete immersion. Reading practices are cultivated to thrive rather than falter when we experience a readerly “delirium” (Deleuze, 1997, p. 4): indeterminacy, suspension, uncertainty, opacity, flux, and, I contend, relations with strange bodies. Such readings require energy, cautions Mann-O’Donnell (2016), not least because they are practices of refusal: refusal of dominant narratives of how Life occurs.222

Deleuze does not suggest that how a novel works for him is how it will work for others, nor that the work will be the same each time, and nor, in the context of this thesis, can I predict that certain literary practices will cultivate aspects of ecological sense. Accordingly, I must concur with Deleuze’s promiscuous and experimental remedy for this problem: “if it doesn’t work, if

221 See Augustine on reading as ‘assembling’ (2010, p. 28).
222 See also Augustine (2010, p. 143).
nothing comes through, you try another book” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 8).

However, it is never solely a matter of finding another book. This thesis shows that there are literary practices—writing and reading—with the potential to cultivate aspects of ecological sense. They involve sensitivities to Life as process, even though much of it may be imperceptible. They involve opening to the new and they open out the new. They involve the search for, and practice of, transversality. They involve seeking and making difference in itself. They involve embracing and seeking intensive relations: collectivities that always, already include the non-and-more-than-human. Via practices such as these, we involve ourselves in relations of affirmative, collective vulnerability that are never really just to do with reading or writing novels, and that are never completely determined by Crises of Ecologies.
References


Alienation and identity in Australasian literature (pp. 15-36). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Brill/Rodopi.


extinction already arrived? *Nature*, 471(7336), 51-57. doi: 10.1038/nature09678


Burke, M., & Troscianko, E. T. (2017). Introduction. In M. Burke & E. T. Troscianko (Eds.), *Cognitive Literary Science: Dialogues between*


Colebrook, C. (2014c). We have always been post-anthropocene: The anthropocene counter-factual. Retrieved from https://www.academia.edu/12757260/We_Have_Always_Been_Post-Anthropocene


Davies, B. (2000b). *(in)scribing body/landscape relations*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.


Dillon, S. (2011). "It's a question of words, therefore": Becoming-animal in Michel Faber's "under the skin.". *Science Fiction Studies, 38*(1), 134-154. doi: 10.5621/sciefictstud.38.1.0134


Jacobs, A. M. (2015). The scientific study of literary experience: Sampling the state of the art. Scientific Study of Literature, 5(2), 139-170. doi: 10.1075/ssol.5.2.01jac


Johns-Putra, A. (2016). Climate change in literature and literary studies: From cli-fi, climate change theater and ecopoetry to ecocriticism and
climate change criticism. Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change, 7(2), 266-282. doi: 10.1002/wcc.385


Laigle, G. (1997). 'You can't be immature for ever': The painful process of growing up in Tim Winton's "that eye, the sky". *Commonwealth (Dijon), 19*(2), 22-32. Retrieved from [http://search.proquest.com/openview/a17d828439e9823d886a010ed302c11e](http://search.proquest.com/openview/a17d828439e9823d886a010ed302c11e)


McFarland, S. E. (2014). Animal studies, literary animals, and Yann Martel’s *life of pi*. In L. Westling (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to literature*


Senior, A. M., Nakagawa, S., & Grimm, V. (2014). The evolutionary consequences of disrupted male mating signals: An agent-based


