

WEAKNESS, LAMENESS AND VEERING. ON THE PRACTICAL DIMENSIONS OF THEORIES OF ECOCRITICISM

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Abstrakt: The article reviews some recent developments in ecocritical discourses. It briefly overviews the discipline from the point of view of weak thinking and comments on Timothy Morton's hyperobjects, a notion which results in what he calls "the state of weakness and lameness for human beings". This position is contextualised within the claims of Object-Oriented Ontology to demonstrate how – using Nicholas Royle's notion of veering – such ecothinking, while drawing on literary discourses, uses a weakened, non-anthropocentric position to offer an alternative to the standard 'strong' mode of thinking and writing about the environment, to take it beyond didacticism, guilt and threat.

Słowa kluczowe: hyperobjects, veering, ecocriticism, object-oriented ontology.

Tom Stoppard's *Darkside* (2013) offers an alarming description of the contemporary ecological situation:

The ice is melting. Your drink is getting warm.

A wall of water is heading for your patio. From

Space you can see the coal furnaces glowing.

[...]

We consume everything. We're dying of consumption.

Hardwoods are toppling for dashboards. The last

Rhino has given up its horn for a cancer cure that

doesn't work. The last swordfish is gasping beneath

A floating island of plastic as big as France. The

Weather forecast is a state secret.

(Stoppard 2013, 52)

Images of eco-apocalypse rapidly follow one another in pointing to the destructive consequences of human exploitation of the environment, where consumerism and capitalization of the Earth's resources seem to be the human *modus operandi*. The play, which is a radio adaptation of Pink Floyd's now classic record, explores the paradoxes of ethical and philosophical discourses, while also touching upon ecological issues. As both the record and the play draw to an end, the main character, Emily, suddenly seems to see Anthropocene for what it really is – a geological era marking human influence on the Earth and its surface (hence, the outer space perspective on the glowing coal furnaces). Faced with ethical dilemmas posed by her cynical philosophy teacher, Emily is quick to recognise the moral implications of entanglement in environmental thinking:

The Earth is a common.

You can't save it for yourself but

you can save it for others, and

the others will save it for you.

The other is us and we are the other...

(Stoppard 2013, 28)

Echoing the notion of 'the common' – in terms of the 'common land' as well as in the contemporary problematics of production and communication, and in the 'common ground' (see Casarino and Negri 2008), human inclusion within the environment is also seen as the blurring of boundaries and distinctions between us and them ('the other is us'). Such thinking not only pits humans against the Earth (or the other way around), but points to a certain 'enmeshing' (Morton 2010, 28–30) within the environment – a position where being one among many organisms also evokes the uncanny feeling of being a part of processes that take place beyond ourselves, or of brushing against objects which are of a completely different scale than they previously seemed.

In what follows, I will look into various forms of recording a weakened, nonanthropocentric critical position within ecocritical thought and attempt to sketch the possible modes of action that these positions allow. Ecocriticism, at a general level, might be defined as an interdisciplinary theoretical current informed by literary studies focusing on the importance of the natural environment and the problems arising from human exploitation of it. Significantly, it is also precisely within this terrain that a tangible shift into a non-human perspective can be registered most visibly. Running alongside other contemporary theoretical orientations within the humanities, this vantage point expanded the scope of literary studies by the environmental dimension of texts. At the same time, it also reoriented the crowning position of humans by putting us on a veering course, both, in theory and in practice, ultimately affecting our very sense of human agency.

My intention in discussing this shift is to focus on critical approaches to the environment as forms of academic writing and to see whether their weakened position and literary discursive language enables any fruitful thinking about the more tangible consequences of human-induced climate change. This involves paying particular attention to theories of understanding objects as problematized within object-oriented ontology (OOO). I will comment on the work of one of its prime exponents, Timothy Morton, and in particular, on his deliberations regarding how such thinking influences attempts to offer a somewhat altered, disoriented and perhaps weakened theoretical practice. Thus, I will outline Morton's view on the current human position with regards to the consequences of our interaction with what he qualifies as hyperobjects, in order to trace how being pushed into a position of *weakness* and *lameness* within the Age of Asymmetry (Morton 2013) may allow us to think through the uncanny viscosity of such entities. I will try to not only show the varied properties of such objects – since they are not only global in scale and equally vast in temporal scope – but include other distinction-problematic features, (like the example of viscosity), which transgress human perception and our ability to give a discursive and artistic account of the very experience of interacting with them. In this context, it's worth asking what kind of discursive properties such thinking entails and what is their effect on thinking and writing about the environment.

The surroundings, or environs as well as the theoretical venture proposed by Morton seem to (re)orient us even further towards a new understanding of what gets termed 'the environment', symptomatically, bringing with it a much broader perspective than the traditional anthropocentric one. This tendency is visible in the Derridean mode of theorising exhibited by Nicholas Royle's concept of "veering" (2011). This approach can be understood as a theory of literature, suggesting, among its connotations, not only a particularly philological preoccupation with the French word *vire* (Fr. to turn or turn around), but also one which highlights the non-verbal, the not-only-human (animals also veer) or the very physical dimensions of interacting with texts and what may be lying outside of them. Consequently, drawing on selected developments in literary ecocriticism, I will argue that encountering hyperobject realities does not simply affect the very mode of writing, producing a semi-literary mode of theoretical expression, but allows for different sensitivities and an altered sense of agency to emerge, especially when compared with capitalism or the discourse of the modernity-derived hard sciences.

The Weakness in/of Ecocriticism

While ecocriticism may seem to be a relatively young field of theoretical inquiry, forms of environmental thinking as such (those about nature, setting, environment, etc.) can be traced back to almost every point in human history¹. Although they signal a fairly continuous interest in the environment, at the end of the twentieth century new modes of considering human and non-human relationships began flourishing, accompanied by the academic legitimisation of ecological criticism. These are of particular interest here because despite initially being centred on literary criticism, they subsequently paved the way for a more literary writing style within the theoretical terrain. In fact, many critical accounts which open with a survey of the discipline's beginnings (e.g. Buell 1995, Garard 2004, Glotfelty 1996) date the burgeoning of the movement either in the 1960s or around the turn of the century. However, the critical position initially available to the orientation was one of marginality and, indeed, of weakness, as at the onset of its visibility in the 1980s, these critics needed to assert their ground in literary and cultural studies.

One reason for such disciplinary weakness (despite the evident environmental turn), was its lack of the more definite theoretical toolbox available to the discourses of the marginalized other, such as in postcolonialism or feminism. The sweeping broadness of early definitions of ecocriticism such as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment”, (in Glotfelty and Fromm 1996, xviii) corresponded to the multiplicity of its critics' aims as well as to a hiatus placed on entries regarding ecocriticism in critical theory handbooks. The domination of the anthropocentric position was absolute and visible within what were otherwise very well-written and insightful academic sources for thinking critically about literature. These sources were largely silent about any thriving forms of green thinking (see Cuddon 1999, Barry 2002, Macey 2000, Leitch 2001) and even if some

¹ The crash-course for such a reading would probably roughly run from the Greek philosophers of nature, through the pastoral tradition and Romanticism, to the Hippy, counterculture, New Age and onwards. See: Buell 2006, Love 2003.

references to the environment were made, they were done in passing and did not amount to a full-blown section².

Another aspect of the weakness of eco discourses was, paradoxically, its active, or practical dimension, stemming from the countercultural aftermath of the late 1960s, especially in terms of popular representations of both nature and environmentalism. In Western societies, the countercultural plea of a 'return to nature' incorporated an active reformulation of a way of life, as demonstrated or practiced by the hippies (e.g. communes), but referred to the realities conceptualised as a one-dimensional society, thus sustaining a thoroughly romanticised image of nature. With the growth of capitalist commodification in subsequent decades, Western popular culture was capitalising on New Age mysticism through supposedly more eco-friendly ways of life such as Yoga, Zen or vegetarian/vegan practices, linking them with ephemeral fads impacted by growing multinational businesses and consumer economies. Similarly, the anthropocentric representations of nature in the media not only aligned humans with evil and wrongdoing, but also with the environmentalist call for political action and protest, resurfacing whenever an oil spill or eco-disaster was reported on the news. Countering the stereotypical image of environmentalist militants chaining themselves to trees, ecocriticism developed as a critical discourse under the growing influence of capitalism and was concerned not only with radical action or activism, but with a set of practices: reading, thinking and writing about texts on the environment. This involved attempts to weaken the hitherto dominant anthropocentric position of such procedures. Although attempts to undermine human domination could already be seen in the 1960s within positions informing ecocriticism (e.g. Deep Ecology), in later decades, human-oriented thinking seemed to become the norm, even in relatively radical militant activist forms (e.g. Earth First!).

In this way, Lawrence Buell's claim about apocalypse being "the single most powerful metaphor that the contemporary environmental imagination has at its disposal" (Buell 1995, 93) seemed to put a finger on the growing tendencies in popular representations of nature, especially in literary and cinematic ones. From Rachel Carson's now classic *Silent*

2 Lentricchia's and McLaughlin's *Critical Terms for Literary Studies* (1994) for example, registers such a brief reference to an ecological perspective in a summary discussing issues of imperialism and nationalism with reference to Alfred W. Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism* (1986) where he speaks about large-scale human migrations between 1820s and 1930s which brought with them an unprecedented number of organisms and biota (Lentricchia and McLaughlin 1994, 354).

Spring (1962) and Nevil Shute's *On the Beach* (1957) to Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* (2003), and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), the apocalyptic imagination probed the threats of using pesticides and bio-technologies and tampering with the environment. These documents of fiction resulted in important real-life debates about ecology and the need to change legal regulations, but they were also instrumental in building both a popular mental picture of humans vs. nature as well the emblematic presence of environment-oriented critical practices and their interests.

Although the heightened attention focused on eco-disasters resulted in tendencies which evoked feelings of fear and contempt in representations of the natural environment, or what Simon Estok has aptly labelled 'ecophobia' (Estok 2011), much of ecocritical theoretical work attempted to think beyond the human ontology. While ecophobia certainly resonates with ecocriticism's early stages and its active potential in gesturing "toward activist possibilities, like other 'political' theories before it – "feminism, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and versions of cultural materialism" (Estok 2011, 2 *et passim*), it simultaneously tries to recognise the political dimension of simply reading and analysing texts. In this light, the canonical works of Shakespeare, for example, are discussed with an acknowledgement of the relationships between human and nonhuman animals, but they also seek to avoid binary thinking. More importantly, such an approach opens up literary studies to connection-making beyond the written page and suggests that – even though this is not the basic mode of human responses to nature – "there is a thing called ecophobia and that racism, misogyny, homophobia, and speciesism are thoroughly interwoven with it and with each other and must eventually be looked at together" (Estok 2011, 3).

Parallel to such perspectives, another line of inquiry developed around the turn of the century. Its growing academic interest stemmed from a growing fascination with what might be called "altered optics" – studies of plants, ecofeminism, animal studies, to name but a few. Such tendencies, including the later explorations of hyperobjects, distinguished posthumanities in general, affecting the form and content of critical writing, as well as the scope of interest, or potential modes of undertaking future action (see: Deleuze and Guattari 2004 [1972, 1980], Claire Colebrook 2014, Haraway 2016) .

Even the very notion of Anthropocene, despite what the name suggests, may be understood as an attempt at weakening human domination. Perhaps in some way

the geological origin of the term simply dissolves certain humanist and anthropocentric preconceptions of agency by rooting them directly in hyper-objective timescales. The discursive practices grouped under the umbrella term of ecocriticism could thus be seen as a form of intellectual work undermining the dominant structures of Western metaphysics to provide alternative forms of thinking and writing. The initial non-mainstream positioning of green critique, together with the deliberate linking of ecocriticism with the discourses of the marginalized, the repressed and the weak, was gradually supplanted by a vast and varied critical literature with a growing number of study guides, readers or critical companions. From general primers which locate the orientation as perhaps the latest instalment of theoretical methodologies (see Nayar 2010), and introductory companions (Clark 2011), to more specific environmental perspectives (Iovino and Oppermann 2014) and entire publishing series devoted to various aspects of ecological thinking (see the Posthumanities series of Minnesota Press) – ecocriticism, despite its weaknesses, is a thriving field and an active force in contemporary humanities.

We the Weak, the Lamé and the Disoriented

The previous section discussed the conceptual weakness of environmental criticism, whereas what follows considers the weakening of the human subject in terms of altered agency, stressing the unimportance of the human ontological position probed in critical discourse. Such tendencies, in parallel to ‘weak thinking’ in general, need not to be seen as a symptom of something negative. They are rather an attempt to think through the difference as an inherent part of late modernity, associated with looking for alternative modes of thinking which can deconstruct domination and problematise any form of making firm judgements (see Vattimo 1994).

One way of approaching such a task and coordinating it with questions concerning human agency, literature and ecology, is through a materialist perspective. Taking their cue from Glotfelty’s now classic definition of ecocriticism, where she claims that “literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact” (Glotfelty and Fromm 1994, xix), more material-oriented theorists within ecocriticism draw on a wide array of disciplines (from quantum physics, philosophy, anthropology, through biology and

sociology, to cultural studies, to name but a few) to think outside the anthropomorphising box. The editors of *Material Ecocriticism*, for example, state the goals for their discursive practices as attempts to explore “possible ways to analyse language and reality, human and nonhuman life, mind and matter, without falling into dichotomous patterns of thinking” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 2 *et passim*). What they call “material narrativity” leads to a different and less human-centred idea of literature, where the material discourse creates a frame for criticism as “literary stories emerge from the intra-action of human creativity and the narrative agency of matter”. Although a degree of anthropomorphizing is used here “as a heuristic strategy aimed at reducing the (linguistic, perceptive, and ethical) distance between the human and the nonhuman”, it can also easily be taken to counteract any dualistic ontology and used to reveal the similarities and symmetries between the two. This approach recognizes the shared creativity of human and nonhuman agents and, as is typical for eco-interests, attempts to probe the co-dependencies of nature, culture and literature to get them thinking about “the natural-cultural dynamics of the material world” (Iovino and Oppermann 2014, 6). Thus, it insists on an enmeshing perspective, with mutual interactions or mergers. However, given the relative newness of these tendencies, the conglomerate of material-oriented positions also varies depending on the theorists thinking through these matters. Obviously, this includes critical voices which come from within the material ranks in order to think through the non-human ecology, but which identify that “the posthuman [...] renounces human privilege or species-ism but then fetishizes the posthuman world as man-less” (Colebrook 2014, 160).

While such materialistic positions recognize the problems of dualistic ontologies, other critics attempt to deliberately explore the ‘weakening’ gap between discourse and things. For Timothy Morton (2013) for example, the weakness of the human position is one of the three categories of effects associated with becoming aware of hyperobjects and our attempts at conceptualizing the human place in the world in relation to them. Objects as diverse as global warming, oil spills, or the Florida Everglades, through their massiveness in distribution, scale and influence on human beings, necessarily push us into a position of weakness. Because of their size and influence – which takes place in more of geological timescale – they force an alteration and revision of the human frame of mind. The fact that hyperobjects need to be considered in relationist terms affects various spheres of human existence – from the conceptual repertoire available to humans to posing “numerous threats

to individualism, nationalism, anti-intellectualism, racism, special, anthropocentrism, ... [p]ossibly even capitalism itself? (Morton 2013, 21). In fact, the growth and development of capitalism can, in turn, also constitute a significant factor contributing to the emergence of hyperobject ontologies in recent years. Since it is also a fundamentally global phenomenon of an extended timescale, capitalism may also be seen as instrumental in paving the way for more 'existential' critical perspectives, easing a conceptual approach to hyperobjects, like climate change. It may also be regarded as playing an active role in redefining the very existential condition of the human and non-human. Such changes are responsible for what Morton calls 'the end of the world', which not only renders "both denialism and apocalyptic environmentalism obsolete" but which has "already ushered in a new phase of *hypocrisy*, *weakness*, and *lameness*." (Morton 2013, 2). Furthermore, claims like these contrast with previously mentioned ecophobia as a norm in discussions about the environment, and following from such fundamental realizations also direct us to the possibilities of thinking differently about nature, ecology and about undertaking action.

As much as the notions which Morton identifies are associated with the inherently weak constitution of the human subject (one which, according to these standpoints, we share with all beings), they also stem from the discursive limitations of human attempts to formulate any accounts of reality. As Morton explains (Morton 2013, 2 *et passim*), *hypocrisy* results from the impossibility of a metalanguage; *weakness* stems from the gap between phenomenon and thing, "which the hyperobject makes disturbingly visible"; and *lameness* "from the fact that all entities are fragile (as a condition of possibility of their existence)". Hyperobjects thus reveal and draw attention to a certain lack or failing in all entities. As he argues, they cause irreductionist thinking, because "they present us with scalar dilemmas in which ontotheological statements about which thing is the most real (ecosystem, world, environment or conversely, individual) become impossible" (Morton 2013, 19).

Such thinking is explored by object-oriented ontology (OOO), a new mode of philosophical inquiry with links to speculative realism, as exhibited by the work of Graham Harman, Ian Bogost or in some ways Quentin Meillassoux. It attempts to counter what Morton (2013, 9) calls the "narrow bandwidth" of philosophy, which goes back to at least Romanticism. Influenced by Heidegger's phenomenology, it also equates human existence with other forms of life and holds that the existence of objects is independent of our perception and of their relations with other objects, including humans (see Harman 2002).

With all objects in a sense equal, this philosophical movement can be precisely captured by the subtitle of Harman's recent book has it: *A New Theory of Everything* (2018). The thing or object part of this subtitle is particularly significant. As a realist philosophy, OOO thus recognizes that our approach to reality is destined to be indirect as "reality is always radically different from our formulation of it, and it is never something we encounter directly in the flesh" (Harman 2018, 7). This means that not only objects are inherently inaccessible to us, but also that all objects are equally important, regardless of whether they are human or not (Harman 2018, 9). Such a 'flat ontology' recognizes the difference between objects and their properties, and, while following the realist side of thinking in recognising that the "external world exists independently of human awareness", it also claims that objects are autonomous and in a way opaque to each other (Harman 2018, 10). Morton, in turn, places himself within the OOO movement and holds that "all entities (including "[him]self") are shy, retiring octopuses that squirt out a dissembling ink as they withdraw into the ontological shadows" (Morton 2013, 3). Such claims rephrase Harman's belief in "*withdrawal* or *withholding* of things from direct access" as one of the central principles in this mode of thinking (Harman 2018, 7). In other words, OOO argues that our access to things is always necessarily limited, we never grasp the whole thing, but also that thinking is not the only (and by far not the best) form of accessing objects. As Morton explains: these two insights give us a world where anthropocentrism is obsolete and no longer possible, "because thought has been extremely closely correlated with being human for so long, and because human beings have mostly been the only ones allowed to access other things in a meaningful way" (Morton 2018, xli). Object-oriented ontology is not necessarily about the possibility of recognizing the importance of other forms of being or the unimportance of the human ontological condition. It rather facilitates the freeing of our thinking from the biased burden of the dominant intellectual conceptualizations entangled in the human system of power, privilege and value.

Such premises allow for a revised thinking about some of the key notions regulating our perception of ecological thinking. Morton's writing not only recognizes 'extended families' in fellow creatures or nonhumans, but at the same time recognizes an uncanny weirdness in our similarity to other beings. Works like *Dark Ecology* (2016) trace such disturbing familiarity, or the uncanny quality of nature and the environment and stem from an argument which exposes the way in which concepts like Nature (which he deliberately capitalizes to expose its artificial and constructed character) have regulated human

conceptualization of the environment and resulted in the physical and conceptual denigration of the natural environment within the Anthropocene (see Morton 2007).

However, with the advent of the recognition of hyperobjects, an operational change in conceptualizing the ecosystems becomes perceptible. Similar in scale to ecological disasters, the paradoxical influence of such entities is associated with a radical break from the past:

The discovery of hyperobjects and OOO are symptoms of a fundamental shaking of being, a *being-quake*. The ground of being is shaken. There we were, trolling along in the age of industry, capitalism, and technology, and all of a sudden we received information from aliens, information that even the most hardheaded could not ignore, because the form in which the information was delivered was precisely the instrumental and mathematical formulas of modernity itself. The Titanic of modernity hits the iceberg of hyperobjects. (Morton 2013, 19)

Since they stem from modernism and capitalism, the objective and rational qualities of modern thinking do not suffice and that is why object-oriented ontologists often turn to a somewhat different mode of writing. The problem of hyperobjects, as Morton claims, should be tackled in a completely different way, taking a new form which might correspond with the break from its entanglement in the value-laden thinking of the past - one which simply fails in the face of hyperobjects or any serious thinking through of the consequences of the Anthropocene. Instead, we should make an effort to 'unlearn how to be modern' as modernity cannot solve the problem of hyperobjects – it “banks on certain forms of ontology and epistemology to secure its coordinates” (Morton 2013, 19). Consequently, even though a lot of factual information, data and scientific information about physical objects pepper Morton's and Harman's writing – mirroring the often 'standard' mode of general eco-writing – their work deliberately departs from a reliance on science as a legitimizing discourse. With frequent use of such semi-literary modes of phrasing and imagery as in the example above, their work shows how philosophy “has a much closer relationship with aesthetics than with mathematics or natural science” (Harman 2018, 9).

Indeed, the quake in being recognized by Morton has not only affected our mode of life but also shaken the practices of academic writing. Taking into account other forms of existence (including nonhuman ones), the human experience needs to transcend nihilism and

recognize that “[t]o live in this pluralistic world means to experience freedom as a continual oscillation between belonging and *disorientation*” (Vattimo 1994:10; my emphasis). The loss of coordinates and haziness of oscillation have, in turn, influenced artistic and academic practices which attempt to represent this current state of affairs. A notion which evokes and corresponds to this confusion in a particularly inspiring way is that of ‘veering’ proposed by Nicholas Royle (2011). Even though it is subtitled ‘a theory of literature’, the whole endeavour is not limited to this single discourse, especially since Royle himself recognizes its non-anthropocentric dimension. The French verb *vire*, (‘to turn’), reverberates across all sorts of turns (including literary and theoretical ones), and willingly touches upon the idea of *environment*. As such it not only reorients us towards a new understanding of that which encircles us but also that which marks a certain turning point or change in thinking and writing about literature or ecology. Since veering is not only limited to human beings (other objects, like stars, for example, also veer), it is thus non-anthropocentric, and recognizes the loss of validity of terms such as ‘nature’ or ‘the environment’. It acknowledges the fact that even within literary studies, or humanities in general, the latter concept has become a pressing and vital problem and that, in fact, multiple environments of degradation have an ecological dimension:

The ‘globalization’ of finance capital’ is inextricably bound up with war and terror (and with all the forces and counterforces of the pursuit of democracy, the establishment of human rights in a worldwide context, and an indestructible passion for justice, but also with questions of the earth, the place of non-human animals, sense and value of the environment. (Royle 2011, 62).

While critical inquiry into environmental issues needs to accommodate the latter line of thinking – especially with emphasising the overlapping of the global human practices of capitalism and politics with ecological issues – Morton’s explorations of modernity’s ‘encounters’ with hyperobjectivity might in this context be viewed as a recognition of capitalism’s active role in reshaping the human and non-human existential condition. In fact, other recent voices outwardly employ the term Capitalocene instead of Anthropocene, because it seems more adequate in recognising capitalism (or generally different modes of production) – and not humans – as the root cause of ecological changes (Moore 2018).

In their book *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, Bonneuil & Fressoz (2016) complicate such an account and even though they do not employ the term itself, it is clear that capitalism may also be treated as a hyperobject. Drawing on a substantial number of historical and social data, they demonstrate how capitalism “has become coextensive with the Earth” and how it also gave rise to what they call ‘second nature’, or the logistic technostructural build-up of roads, mines, pipelines or banks which “swung the Earth system into Anthropocene” (2016: 409) This era, as they argue, did result “from a long historical process of economic exploitation of human beings and the world”, but has to be regarded through the conditions shaped by capitalism and the globalising economy which made industrialisation possible and which reach back to at least the sixteenth century. The socio-economic perspective which the authors adopt enables demonstrating how British economic and imperial practices were in fact more profitable, connected and open “than a history focused on production might lead us to believe” and how it contributed to the British and European hegemony in what they call ‘the Great Acceleration’. Financial procedures that the British were initiating and governing in the eighteenth century, for example, resulted not only in creating fortunes, positions of political power or various industries, but were involved in global trade (e.g. income from the East India Company) which created “invisible revenue”, e.g. from shipping and insurance” (2016: 411). These processes were also extended over numerous physical spaces connected to and defined by their productive capacity (plantations, farming) which would later be affected by mining, farming, or pasture – not without substantial impact on the environment. The advantages of such hyper-perspective concern point to how, for example, the birth of underdevelopment resulted from these processes and how it helps to recognise the unequal character of development in different corners of the world.

Significantly, such thinking about the Anthro and Capitalocene enables identifying more than industrial capitalism’s dependency on fossil fuel, signalling an awareness of the very mode in which certain issues are discussed. The fact that humans have ceased to be at the centre of the world stems not only from their exploitative practices but from the manner in which such a position is verbalised and conceptualised. This is particularly visible in Royle’s semantically rich notion of veering and claims like this one: “if an environment *environs*, it does not merely environ the human” (Royle 2011, 2). Unifying humans and non-humans in its scope and properties, this ‘veering’ perspective allows a rethinking of various

species together and, in an uncanny way, also explores the temporal dimension – “it is a matter of linking this not only with the astonishing rapidities of techno science and ‘the computer age’ but also with the more obviously non-anthropocentric challenges of ‘deep time’ – whether prehistoric or futural“ (Royle 2011, 62). It is concerned with interrogating and explaining such complicated relationships while probing the uncanny qualities of our proximity with other entities, including the singularity of each particular instance of veering. Literature, anthropocentrism or space and time are just a few of the approaches here which explore the weakened human subject. In place of active and domineering theoretical moves, thinking with and in a veering manner requires us and our critical practice to attune to the “the strangeness of literature (including its relation to law and democracy); the animal that you are; spectrality; and the environment” (Royle 2011, 62). No wonder then that to an extent, theoretical practice also reflects such approaches. The recent *Companion for Environmental Thinking* (Cohen and Duckert 2017), for instance, makes veering into its guiding principle by turning nouns often associated with eco-discourses into verbs intended to tease out the active potential of some key notions in the current environmental debate. Needless to say, the collection holds interesting contributions by Morton, who discusses our attunement to the natural environment (2017), and Royle, who offers an afterword on the veer (2017).

Being Ecological or Ecological Being?

I would like to conclude by pushing the title of one of the latest books by Timothy Morton (2018) into a somewhat veering motion, spurred by the title of this section. So far, we have seen how ecotheory has moved from a marginalized discourse associated with militant practices or evoking a tone of apocalyptic disaster to one which recognizes non-human perspectives by acknowledging the importance of animals, the environment and material practices. It is against such a backdrop that the realist positions of object-oriented ontology, aided by a phenomenological probing of experience but with a reversal of the customary human-centered point of view, seem to offer a more intricate way of conceptualizing the weakened human subject involving a correspondingly weak intellectual practice. While the unquestionable appeal of OOO – especially when coupled with Royle’s attempt at embracing the plurality of life’s turns, literature and our thinking about the environment – may be indicative of a broader collective critical trend to bring about a change in ecocriticism,

such positions, however, may simply also beg the question of their ultimate usefulness in attempting to actually *be* ecological.

Having learned that the place available to the human subject is no longer one of domination, control, or a physical crowning of existence, we need to acknowledge that we are affected by (or, in the most radical sense, even living inside) hyperobjects – a situation which further affects and weakens the positioning of the human subject. Such a perspective necessarily has a bearing on the discursive strategies within ecocriticism which currently have to deal with what Morton calls ‘planetary awareness’, or “the creeping realization not that “we are the world”, but “that we aren’t” (Morton 2013, 101). While changes in the conceptual framework and content of much ecowriting are also visible in academic practice, it is through sticking with thinkers like Morton that allows us to take a look at how one might attempt to live in an ecological way. However, what his book does not do is to specifically hint at what the title might suggest (*Being Ecological*). Instead, it attempts to raise the awareness of its readers through engaging with some eco issues in a discursive way, inviting them to a particular way of thinking, argumentation and reasoning, without resorting to didacticism or threat-making that much of the concrete eco-advice literature professes.

Such a strategy may certainly be criticised for being wishy-washy. However, looking at seemingly more immediately effective perspectives which also define the present situation as askew, straightforward solution-giving clearly has its drawbacks, too. Like the varied strains of ecocriticism, Nick Land’s *Dark Enlightenment* (2012), for instance, also offers an altered and critical optics of human development, yet it does so at the high price of risking racist and exclusivist implications. Although not particularly focused on the environment as such, the philosopher’s propositions have a negative view of the ramifications of the industrial revolution. Despite being articulated in a succinct way, such a reading of the threats of modernity is much more controversial or even reactionary. Civilization, for example, is seen as broad time-scale process “indistinguishable from diminishing time-preference (or declining concern for the present in comparison to the future)” in which democracy, “both in theory and evident historical fact accentuates time-preference to the point of convulsive feeding-frenzy, is thus as close to a precise negation of civilization as anything could be, short of instantaneous social collapse into murderous barbarism or zombie apocalypse (which it eventually leads to)” (Land 2012). According to Land, the chief socio-political ideals which go back to the Enlightenment, like humanism, democracy and equality, have resulted in

the zombie apocalypse of consumerism and consumption. Consequently, since modernity is to be blamed for the appetites likely to eventually devour society, as well as the state of the environment in total, the English philosopher and his acolytes are calling for a return to past forms of social organization. Unfortunately, such pleas also endorse racist inequalities (“ethno-racial national identity”), suggesting a radical reworking of the socio-political organisation of the world (modelled, obviously, on the current dominant economies) along the lines of ‘modern’ feudalism. In consequence, the democratic limitations of the present day would be overcome by installing CEOs in the place of sovereigns. Additionally, the right-wing sympathies of this intellectual formation, articulated on the Internet, have quite rightly caused critical response, especially given the racist and ethno-centric bias of such propositions.

In this context, OOO or the theory of hyperobjects are conceptually and practically weak. While they might be seen as simply too theoretical, too caught up in their very own discursive practices and centred on grand terms like ontology, I would argue that their disorienting veering whirlwind of meanings is exactly their strength. Their merit lies in attempts at finding a proper language to render the current human position, indeed, as entrapped between the environmental complexities and catastrophic developments on the one hand and limitations of a theorizing ontology on the other. Such thinking seems to be particularly useful in times of the Anthro- and Capitalocene, because it reveals the essayistic literary convention as potentially more effective than traditional theory, as examples of *Veer Ecology* illustrate. While popular ecological writing frequently operates on factual information, often employing what Morton calls a ‘guilt-inducing’ mode (2018, xlv), the “veering” narrative allows problematization without didacticism. Consequently, the intellectual standpoints discussed above respect a certain autonomy of understanding, thinking, critical writing and theoretical praxis. The paradoxical point of such perspectives is that perhaps it inspires a theoretical practice which actually leads to practical change.

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Tymon Adamczewski – adiunkt w Zakładzie Literaturoznawstwa i Kulturoznawstwa Angielskiego na UKW w Bydgoszczy. Bada dyskursy krytyczne współczesnego literaturoznawstwa oraz ich związki z filozofią, a w szczególności z myślą Jacques'a Derridy. Obecnie pracuje nad zadaniem kategorii doświadczenia w obcowaniu z tekstami (nie tylko) literackimi, a także kwestiami etyki i znaczeniem ekokrytyki dla lektury i interpretacji.

Tytuł: Słabe, chrome i skolowaciale. O praktycznych wymiarach teorii ekokrytycznych.

Abstrakt: Autor omawia w artykule współczesne osiągnięcia dyskursów ekokrytyki, próbując odczytać je przez pryzmat słabej myśli. Główna uwaga poświęcona jest intrygującym propozycjom teoretycznym Timothy'ego Mortona dotyczącym hiperobiektywów, które ukazane

zostają w kontekście OOO (object-oriented ontology), a które uznać można za przykłady innego sposobu uprawiania teorii i praktyki akademickiej. Wykorzystując pojęcie *veering* (skołowacenia) Nicholasa Royle'a, autor wskazuje zalety osadzenia rozważań w „osłabionej”, nieantropocentrycznej perspektywie, która stanowi alternatywę dla bardziej dydaktycznych i opartych na poczuciu winy dyskursów krytycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: hiperobjekty, skołowacenie, ekokrytyka, ontologia zorientowana na przedmiot.