

Secret Perceptions: Speculative Aesthetics in Wu Ming-Yi's *The Man With the Compound Eyes*

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Abstract

According to Timothy Morton, “hyperobjects” are “things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans” (1).¹ Thus, hyperobjects (e.g., global warming, pollution, and ecological systems) are so vast and dispersed that we can only discern them obliquely. Nevertheless, the task of speculative realism – a recent philosophical development that seeks to undermine anthropocentrism by imagining the real experiences of non-human organisms and even inorganic objects – is to uncover these secret realms in order to more ethically engage the ecological crises of our time. Rather than close our eyes to the very real dangers of ecological degradation, Morton insists that we make them glaringly visible: he argues, for example, that nuclear waste should be encased in gold and put on public display, because there “is no *away* into which we can meaningfully sweep the radioactive dust” (120).

Taiwanese author Wu Ming-Yi's provocative novel, *The Man With the Compound Eyes* (2011, trans. 2013), similarly emphasizes the need to make ecological secrets visible. It does so by aestheticizing objects and animals, encouraging its readers to assume the bizarrely non-human perspectives, specifically, of plastic and insects (the plot documents a hyperobject in the form of a massive, floating plastic vortex crashing into the Taiwanese coast, as well as the need to adopt the titular character's vision). Employing a speculative realist reading of non-human aesthetics, I will explore the ways in which *Compound Eyes* rigorously examines the secret affects, aesthetics, and perspectives needed to confront ecological catastrophe in the Taiwanese context.

Keywords: Taiwanese literature, science fiction, speculative realism, aesthetics, ecological studies

¹ Morton, Timothy. *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology After the End of the World*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013.