

Expedition cruising in Solander: An application of ecology without nature

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Abstract

In his 2007 book *Ecology Without Nature*, Timothy Morton proposes that reified Nature, the idea that nature is a set of objects separate from us, interferes with properly ecological approaches to art, culture and politics. Morton argues also that much writing about nature exacerbates this separation, even as it appears to reduce the distance between humans and the nonhuman world. One powerful mechanism establishing and maintaining the separation of humans from such reified nature is the process of aestheticisation; requiring the viewer to step back in order to appreciate the beauty of a natural object, in a way similar to imbuing a work of art with what Walter Benjamin called *aura*. Morton argues that this mechanism contributes strongly to poor environmental protection and suggests that a consideration of Benjamin's *aura* and its companion notion *distraction* may cast some light on how to encourage *the ecological thought*, a truly ecological form of critique.

Expedition cruising is a form of nature-based tourism and often involves visiting areas rich in dramatic scenery, and viewing varieties of nonhuman animals that humans find charismatic. Such cruising involves individuals, who have already a sense of self, performing the role of tourist. On some of these cruises a strong *public narrative* is provided in order to demonstrate how passengers should respond to their surroundings, usually how to experience the sublime and the beautiful.

This work takes a narrative approach to illustrating a practical application of Morton's theoretical treatment of art, nature and environment, through considering *aura* and *distraction* while expedition cruising in the waters of southern New Zealand and its sub-Antarctic islands.