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Beaumont, Alexander (2018) Cosmopolitanism without a World? David Mitchell's Cloud Atlas. Open Library of Humanities, 4 (2). p. 21.

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How to Cite: Beaumont, A 2018 Cosmopolitanism without a World? David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2): 21, pp. 1–39. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.349

Published: 02 October 2018

Peer Review:

This article has been peer reviewed through the double-blind process of *Open Library of Humanities*, which is a journal published by the Open Library of Humanities.

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Alexander Beaumont, 'Cosmopolitanism without a World? David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*' (2018) 4(2): 21 *Open Library of Humanities*. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.349

FREEDOM AFTER NEOLIBERALISM

Cosmopolitanism without a World? David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

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This article argues that David Mitchell's 2004 novel *Cloud Atlas* equivocates between an optimistic articulation of a global public sphere and a more pessimistic inability to offer its readers a vision in which this public sphere can be realised. I attribute this equivocation to two competing imaginaries within the novel. The first—a cosmopolitan imaginary—wishes to dispense with teleological accounts of human beings, the societies they create and the world in which these societies are located. The second—an emancipatory imaginary—evidences deep concerns regarding the carceral conditions that increasingly dominate the world at the beginning of the twenty-first century. Mitchell's text appears to evidence an awareness that the promises of freedom around which neoliberal governance has been instituted look increasingly hollow, and thus that the concept of freedom is ripe for reengagement. However, the fact that freedom represents a telos at odds with the novel's cosmopolitan ethics produces a pessimistic philosophy of history that forecloses any hope for the realisation of human freedom. The cosmopolitan imaginary of *Cloud Atlas* thus acts as a brake on its emancipatory imaginary and lends the novel a characteristically cyclical structure in which acts of ethical commitment are stripped of ramification. Finally, the article argues that the impasse between the novel's competing imaginaries is indicative of a larger challenge confronting cosmopolitan discourse today and suggests that a move beyond the ethical humanism at the heart of this discourse is necessary if an understanding of freedom-as-action is to have any place within it.

In a 2012 article, Berthold Schoene draws a distinction between two broad trends within the contemporary British novel. The first of these he terms 'cosmo-kitsch' and dismisses as 'paying lip service to the world's potential as a global village in continual convivial flux' (2012: 105). He is more enthusiastic about the second, however, which he considers to be characterised by a genuine 'cosmopoetics' that is capable of 'ris[ing] to the challenge of imagining humanity in its planetary entirety' (2012: 105). Schoene identifies David Mitchell's 2004 novel *Cloud Atlas* as a good example of cosmopoetics and argues that Mitchell's work:

> Elicits a sense of global cohesion precisely by yielding to the world's brokenness and fragmentation, a sense of global connectivity and neighbourly proximity by representing individual alienation, and a sense of world community by envisioning humanity beyond any determinate purpose other than reiterating the fundamental condition of our planetary conviviality. (2012: 109)

The assertion that *Cloud Atlas* refuses to attribute to humanity a determinate purpose—a telos—is surely true. In the novel's closing pages, the notary Adam Ewing disagrees with those who 'discern motions in history & formulate these motions into rules that govern the rises & falls of civilizations' and argues instead that 'history admits no rules; only outcomes' (Mitchell, 2004: 528). In adopting this position, Ewing permits himself just one, fundamental principle—opposition to human predation in all its forms—which provides an ethical grounding for the abhorrence the novel demonstrates over nearly six hundred pages towards the instrumentalisation of human life. In keeping with its non-teleological ethics, Mitchell's novel suggests that, wherever such instrumentalisation is found, it is bound to produce unfreedom.

The most dystopian manifestation of this logic is the fate embodied by Sonmi~451, one of an army of fabricant slaves living in a dystopian future Korea who, without realising it, are 'doomed from their wombtanks' (Mitchell, 2004: 359) to provide slave labour for a fast food chain named Papa Song's. Though promised a comfortable retirement after a brutal and humiliating period of indenture, at the end

of their useful lives the fabricants are in fact slaughtered, butchered and turned into protein for their fellow fabricants and the restaurant's customers. Elsewhere in the novel, unfreedom is represented in the mid-nineteenth century by imperialism and the international slave trade; in the interwar years of the twentieth century by the manipulation and effective imprisonment of a young composer; during the 1970s by the battle fought by a journalist to expose the dangerous industrial practices of a multinational energy corporation; in the early years of the twenty-first century by the incarceration of an embittered publisher in a care home; and finally—though in some ways most subtly—by the sense of moral inertia experienced by a peaceful but cowardly member of a tribe that is being predated upon by a more bloodthirsty tribe in post-apocalyptic Hawaii. The paralysis of will experienced by Zachry, this final character, living many centuries after Ewing, is positioned as a consequence of the predatory and unfree society in which the earlier character lives. And the culminating moment of the novel—Ewing's commitment to the abolition of the slave trade—raises the possibility of a break with this future genealogy. The novel thus seems to suggest that, without free acts of moral reflection and ethical commitment of the sort performed by Ewing, humanity is forevermore condemned to live in both outward and inward states of unfreedom.

From the perspective that focalises the novel's conclusion—a liberal cosmopolitanism which, as Kristian Shaw (2017: 65) writes, 'rejects a teleological approach' to the world and humanity's place within it—there would appear to be little to object to in this position. After all, how could the decision of a man to commit himself to abolitionism despite full knowledge of the obstacles that stand in his way be a bad thing? How could a commitment to human freedom of this kind be problematic? Yet from the reader's perspective, Ewing's commitment appears platitudinous because his acknowledgement of the difficulties he will face—staged inwardly in an imagined dialogue with his father-in-law—is complicated by an expectation of historical awareness that is both foregrounded and wrongfooted by the novel's structure. On the one hand, we are encouraged to recognise that the abolitionist movement was successful: slavery was abolished; today we are free. *Cloud*

Atlas thus smuggles in the most reassuring kind of telos in its closing moments: a telos already achieved. On the other hand, the neatness of this resolution alerts us to the fact that Mitchell has already comprehensively undermined Ewing's '*Whiggish* sentiments' (Mitchell, 2004: 529, italics in original) since, within the very history that his epiphany precedes, unfreedom persists everywhere. Ewing's commitment to abolitionism might therefore furnish us with an emotionally satisfying conclusion, but the striking temporality of the novel—wherein the events that happen after his opening section are nested within and bookended by the account of his moral awakening in what the novel itself describes as 'an infinite matrioshka doll of painted moments' (163)—seems designed to remind us that there is no guarantee that a moment of ethical commitment will result in meaningful change.[1] Even if Ewing's awakening is taken in itself to be good, in that it represents a form of 'performative ethical agency' (Shaw, 2017: 45), the novel's structure still casts a pessimistic shadow over its closing pages that appears to empty this agency of any meaning. While Mitchell deploys techniques that permit the reader some room for an alternative interpretation of its form, the historical sequencing of its constituent narratives raises questions over whether Ewing's commitment leads or is capable of leading to the realisation of the freedom he so desires.[2] And, more to the point, *Cloud Atlas*

[1] A gloomier interpretation might argue that Ewing's commitment is no different from every other event in every other historical period represented in *Cloud Atlas*; indeed, critics have described the novel as 'oscillat[ing] between discrete succession and cyclic repetition' (Harris, 2015: 3) in a way that 'simply calcif[ies] the brutality humanity has shown itself capable of, rather than opening up the way for positive change' (Hicks, 2010: n. pag.).

[2] One way in which critics of *Cloud Atlas* have sought to escape the temporal trap that the novel sets for its readers is to marginalise the sequential relationship between its nested narratives and to emphasise instead that '[t]he movement in this novel is not, as it first appears, a teleological movement forward in time toward apocalypse, but rather the gradual consumption over time of different media of expression' (Hopf, 2011: 119). This reading allows the sting to be taken out of *Cloud Atlas*'s troubling philosophy of history since the novel can safely be identified as a postmodern comment upon the palimpsestic nature of storytelling and its narrative nesting understood as the occasion for comments upon the 'transformative power of metalepsis' (117). In this analysis, the novel's repeated transgression of diegetic boundaries functions to replace a cyclical with a recursive structure that insists upon the singularity of the ethical demand articulated within each of its narratives and, though this iterative form, ultimately places a burden of ethical responsibility upon the shoulders of the reader. Yet, whether one opts for an optimistic reading that emphasises the novel's metaleptic

cannot have it any other way, since freedom represents a telos at odds with its own non-teleological ethics. The novel thus betrays a profound ambivalence regarding the relationship between its cosmopolitan and emancipatory imaginaries. Examined from one direction, it suggests that freedom can be imagined but never with the hope that it will be realised, since the expectation attending such an emancipatory aspiration necessarily traduces the novel's cosmopoetics. Looked at from the other direction, it emphasises the need to engage in a cosmopolitan ethical practice which, in the absence of the determinative role of the telos, is bound to be limited in its implications for human freedom.

Unlike Schoene, then, I think that *Cloud Atlas*'s cosmopoetics represent less a route through the carceral conditions that so perturb Mitchell than a troubling redescription of them. Rather than offering the reader an opportunity to navigate the challenging conditions of planetary existence, the novel's chiastic structure points instead to an impasse.[3] But while this impasse is stubborn, I want to argue that it is also suggestive—even helpful. As Garrett Brown (2009: 32) points out, since its modern inception in the European Enlightenment, cosmopolitan thought has been organised around 'the attainment of universal justice,' something that 'requires the broader cultivation of a cosmopolitan civil society'. During the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the universalism of this vision has been subject

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gestures or a pessimistic reading that emphasises the grim determinism of its cyclical temporality, it remains the case that the moment of ethical commitment that arrives in the novel's concluding paragraphs entails no meaningful ramifications within the world of the novel itself. However one accounts for the relationship between its constituent narratives, *Cloud Atlas*'s formal experiment excises from this moment any possibility of the historical realisation of its concluding aspiration: namely, human freedom.

[3] It is perhaps for this intractable reason that some of the more optimistic interpretations of the novel have characterised it as utopian. For instance, Fredric Jameson (2011: 308–09) argues that *Cloud Atlas*'s dialectical representation of civilisation and barbarism 'shatter[s] their twin dominion [so] that we might conceivably be able to think politically and productively, to envisage a condition of genuine revolutionary difference, to begin once again to think Utopia'. A little less grandiosely, Caroline Edwards (2011: 194) identifies the novel's message in the belief that 'a utopian imaginary is essential if we are to transcend the eternally recurring cycle of causality that gives rise to the supremacy of exploitation', but asserts that this imaginary is noticeable principally 'within … "minor" utopian futurities that … remain … at a strikingly minimalist scale'.

to deep scepticism, but the commitment to a global public sphere—albeit a more fractious one, orientated around difference—has remained.[4] This article argues that *Cloud Atlas* alternately stumbles and scrambles towards a cosmopolitan politics of the public without ever quite managing to reach it. The novel does this through a sustained engagement with a concept—freedom—that is treated with some wariness by cosmopolitan discourse of the twenty-first century, and is barely commented upon within the critical literature both on the novel itself and on the cosmopolitan novel as a generic apparatus.[5] *Cloud Atlas*, I want to suggest, demonstrates a conjunctural awareness that neoliberal promises of freedom in the twenty-first century look increasingly like their opposite, and thus that the concept of freedom is ripe for reengagement. Yet Mitchell tends to work through this engagement in negative terms, by focusing on freedom's opposite. First, he offers an account of what unfreedom looks like *under* neoliberalism, a phrase that provides the title for the first section of this article. Here I offer an outline of Mitchell's broader engagement with the concept of freedom within *Cloud Atlas* and his earlier work before examining the Korea-set parts of the novel in order to establish the specific ways in which the neoliberal nightmare of Nea So Copros presents the problem of unfreedom to the reader. Second, Mitchell imagines what unfreedom might look like *after* neoliberalism, the subject of the second section of the article. Here I begin with a discussion of the problematics of the 'ethical turn' before examining the Hawaii-set parts of Mitchell's novel, where isonomia—the one form of freedom represented in the text which, I suggest, is genuinely amenable to its cosmopolitan ethics—is

[4] As Shaw argues, '[t]he maintenance of dissonant dialogues and differing opinions is conducive to democratic forms of public debate' and thus, if a global civil society is to emerge today, '[c]ontemporary cosmopolitanism requires a *modus vivendi*' that 'allow[s] respective differences between communities to be … effectively tolerated and appreciated' (2017: 182).

[5] David Harvey—who is less wary of universals than some of his interlocutors—summarises the place of freedom within the recent debate on cosmopolitanism thus: 'The concepts of freedom and liberty that [George W.] Bush now projects onto the rest of the world inevitably bear the traces of the circumstances of their particular origin in US history. There is, therefore, always an imperializing moment in any attempt to make that particular formulation, drawn from the one place and time, the foundation for universal policy … Similar caveats can be advanced when considering the current revival of interest in Kant's cosmopolitanism as a unifying vision for global democracy and governance' (2009: 10–11).

represented as inadequate to the challenge of reproducing itself. I argue that the fact *Cloud Atlas* demonstrates awareness of the social conditions that cause it such consternation without being fully able to offer the reader an account of a free act, a free society or more abstractly a formulation of freedom that is not captured by its pessimistic structure illustrates how its cosmopolitan ethics ultimately *limit* its ability to offer a solution to the problem of unfreedom that so evidently concerns it. Though the novel's cosmopolitan imaginary is able to critique the relationship between unfreedom and neoliberalism, I suggest, it struggles to imagine what freedom might look like *after* neoliberalism. This phrase—the title of the current special collection—thus provides the title for my third and final section, which returns to the closing moments of the novel and argues that, to the extent that *Cloud Atlas* reflects a cosmopolitan ethics, it also offers us a useful guide as to how cosmopolitan discourse requires modification if the concept of freedom is to have any place within it.

Mitchell appears to be aware of what has been lost in the retreat from the politically potent concept of freedom, even if this awareness is adulterated by the reservation that any teleological conceptualisation of the term is untenable under planetary conditions that render teleological reasoning myopic at best and, at worst, a smokescreen for domination. The challenge he thus sets his reader is to imagine a model of freedom that possesses the capacity to produce a future without reducing that future to a telos of the kind that guided earlier incarnations of cosmopolitan ethics. In the following, I argue that what prevents the novel from meeting this challenge is that, though eager to eschew the teleological reasoning of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism, it is unwilling to jettison another of the latter's central preoccupations: what Linda Zerilli (2005: 10) calls the 'subject question'. The non-teleological ethics of *Cloud Atlas* are indicative of a broadly humanist strain within contemporary cosmopolitan discourse after the 'ethical turn', in that the novel is more preoccupied with negotiating the questions raised by subjectivity—and by intersubjective relations—than it is with thinking about how worldly plurality provides the conditions for political freedom and collective action. An action-orientated (and thus specifically political) account of 'world' is what Zerilli, developing the thought of Hannah Arendt, calls for as the answer to the ethical

account of 'world' handed down to us by Enlightenment thinkers such as Immanuel Kant. But she argues that the process of reorientating political discourse towards action involves a revision of the concept of freedom. This revised understanding of freedom is 'not an attribute of the will'—or something that a subject or group of subjects can be said to *have* or *not have*—but is instead 'an accessory of doing and acting' (Arendt, 1961: 165). As Pheng Cheah (2016: 10) writes, for Arendt, freedom is the means by which 'we have the power to begin something new and to fabricate the world through our actions'. This worldly, Arendtian account of freedom is thus more preoccupied with maintaining the conditions for collective action than it is with stipulating a particular outcome—a telos—for the community in question. It therefore offers us an understanding of 'world' in which freedom is not peripheral but central, yet one in which 'freedom' carries little teleological charge. And it is just such an understanding of the relationship between 'world' and 'freedom' that, I suggest, is capable of navigating the dilemma dramatised by Mitchell's novel. Cheah argues that literature can be 'a world-making activity' (2016: 2), and the existing criticism on *Cloud Atlas* tends to treat the novel in this way. However, insofar as Mitchell's cosmopoetics struggle to imagine an action-orientated understanding of 'world', they expose a condition that is more accurately described as *cosmopolitan worldlessness*. This is a condition we must move beyond if we are to imagine what freedom after neoliberalism might look like.

Unfreedom under Neoliberalism

A very considerable body of criticism has developed around Mitchell since his debut, *Ghostwritten*, was published in 1999. Indeed, *Cloud Atlas* has a strong claim to be the most scrutinised novel published by a British writer in the twenty-first century, with the possible exception of Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000). Given this rich and substantial body of critical work, it is surprising that Mitchell's preoccupation with the concept of freedom has been the subject of only limited critical discussion, and this oversight is particularly noticeable in the literature that focuses on Mitchell's articulation of a cosmopolitan ethics organised around what Schoene describes

as 'globalised being-in-common' (2012: 109).[6] In one sense this should not be a surprise. The risk in addressing *Cloud Atlas*'s concern with the relationship between freedom and unfreedom in the context of a discussion of cosmopolitanism would necessarily seem to summon the spectre of Kant, whose teleological understanding of cosmopolitanism is what such interpretations seek to eschew.[7] But to refuse to address the concept at all is to fail to recognise that, at the very least, a preoccupation with the *absence* of human freedom bears heavily on a novel that, as Fredric Jameson points out, takes the form of 'a history of imprisonments' (2013: 311). In other words, even if it were claimed that Mitchell is not especially interested in freedom, it would still be difficult to claim that he is uninterested in unfreedom.

Though it is a critical commonplace to suggest that the novel's animating metaphor is predation, the absence of freedom is relentlessly identified as something that allows predation to go unchallenged.[8] Two-thirds of the way through the novel,

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[6] Mitchell's preoccupation with freedom is by no means limited to *Cloud Atlas*, even if here the relationship between freedom and unfreedom takes centre-stage; in fact, it makes itself known at the very outset of Mitchell's career in the representation of a character that has attracted a significant amount of critical commentary. The arresting voice of the 'noncorpum' that narrates part of Mitchell's debut (2000: 165) introduces itself to the reader by announcing, 'I possess freedom beyond any human understanding of the world. But my cage is all my own, too. I am trapped in one waking state of consciousness'. While this narrator has been discussed regularly in the critical literature on Mitchell, and identified as one of the preeminent reasons for his being ranked among the most interesting British novelists writing today, the paradoxical nature of a 'vertiginous' freedom that produces little but 'profound loneliness' (Childs & Green, 2011: 27) has usually been remarked upon only in order to facilitate an analysis of other aspects of his writing. For instance, Jonathan Boulter (2015: 27) cites this passage in full but is less interested in the very carceral form of freedom enjoyed by the noncorpum than in the latter's state of permanent wakefulness.

[7] Brown locates Kant's cosmopolitanism in 'the concept of public right,' which 'is an egalitarian principle of formal jurisprudence, since it affirms the equal restriction of everyone's external freedom in order to promote a mutually consistent level of equal freedom between individuals' (2009: 37). The teleological elements of this position derive from the metaphysical grounding for Kant's ethics, but they are also visible in Kant's 'vision of history,' wherein 'nature mechanically compels humanity towards a universal purpose' (38).

[8] Paul Ferguson (2015: 147) provides a useful summary of critical engagements with the representation of predation in Mitchell's work, ultimately suggesting that 'whilst the metaphors of consumption and predacity do indeed fit the bill, analogous metaphors of parasitism and, further, cannibalism extend the scope of the imagery'.

after the reader has read the first half of each narrative, changed gear and begun to retreat through *Cloud Atlas*'s palistrophic structure in reverse historical order, Robert Frobisher records a conversation with a friend, Morty Dhont, in which he is told:

> Another war is *always* coming, Robert. They are never properly extinguished. What sparks wars? The will to power, the backbone of human nature … Listen to this and remember it. The nation state is merely human nature inflated to monstrous proportions. QED, nations are entities whose laws are written by violence. Thus it ever was, so ever shall it be. War, Robert, is one of humanity's two eternal companions. (Mitchell, 2004: 462)

Any reader of *Cloud Atlas* learns to be suspicious of characters who seek to naturalise violence. Yet this passage also represents a moment where Mitchell weaves his readers into the temporal trap that I discussed at the beginning of this essay: as pessimistic as his attitude might be, it is difficult not to credit Monty's interbellum comments with some foresight, given our knowledge that another world war is in the process of developing. Indeed, it is notable that 'Letters from Zedelghem' ends with the most explicit articulation of *Cloud Atlas*'s cyclical philosophy of history, as Frobisher stares down the barrel of his pistol and writes, invoking Nietzsche: 'Rome'll decline and fall again, Cortazar'll sail again … the Sun'll grow cold again' (2004: 490). His conviction, at the end of his life, is that '[p]eople are obscenities' (489); what alternative is there, except to conclude his last letter with the fatalistic Virgilian aperçu, '*Sunt lacrimae rerum*' (490)?[9]

The answer that Mitchell offers his readers is to point out that '[o]nce any tyranny becomes accepted as ordinary … its victory is indomitable' (378). Unfreedom is, in other words, the means by which predation is formalised and abstracted into a social system.[10] Hence each of the six narratives that constitute *Cloud Atlas* features

[9] The titular character of Virgil's *Aeneid* gazes upon a mural of the Trojan war and makes this pronouncement, which, as Wharton's (2008) discussion suggests, has proven difficult to translate into English. One relatively recent translation of the poem by Robert Fagles renders Virgil's line as 'The world is a world of tears, and the burdens of mortality touch the heart' (Virgil, 2010: lines 461–62).

[10] The slippage between tyranny and unfreedom here is not accidental: for republican theorists of

a protagonist who is unfree, and each is marked by a moment in which, as Jameson (2013: 311) writes, 'freedom and emancipation are conjoined'. Before Ewing commits himself to the abolition of the slave trade, and thus the emancipation of others, he is himself freed by 'Autua, the last free Moriori in this world' (Mitchell, 2004: 525). Less cheerfully, Frobisher cannot identify a route out of his creative indenture other than committing suicide, but this act is nonetheless characterised in the novel as a form of liberation, something that 'lets [him] go' (490). In the meantime, he expends all his efforts in the composition of a piece of music that functions as a metaphor for the ways in which aesthetic acts are both expressions of and spurs to freedom.

Luisa Rey is directly inspired by Frobisher's composition: having become embroiled in an industrial intrigue concerning an unsafe nuclear power plant, she is first pressured into accepting job security at the cost of journalistic integrity and then, having refused to capitulate to this selfish imperative, offered an opportunity to become a 'free woman' (438) if she finally collaborates with the power plant's owners. But throughout her story she remains committed to working '[o]n behalf of the truth … freelance' (431), and the freedom she enjoys in her work outside the structures that would silence, co-opt and exploit her is what ultimately grants her a happier ending than Frobisher.

The story of Timothy Cavendish is saturated with the language of liberation, even if Mitchell undercuts the latter by setting the narrative in a geriatric care home and deploying a farcical tone throughout that is bathetically at odds with the story of Sonmi~451 which follows. Yet, as ridiculous as Cavendish may be, we are—just like Sonmi~451, who asks to watch the cinematic adaptation of Cavendish's memoir before she is executed by the capitalist superstate against which she has revolted—ultimately invited to celebrate his attempts to 'free [him]self' (369), escape his care home and become a 'free man' (178). Indeed, it is in his caustic, pompous voice

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freedom such as John Pocock, Quentin Skinner and Philip Pettit, unfreedom is not something that arises because of impediments to free intercourse between individuals but rather as a consequence of the arbitrary control of one party over another, and of the state over those whom it governs. A ruling order that wields arbitrary power over a population is a tyranny, and those who live under tyranny are necessarily unfree. For more, see Pettit (2001).

that *Cloud Atlas* announces its keenest lesson: that only those who have experienced carceral conditions are able to appreciate the potential manifested in a moment of liberation. As Cavendish puts it: '"Freedom!" is the fatuous jingle of our civilization, but only those deprived of it have the barest inkling re: what the stuff actually is' (372).

Given this deep fear over the institutionalisation of unfreedom, it should not be a surprise that Mitchell's work evidences an awareness of political formations such as neoliberalism in which freedom is positioned as central but which seem, nonetheless, to produce unfreedom.[11] Here, the story of Sonmi~451 is the most relevant but also ostensibly the bleakest, since it is clear by the end of the narrative that its protagonist will be put to death.[12] Yet this narrative also signals a turning point in the novel, when Mitchell most thoroughly investigates the role of social conditions in shaping history, and thus raises the possibility that such conditions might be changed. From the opening pages of Sonmi~451's discussion with the archivist who wishes to record her testimony for '[h]istorians still unborn' (187), Mitchell makes clear that he is directing his concern about unfreedom and predation not at a general strain within human nature, nor at a specific set of behaviours, but rather at a social system.

Nea So Copros was by no means an unfamiliar setting by the time that *Cloud Atlas* was published in 2004. Although the interview form of 'An Orison of Sonmi~451' is not a common feature of contemporary novelistic discourse, the world in which the narrative takes place represents a fairly conventional assemblage of images drawn

[11] See the introduction to the current special collection for a detailed discussion of this dynamic.

[12] Throughout this article I quote from the UK edition of *Cloud Atlas*, in which the sections of 'An Orison of Sonmi~451' are noticeably different from the US edition that provided the basis for the film adaptation (Tykwer, Wachowski & Wachowski, 2012) and subsequent translations of the text. Martin Paul Eve (2016: 12) provides a useful discussion of the major differences between these editions, noting that the UK edition offers 'far greater background about Papa Song's diner' that 'emphasise[s] the degradation of the fabricants'. It is for this reason that the UK edition is the most appropriate to address here, though Eve's work provides a useful reminder that recent novels such as *Cloud Atlas* do not often exist in definitive editions. Rebecca L. Walkowitz (2015: 35) points out that 'the book's global circulation now matches the global circulation imagined and solicited diegetically by the text'; this circulation, it transpires, is as fractious and fragmented as the world imagined by Mitchell in his novel.

from the standard-bearers of cyberpunk culture as well as Mitchell's earlier, Japan-set novel *Number9Dream* (2002). Cyberpunk has long been used as a generic apparatus to represent a bastardised vision of neoliberalism in practice; in fact, the longevity of the subgenre has sometimes been indexed to the perennialisation of neoliberal governance.[13] Hence 'An Orison of Sonmi~451' demonstrates the same preoccupation with heteronomy, paranoia and the slippery ironies of posthuman ontology as that evidenced in its many cyberpunk antecedents. Uneven urban development is subject to ferociously policed territorial imperatives; public life has all but shrunk from view; and, throughout this section of the novel, the reader is witness to a general substitution of corporate for civic culture (citizens of Nea So Copros are, for example, referred to as consumers).

More specifically, however, the cyberpunk narrative that sits close to the heart of *Cloud Atlas* incorporates pointed commentary on what David Harvey (2005: 32) describes as the cornerstone of neoliberalism: 'the financialization of everything'. The logic of the market has insinuated itself into aspects of social existence which, under the liberal moral economy, are shielded from market forces: the wife of Sonmi~451's overseer, for instance, 's[ells] her male-child quota' to 'ma[k]e shrewd investments of her own' and 'spen[ds] her husband's salary on dewdrugs and facescaping so that her seventy years passe[s] for thirty' (Mitchell, 2004: 194). The novel does not characterise this activity as vanity: it is investment for a return, a manifestation of the particular care of the self represented by Catherine Hakim's concept of 'erotic capital'.[14]

Thus, in Nea So Copros, exchange begins to look like an idol: when Sonmi~451 feels as though she has committed a disciplinary infraction, she 'genuflect[s] to

[13] As Evan Calder Williams (2011: 18) writes, '[I]n cyberpunk, neoliberalism … saw a distorted image of itself'. It is peculiar how long this image has persisting in popular culture, given that the rapid pace of technological change over the final decades of the twentieth century led to its early superannuation; however, as Graham J. Murphy and Sherryl Vint point out, 'one of the reasons cyberpunk seems both so dated and yet paradoxically so relevant is that the ideological assumptions of neoliberalism have become as ubiquitous as information technology' (Murphy and Vint, 2010: xvii).

[14] Hakim (2010: 501) proposes this term as a fourth addition to Pierre Bourdieu's three forms of capital (economic, cultural and social), defining it as 'a combination of aesthetic, visual, physical, social and sexual attractiveness to other members of … society' that can be subject to exchange in a marketplace.

the dollar' (Mitchell, 2004: 196). Meanwhile, art has become little more than a reproducible commodity: Boardman Mephi, who installs Sonmi~451 on a university campus called Taemosan ostensibly so she can assist with research into consciousness, boasts that the Rothko canvasses that adorn the replicant's room are '[m]olecule-for-molecule copies of the originals' (227). Mitchell suggests that Boardman Mephi has ulterior motives for sequestering Sonmi~451 at the campus, however, and the latter suspects that he is part of a conspiracy on the part of 'Unanimity', the ruling regime, to stage a replicant uprising in order to exploit fear as a means of keeping the population in check. Institutions of cultural governance such as higher education therefore incubate the means by which dissent can most effectively be crushed under a smokescreen of free thinking and academic inquiry. More broadly, culture has been hybridised with market imperatives such that residual Korean culture is everywhere evident in Nea So Copros even as it is subordinated to the logic of the market in a manner reminiscent of what Jamie Peck (2013: 147) describes as 'the messiness, and incompleteness, of trajectories of neoliberal restructuring'.

The life process itself has been made subject to managerialisation to a terrifying extent: supporting the privileged caste of consumers is an army of fabricants just like Sonmi~451, but the abuse, exploitation and vilification of this labour resource belies its status as a valuable commodity whose every biological process must be surveilled in order to protect its owner's investment. Meanwhile, a lumpenproletariat of human labourers subsists in what the archivist describes as '*untermensch* slum[s]' (Mitchell, 2004: 331) within Nea So Copros, bolstered by 'Production Zones [in] Africa and Indonesia' whose purpose is to 'supply Consumer Zones' demands' in a clear comment on the uneven nature of globalisation at the end of the twentieth century (341). These zones are 'sixty percent uninhabitable' (341) and subject to ecological catastrophes that are produced by the insatiable consumer demand they exist to service. In this respect they approximate a combination of the morbid geographies of what Achille Mbembe (2003) terms 'necropolitics' and what Rob Nixon (2009: 444) describes as the 'slow violence' of the 'contemporary neoliberal order'.

Altogether, then, while the archivist who interviews Sonmi~451 claims that 'Nea So Copros law is based on equitable commerce' (Mitchell, 2004: 36), the experience

of his interviewee confirms that it is in fact a neoliberal nightmare. But while the nightmare ultimately sees the protagonist of 'An Orison of Sonmi~451' being sent to her death, this constituent narrative of *Cloud Atlas* seems at first glance to undercut the fatalism that characterises Frobisher's comments at the end of 'Letters from Zedelghem'. In contrast to Monty Dhont's pessimistic ruminations on the warlike nature of the human animal, violence in Nea So Copros is characterised as institutional, artificial and thus subject to political contestation. Key passages from the beginning of the narrative read so like Marx's (1999) discussion of the working day in *Capital* as to register as a conscious homage. When asked to describe her 'schedule' as a server (Mitchell, 2004: 188), Sonmi~451 sketches out something similar in principle to a worker in a Victorian mill town, commencing with worship ('Matins', 'the six Catechisms' and a 'Sermon' [188]) followed by nineteen hours' intensive labour and a mere four hours' sleep. When her interviewer asks whether she was entitled to any time to herself, she responds: '"Rests" constitute time-theft, Archivist!' (188). The clock is thus represented as a battleground and the war is fought in temporal terms: for the fabricants, much as for the millworkers in *Capital*, 'the working-day contains the full 24 hours, with the deduction of the few hours of repose' and during that day '[i]f the labourer consumes his disposable time for himself, he robs the capitalist' (Marx, 1999: 162, 149). It should thus be unsurprising that, when Sonmi~451 first joins her fellow fabricant Yoona~939 in rebelling against the regime, it is a temporal prohibition that they break: 'When I woke it was not to brash yellow-up lites, but to Yoona, shaking me in the pale light of the curfew lamp … "It's curfew," I told her. "I'm afraid." "Don't be," [she replied]. Follow me"' (Mitchell, 2004: 195).

Mitchell goes so far as to rehearse the logical outcome of this battle: a growing awareness on the part of his protagonist of the class-bound nature of the society that oppresses her, and the necessity of a class-based response to it. Early on in 'An Orison of Sonmi~451', the protagonist remarks that 'of all Nea So Copros' slaves we [fabricants] are surely the most miserable', to which the archivist responds: 'There are no slaves in Nea So Copros! The very word is abolished!' (193). Of course, the fabricants are indeed slaves, and their slavery is of a singularly financialised kind. '[B]orn into debt', they understand their lives in terms of a time-bound '[i]nvestment'

that must be repaid with their labour before they can be free. The measure of their enslavement lies in the fact that what Maurizio Lazzarato (2012: 85) identifies as debt's most insidious effect—its capacity to 'exploit … both chronological labor time and action'—is what constitutes the fabricants' entire existential horizon and guarantees their complicity from the moment of their birth to the moment they are slaughtered. Thus Sonmi~451 reflects: 'In Papa Song's I had been a slave; at Taemosan I was a slitely more privileged slave' (Mitchell, 2004: 241). Throughout this section of *Cloud Atlas*, the concept of 'Ascension' seemingly refers to self-consciousness: what makes Yoona~939 so threatening, for instance, is that she 'mimic[s] the consumers' whom she is supposed to serve (191). But the term also describes the fabricants' growing awareness of the exploitative conditions in which they are forced to work. While Sonmi~451 is ensconced at Taemosan, Mitchell shows her learning of what is obviously Hegel's master/slave dialectic:

> The professor [Boardman Mephi] asked if my lecture had been fruitful; I chose the word 'informative', and asked why the students despised me so when I had given them no cause for offense?
>
> He asked why any dominator fears their dominated gaining knowledge.
>
> I dared not utter the word 'insurrection' … I asked when purebloods might start blaming themselves.
>
> Mephi replied, 'History suggests not until they are *made* to.'
>
> I realized I was sick of winter. 'When will that happen?' (231)

Almost immediately after this, Sonmi~451 begins wondering about class consciousness ('Were there more of me?' [232]) and the stage is set for the rehearsal of this Hegelian moment at an historical and collective level. As winter yields to spring, so, her story implies, this neoliberal dystopia will meet its reckoning in a slave revolt.

But the anticipated moment of liberation does not arrive. It cannot arrive, if the novel's cosmopoetics are to remain intact. Sonmi~451 notes that '[a]ll revolutions are the sheerest fantasy until they happen; then they become historical inevitabilities'

(342). Her conversation with the archivist becomes increasingly marked by the precepts of dialectical materialism as she rejects the voluntarism that undergirds neoliberal conceptualisations of the human as *homo oeconomicus*, announces that 'free will plays no part in [her] story' (365) and states prophetically that 'An abyss cannot be crossed in two steps' (344). But the temporal trap of *Cloud Atlas* is witnessed once more as Mitchell ensures that any teleological expectations regarding the realisation of freedom are extricated from his novel and Sonmi~451's enigmatic comment that 'Time is what stops history happening all at once' (244) becomes less a statement about the inevitability of revolution than a comment on revolution permanently—and, from the perspective of the novel's non-teleological ethics, necessarily—delayed. The outcome of this deferral is far from cheerful. Sonmi~451 recalls inveigling herself into Papa Song's abattoir and watching her fellow fabricants queuing for their trip to Xultation, a kind of heaven that is promised to them once their period of indenture is complete, but which really functions as an ideological apparatus that vouchsafes their obedience as they head to slaughter. 'Their Investment was paid off' we are told, sardonically; now, 'the voyage to Hawaii was under way' (358). The implication is that her promised revolution will deliver what the lie of Xultation does not. But, since this assertion falls in the second half of her narrative, after we have finished 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After', the reader is aware of what remains unknown to Sonmi~451: the radical change she believes in will never arrive; worse, it is not a world without exploitation but rather a monstrous inversion of Papa Song's Polynesian paradise that bifurcates her narrative and sits at the centre of *Cloud Atlas*.

At the end of her story, Sonmi~451 reveals her suspicion that her escape, education and ordeal at the abattoir in fact constitute a script put together by Unanimity to produce a show trial and foment anxiety in the Nea So Copros population so that the latter can be governed more effectively. Mitchell never confirms that this is the case, but it is a gloomy Foucauldian account of the relationship between power and resistance that is far from being out of place in *Cloud Atlas*. What we are offered by way of consolation is the promise of freedom embodied in the protagonist's 'manifesto' of alternative 'Catechisms' (363, 364), the subversion of this last term representing an

additional comment on the impossibility of an opposition emerging from anywhere other than the disciplinary apparatus of the existing hegemonic order. Shaw (2015: 113) argues that *Cloud Atlas* identifies an answer to the 'neoliberal corprocracy' that plays host to Sonmi~451's living nightmare in the fabricant's 'treatise on freedom', which 'suggests the role that cultural texts can play in promoting cosmopolitan ethics'. Yet, like the comments that conclude Ewing's 'Pacific Journal'—and *Cloud Atlas* as a whole—it is unclear whether this treatise ramifies within the world of the novel. After all, it is the recording of Sonmi~451's interview and not her treatise on freedom that appears to have survived the apocalypse in 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After'. Of course, the interview itself qualifies as a cultural text, but if it is this—and not the treatise—that is taken to do the work of transmitting cosmopolitan ethics to future generations, then the impasse I described at the beginning of this essay is that much more acute: in order for cosmopolitan ethics to survive, it appears that radical calls for freedom must be forgotten.

Unfreedom after Neoliberalism

Perhaps this would be fine, except that *Cloud Atlas* is simultaneously more sceptical than has been acknowledged about the capacity of cosmopolitan ethics to effect the kind of historical change around which teleological understandings of freedom tend to be organised. If the novel evidences doubts regarding its own emancipatory imaginary, then it is also true that it demonstrates misgivings regarding the limitations of its cosmopolitan imaginary as well. I do not mean that we should avoid reading *Cloud Atlas* as an example of what Schoene (2009) has described as the cosmopolitan novel. Even if we put the specifics of Schoene's formulation of this genre to one side, it remains the case that readings of Mitchell's novel have often treated it as indicative of a broader engagement within literary fiction—and literary and cultural theory—with the question of the ethical claim of the Other. And it is certainly the case that this discussion has opened up an important debate about planetary forms of community and conviviality in the twenty-first century. In the last two decades a large range of scholars have contributed to this 'ethical turn', producing a literature that is laudable for staging a robust confrontation with the most appalling aspects

of a militarised global neoliberalism that seems systematically to produce and reproduce precarity.[15] Indeed, it is not uncommon for such an ethics to be identified as bearing promise precisely because of its capacity to resist questionable, neoliberal conceptualisations of freedom. As Schoene points out, neoliberal freedoms are characterised in Mitchell's novel as singularly carceral and bound to precipitate planetary catastrophe, while in the work of lesser writers a celebration of such freedoms has tended to produce an 'exonerative' (2012: 106) aesthetic of cosmo-kitsch in place of a more fruitful response to 'our ever-increasingly globalised condition' (2012: 105).[16] It is important to underscore the fact that neither Schoene nor Shaw identifies in *Cloud Atlas*'s cosmopoetic imaginary a facile celebration of planetary experience, but rather an ability to capture the fractious nature of this experience in representational form. Yet it is also worth acknowledging that the way in which the novel articulates its cosmopoetics alongside a preoccupation with the relationship between freedom and unfreedom raises challenging questions regarding the efficacy of the cosmopolitan ethics that have been imputed to it.

Indeed, *Cloud Atlas* can be indexed to a broad problem that emerges whenever ethical solutions are identified as representing a remedy for the challenges attending

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[15] What has been termed the ethical turn is much more various and reaches much further back into twentieth-century philosophy than can be easily communicated here. It often gestures to the work of Emmanuel Levinas, frequently via Jacques Derrida's (2000) writing on hospitality; however, the tradition also encompasses the work of Julia Kristeva, Paul Ricoeur and Jean-Luc Nancy (the latter being especially important for Schoene's understanding of cosmopolitanism). The broad nexus of critical positions I have in mind seeks, generally speaking, to counter what Judith Butler (2009: ii) terms a 'politically induced condition of maximized vulnerability and exposure' with what Paul Gilroy (2004: 4) describes as an 'agonistic planetary humanism capable of comprehending the universality of our elemental vulnerability'.

[16] Hence Schoene opposes the 'open cosmopoetic paradigms' of *Cloud Atlas* (110) to the 'glib cosmopolitan myth-making' of Amanda Craig's novel *Hearts and Minds*, which collaborates in a tendency to celebrate 'London … as a neoliberal utopia, ideal for free-spirited, independent-minded individuals whose determination and eccentricity identifies them as members of one and the same quasi-national community, irrespective of their vastly divergent points of departure' (108). The fragmentary openness of Mitchell's novel, by contrast—that is, its refusal to organise itself around sovereign individuals operating within a recuperative, unifying ethic of planetary singularity—identifies it in opposition to the neoliberal understanding of the world as a staging ground for individual self-actualisation.

the troubling biopolitical logics of neoliberalism as a global (and globalising) technique of governance. The objection is that it is far from obvious whether such solutions are in and of themselves adequate to the challenge of developing dissent in a way that cultivates alternative conceptual frameworks, counter-formations and coalitions of antihegemonic agitation.[17] As Ash Amin, addressing a broad spectrum of critical positions within the ethical turn, puts it:

> 'Ethical humanism' does not take subjectivity, citizenship or community as given, tied to the primacies of race, ethnicity, tradition or nation. Instead, it ties membership to ethical practice towards the other … The question … is whether ethical humanism possesses the strength and persuasiveness [needed] to tackle the machinic force of emergency biopolitics … A politics of human fellowship may be able to put a face to the malpractices of this machinery, expose its hidden ethic of human treatment and lay down the guidelines for an alternative system of social integration, but it lacks the means to stop or subvert the disciplinary routines […attending] the biopolitics of emergency. (2012: 107–08)

Elsewhere, Amin argues (alongside Nigel Thrift) that what is necessary to overcome the limitations of the ethical turn is 'a politics of publics to be made and worlds to be discovered', or, in other words, 'a new politics of *res publica*' (Amin and Thrift, 2013: np). In the remainder of this essay I want to suggest that the idea of the public sphere

[17] Alain Badiou offers the preeminent example of this critique: in *Ethics* he argues that the ethical turn is by and large a manifestation of 'the self-satisfied egoism of the affluent West' (2001: 7) and urges that 'the whole ethical predication based upon recognition of the other should be purely and simply abandoned' (25). Mari Ruti (2015: 53) articulates a more nuanced position from within the ethical turn that is specifically concerned by Butler's 'fairly uncritical adoption of Levinasian ethics [which]—coupled with her relative neglect of Levinasian justice—causes her to claim that "our responsibility is heightened once we have been subject to the violence of others"'. Ruti's objection is that 'in this vision, assigning responsibility – in the sense that normative justice strives to do – becomes impossible' (53) in a way that Levinas did not necessarily imagine. A fuller engagement with Levinas's ethics, Ruti argues, reveals that he is not necessarily opposed to the application of normative principles; moreover, acknowledging the place of norms within his conception of justice might allow Butler to articulate a more effective formulation of her ethical project.

allows us most fully to grasp the impasse identified by Mitchell's cosmopolitan novel—even if Mitchell himself is finally incapable of grasping it himself—for it is here that a non-teleological form of political community organised around the crucial concept of action presents itself.

Key aspects of Schoene's theoretical architecture for the cosmopolitan novel account in useful ways for the phenomenon of action within a democratic space of appearance.[18] But it is notable that *Cloud Atlas* struggles to imagine what such a space looks like, which explains why it is also incapable of imagining how attending to our shared, elemental vulnerability might produce the kind of substantive change that the novel hopes for but ultimately forecloses. This is because the recognition of the vulnerability of the Other does not constitute a form of action but rather an acknowledgement of a certain kind of intersubjective relation. It is in its insistence on the need to value this relation that *Cloud Atlas*'s cosmopolitan ethics consists, but this is also where the novel most clearly echoes an abiding problem within the ethical turn insofar as it entails an understanding of freedom that is organised around what Linda Zerilli has called the 'subject question':

> [T]he 'subject question' … centers primarily on the subject's very formation and on the external and internal forces that hinder its freedom … What defines [it] is not a certain *theory* of the subject (autonomous, dependent, or interdependent) but the fact that *the* subject (be it a philosophical, linguistic, or psychoanalytic category) is the nodal point around which every political question of freedom gets posed. (Zerilli 2005: 10)

[18] The conceptual framework that allows Schoene to formalise the mechanics of this genre rely to a great degree on the thought of Jean-Luc Nancy and ultimately to the latter's concept of *comparution*, a term derived from Scots law that is translated by Tracey B. Strong as 'compearance' and refers to appearing at court having been summoned (Nancy, 1992: 371). In his book-length examination of the cosmopolitan novel, Schoene (2009: 156) glosses compearance as 'describ[ing] people's coming into being in necessary relation to one another while retaining their unique separateness'. Those who share such a space exist in a cosmopolitan relation to one another because 'what holds them together is compearance rather than identity': they are 'linked to one another as much by their strictly anonymous adjacency as by a vague, residual sense of neighbourly conviviality and solicitude' (2009: 156–57).

Although post-Foucauldian critical theory has sought to challenge the privileged category of the human and to shed light on the ways in which it is constituted by the exclusion of an entire range of subject positions, it has also, according to Zerilli (2005: 12), failed to move beyond the subject question at the heart of liberalism itself and thus produced a theoretical bind in which 'the paradox of subject formation is installed as a vicious circle of agency at the heart of politics'. Drawing on the political theory of Hannah Arendt, Zerilli challenges the humanism at the heart of the subject question, which she considers to stand in diametric opposition to the 'world question'. Whereas 'the (ethical) idea of freedom' given to us by the subject question risks 'displac[ing…] political freedom as a relation to the world and to others' (15), the world question emphasises 'the ongoing constitution of the world as a public space, [which…] marks the way in which subjects as members of political communities, as citizens, stand to one another' (19).

Cloud Atlas has been identified as 'signif[ying] a shift towards a revised version of humanism as it is being played out through the spatially- and temporally-disjunct coordinates of unevenly expanding globalization, with its emerging cosmopolitan identities' (Edwards, 2011: 179). But read in light of Zerilli's opposition to the way in which post-Foucauldian critical theory has served to perpetuate the subject question, the kind of ethical humanism that has been attributed to *Cloud Atlas* could be described as a kind of *cosmopolitan worldlessness*. Worse, it might even be judged to be complicit—however unwittingly—with those logics of depoliticisation that have been identified as typical of neoliberal governmentality by figures such as William Davies (2017: 6). In this more extreme critique, if neoliberalism represents 'the disenchantment of politics by economics', ethical humanism represents the displacement of politics by ethics.[19] In struggling to jettison the 'subject question'

[19] Zerilli is not the only theorist to question what Chantal Mouffe has more recently termed 'the current displacement of the political by the ethical' (2013: 15–16), even if for many thinkers working within the ethical turn such a displacement does not represent a problem. For some such as Gilroy—who long ago challenged the 'occidental separation of ethics and aesthetics, culture and politics' (1993: 39)—this is because ethical commitment is to a great degree assumed to *be* political. For others, however, it is because accounts of the political that have emerged explicitly out of the modern Western tradition of political theory are not considered to be worthy of respect. In this last account, the capacity of

in favour of the 'world question', *Cloud Atlas* provides a compelling illustration of the potential unworldliness of a cosmopolitan ethics that is not organised around a politics of the public and does not retain a place for what Zerilli calls 'Arendt's account of freedom as political action' (9). This would seem to open *Cloud Atlas*'s cosmopolitanism up to question, despite Schoene's claim that the novel 'set[s] an entirely new standard for cosmopolitan writing' (2012: 109). I want now to suggest that, if this novel is indeed paradigmatic of contemporary cosmopolitan writing, what it offers us is an illustration of the need to engage in a revision of any subject-centred or intersubjectively conceived cosmopolitanism into a world-centred one. Recognising the ways in which *Cloud Atlas* ultimately *fails* to imagine the world as public finally alerts us to the need for a cosmopolitanism whose concept of world is organised around freedom-as-action.

Were it not the case that the setting of 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' is made to resemble what one critic (Childs, 2015: 188) calls a 'Hobbesian nightmare of civilisation's destruction', there might be grounds for describing it as Mitchell's vision of an ideal society. There is a degree of peacefulness, freedom and egalitarianism to tribal relations within the region of the Valleysmen that is represented as being attractive—not least to Meronym, the technologically advanced Prescient who is there to study those relations. The attraction lies in the fact that the situation of the Valleysmen resembles what Herodotus termed isonomy: a form of 'no rule' that has been described by Kōjin Karatani (2017: n. pag.) as originating a radically different political tradition in which 'people [are] free from traditional ruling relations' and simultaneously 'economically equal in their lives'.[20] If Zachry and his tribe can be

political theory to remedy the questions raised by globalisation is attacked as being limited by what is described as its own hopelessly conservative understanding of the concept of the political itself. This charge can be heard, for instance, in Jacques Rancière's critique of Arendt's 'political purism', which, he argues, 'pretend[s] to separate political freedom from social necessity', thus 'becom[ing] the legitimation of the necessities of the consensual order' (2004: 18–19).

[20] As Karatani argues in *Isonomia and the Origins of Philosophy* (2017: n. pag.), Ionian isonomy offers a radically different political vision to that deriving from Athenian democracy because, unlike in ancient Athens—where political freedom was born of inequality—in Ionia 'freedom gave rise to equality'. Rather than being bound to the polis in a way that invited them to equate it with their freedom, in Ionia any 'landless person could simply migrate to a new city, instead of working on someone else's

described in any meaningful way as being free, it is in this sense of the term, and the tragedy of their situation is that they are being deprived of that freedom by another tribe—the Kona—that embodies the most appalling kind of inequality in being built upon the institution of slavery. As Zachry tells us:

> From each o' the Nine Folded Valleys black cobras o' smoke was risin' an' ev'ry carrion winger'n' legger on Big I was crawkin'n'feastin' in our Valleys that mornin' I reck'ned. Up in the pastures we finded goats scattered, some o' mine, some from Kaima, but we din't see not one goatherd, nay. I milked some an' we drank the last free Valleysman's goatmilk. (Mitchell, 2004: 313)

Predation again represents the means by which unfreedom exerts a grip on the world, but while the other sections of *Cloud Atlas* contain moments in which liberation occurs or is at least anticipated, 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' represents a terminal society whose fragile freedom, long under threat, is now in the process of being destroyed by those who would dominate rather than enter into a convivial relationship with other human beings. Unlike Sonmi~451, who seems adamant—even if Mitchell is not—that history will see the realisation of the freedom she craves, the narration in this passage is above all else mournful. What limited freedom the Valleysmen enjoy is in the process of being lost and Mitchell is lamenting how easily the closely associated virtues of freedom and equality that characterise isonomy can be destroyed.

Yet it is curious that the form of freedom the Kona are destined to destroy in 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' is the one form that appears amenable to the kind of cosmopolitan ethics that Mitchell wants to endorse: a non-teleological ethics organised around radical equality and anonymous adjacency tempered by mutual recognition. Mitchell appears once more to limit his own cosmopoetic imaginary, but this time he does so not by representing freedom and cosmopolitanism as mutually

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land' (n. pag.). Freedom was thus manifested above all in freedom of movement, not freedom as a form of participation in the public life of the polis. It should be pointed out here that Karatani's book-length discussion of isonomy grows directly out of a critique of Arendt that he advances in *The Structure of World History* (2014).

incompatible but by presenting them as inadequate to the task of reproducing themselves in the one form in which they *are* compatible while remaining relevant to the globalised social condition in which we live. The freedom enjoyed by Zachry's tribe nearly furnishes us with a solution to the trap set by the novel's structure, which places Mitchell's emancipatory and cosmopolitan hopes in tension with one another. But Zachry's isonomic existence is not ultimately represented as a solution, since there appears to be no way for it to withstand contact with other civilizations. The easy destruction of the Valleysmen's freedom communicates Mitchell's central lesson in *Cloud Atlas* regarding the nefariousness of predation; however, it also implies that such a freedom can only exist in pristine conditions that do not necessitate the development of a cosmopolitan ethics in the first place.

This is no bad thing, for there is no shortage of speculative fiction proposing a solution to modernity's ills in a form of primitive communism, and to have advanced such a proposal in *Cloud Atlas* would have risked allowing the novel's cosmopoetics to have devolved into an example of cosmo-kitsch, or what Schoene (2009: 122) describes as 'the vertebrate rigidity of a utopian vision'. Worse, it would have been to rehearse the hoary trope of the noble savage in a way that would simultaneously narrow the novel's ethics to a sentimental Romanticism, repeat a key trope of imperialist propaganda and substitute a nostalgic atavism for Mitchell's much more sophisticated development of a form of representation that is up to the task of capturing the uneven nature of globalisation. The dynamic within the novel that forecloses this easy vision is not so much the antagonistic relationship between Zachry's tribe and the Kona but the more ambivalent form of being-in-common that emerges—or rather, does not fully emerge—between Zachry and Meronym. On one level, this relationship allegorises the historical relationship between colonial Europeans and the peoples they colonised, displaced, enslaved, Christianised, emancipated and are now, very often, subjecting to global neoliberal governance. In fact, as Zachry tells us in retrospect, this was his anxiety as he 'watched Meronym wormy her way 'round all the Valleys', meetin' folk 'n'learnin' how we lived, what we owned, how many of us could fight, an' mappin' passes into the Valleys' (Mitchell, 2004: 269). Throughout 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' his fear is that

Meronym is '*sussin' our lands! Sussin' our ways! Sussin' us!*' (275, italics in original) in a way that will enable her far more technologically advanced civilization to do exactly what readers of *Cloud Atlas* know Europeans to have done in the parts of the world that were made subject to colonisation. In other words, he intuits that Meronym's anthropological project functions as a Trojan Horse for imperialist domination. It is by these means that Mitchell prevents a simplistic isonomic primitivism from emerging as a solution to the challenges presented by global society in the twenty-first century.

Zachry's fear, though ultimately revealed to be untrue in the case of Meronym and the Prescients, is reasonable: there has long existed an acknowledgement of the close relationship between imperialism and the development of anthropology even within that discipline (Gough, 1968). More relevant to the concerns of this article, however, is how Mitchell represents the collapse of what Pedro Erber describes as the 'allochronism' of the anthropological gaze in a way that thrusts the problem of contemporaneity into the foreground and attaches a political imperative to the development of an understanding of the world that is capable of grasping the new ways in which people share time and space. Meronym is under strict instructions to observe but not interfere with the community she is studying, since her civilisation considers the Valleysmen to exist in a simple but decent state that should not be disturbed by modernity. Hence, at the outset of the narrative Meronym is presented as existing in a kind of future state. In one sense this is quite literal, since she has reached an age (50 years) that the Valleysmen find difficult to believe possible, especially in light of the fact that she looks so healthy (Mitchell, 2004: 264). But this supposedly advanced physical age functions as a metonym for the technological maturity of her civilization more broadly, which in turn casts a very particular light on her role '*live'n'work*[ing]' with the Valleysman in order to '*learn* [their] *ways*' and '*und'stand* [them]' (261, italics in original).

While Meronym grounds her anthropological examination 'in an experience of sharing the same time and space—of contemporaneity—with [her] object of study' (Erber, 2013: 30), her work is nonetheless made possible through 'a temporal displacement … to the time of scientific writing, which secures the distance between

self and other, between subject and object of knowledge' (31). But while at first she seeks to maintain this distance, she ends up assisting Zachry by giving him the antivenin that saves his sister's life when the latter is stung by a scorpion fish. Initially Meronym objects that '[t]*he life o' your tribe's got a nat'ral order*', but she relents when Zachry objects, '*I reck'n jus' by bein' here you're bustin' this nat'ral order*' (Mitchell, 2004: 280, italics in original). Here she begins to echo the naturalisation of violence that is the object of perennial scepticism throughout *Cloud Atlas* but is persuaded by the illegitimacy of this perspective through a simple reminder of the necessary fact of the being-in-common she shares with Zachry's tribe. Thus, having implicated herself in the wellbeing of this society, she in turn asks for Zachry's assistance in travelling to the ruins of the Mauna Kea Observatory. And, during their journey, the Kona finally move to enslave the rest of the Valleysmen and Zachry and Meronym come to share a common time and space in the most immediate sense as they rely on one another on a moment-by-moment basis for their mutual survival. The novel thus seeks to collapse any notion of a temporal distance between the modern and premodern—a distance that is maintained by the allochronism of the anthropological gaze—in a way that once more pushes the imperatives that drive contemporary cosmopolitan thought to the fore.

The relationship between Meronym and Zachry is therefore an important way in which Mitchell represents the instrumental distinction between subject and object as untenable—even if, as in Meronym's case, it has more to do with epistemological rather than literal domination—and offers in its stead an ethical humanism built upon intersubjective recognition. In this respect, *Cloud Atlas* echoes what Erber characterises as a countervailing element within the Enlightenment's conceptualisation of the human, which is

> [g]rounded upon a temporality split between two modern concepts of humanity. As the science or study of *anthropos*, anthropology seems to indicate broadly the study of human beings ... in their specificity and diversity. Meanwhile, the study of the civilized and universal (European) human being, as the incarnation of *humanitas*, developed into the domain of what came to

> be designated as the humanities … that is, as reflexive knowledge about man as human and universal, [which] develop[ed] in implicit counterpoint to anthropology as the study of man in his cultural diversity. (Erber, 2013: 36)[21]

For anthropology, 'the challenge of contemporaneity is thus posed at the level of its very identity as science' (36), since it threatens to collapse the allochronism that facilitates the anthropologist's scientific claims regarding *anthropos*. Simultaneously, however, Erber argues that 'our own historical time … has become so inextricable from the increasing contemporization of difference' that the notion of *humanitas* is all but impossible to maintain (43). In its representation of the collapsing distinction between the subject and object of knowledge, *Cloud Atlas* captures the implications of Erber's comments regarding the limitations of anthropology. And, in representing characters that are 'uniquely unprecedented and inimitable in their individual and cultural difference' (Schoene, 2009: 98), it simultaneously displaces any unifying and universalising logic that might grant the subject of *humanitas* a teleological aspect.

Yet it is notable that, while Erber (2013: 44) argues that '[t]he theoretical and political task' is to 'think through the … modern dichotomies between *humanitas* and *anthropos*', at the end of 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After' Mitchell raises the possibility of this task being undertaken only then to marginalise it. Zachry tells us that Meronym 'had a choice to settle' with him on Big I (Mitchell, 2004: 323); indeed, good enough reason for her doing so is offered when we are told that her husband has been dead for a long time (264) and it is implied that her son Anafi has died alongside many others in a plague that has wracked her home city while she has been in Hawaii (310). Yet Meronym does not stay. Instead, she abandons Zachry to the 'nat'ral order' of his tribal existence even though he has lost any sense of the world that he previously inhabited. As he is rowed away from Big I towards a life with a new and different tribe, he looks back and reflects: '[M]y Hole World an' hole life was shrinked 'nuff to fit in the O o' my finger'n'thumb' (324). Earlier in the narrative,

[21] Harvey (2009: 35) identifies this distinction between *anthropos* and *humanitas* as a central problem in the model of cosmopolitanism inherited from Kant, arguing that the 'universality of Kant's cosmopolitanism and his ethics, and the awkward and intractable particularities of his anthropology and geography is … of critical importance'.

while journeying to Mauna Kea, he describes the mountaintop landscape there as 'jus' a flatness hangin' in nothin' b'tween worlds' (288). But if, as he climbs to the observatory, he thinks that the world of the valleys awaits his return, by the end of his story it is obvious that he has become what we recognise as a displaced person: worldless.

This is perhaps the grimmest conclusion in all of *Cloud Atlas*: an inevitable declension from a state of primitive isonomy into a condition of worldlessness. And it is telling that what Mitchell leaves his readers with by way of consolation—a brief passage in which Zachry's child addresses the reader—represents the most straightforward attempt to mimetise the ethical humanism discussed earlier. For what we are left with at the very heart of *Cloud Atlas* is a simple intersubjective dyad of speaker and listener, shorn of social, political and geographic referents and conspicuously underdetermined by comparison with the maximalism of the rest of the text. While the end of *Cloud Atlas*'s historically sequential narratives—or rather what Schoene (2009: 119) calls 'the novel's navel, its axial nadir and central turning point'—might represent a moment of recognition, this hardly amounts to a world. We do not know where we are, nor do we really know who is speaking: in a novel that is full of cartoonish characters, Zachry's child receives barely any characterisation whatsoever. If this is recognition, it is minimal in the extreme, but it nonetheless represents an essential tenet of ethical humanism: an invitation to '[s]it down a beat or two' (Mitchell, 2004: 325), to listen and to bear witness. The humanity of *humanitas* has been excised from the novel and, while the humanity of humanism survives, it is a humanism without a world.

Freedom after Neoliberalism

For Arendt (1970: 17), the concept of humanity as a form of irreducible human fraternity is profoundly important, because 'it makes insult and injury endurable'; however, she also asserts that 'in political terms it is absolutely irrelevant'. Indeed, she identifies this form of humanity as something belonging to 'pariah peoples':

> Humanity in the form of fraternity invariably appears historically among persecuted peoples and enslaved groups ... This kind of humanity is the great

> privilege of pariah peoples [...but it is] dearly bought; it is often accompanied by so radical a loss of the world ... that in extreme cases, in which pariahdom has persisted for centuries, we can speak of real worldlessness. And worldlessness is always a form of barbarism. (1970: 13)

Arendt argues that political life entails a relationship beyond humanity; a recognition that we inhabit the world as a plurality of humans and not as a singular abstraction; that, in her words, 'men, not Man, live on the earth and inhabit the world' (1958: 7–8). As Zerilli (2005: 19, italics added) suggests, a 'political rather than ontological relation based on the ongoing constitution of the world as a public space' necessitates a manoeuvre beyond our irreducible oneness, towards the kind of 'plurality [which] marks the way in which subjects as members of political communities, *as citizens*, stand to one another'. For Arendt, the kind of compassionate openness around which ethical humanism is constructed cannot bring such a situation to pass because, like fear, it is a 'purely passive' state which 'make[s] action impossible' (Arendt, 1970: 15). Without action there can be no freedom, and without freedom there can be no world in the Arendtian sense of the term.

Cloud Atlas's preoccupation with predation speaks to the elemental vulnerability that is at the centre of much cosmopolitan thinking in post-Foucauldian critical theory. Ultimately, however, in being organised around the singularity of human experience, it suggests that a non-teleological ethics cannot compensate for the animating concept of the political: namely, the kind of pluralism that necessitates agonistic dissensus and thus specifically political relations among citizens who encounter one another in a public sphere. It is thus worth noting that, while public life is everywhere marginalised in *Cloud Atlas*, this is nowhere more the case than in 'Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After'. Indeed, the absence of public life is captured right from the outset of this narrative by upending the conventional novelistic means of distinguishing between private acts of ratiocination and public acts of speech. Direct discourse for much of this section of *Cloud Atlas* is communicated using italics, a typographic convention that is sometimes deployed to report private thoughts in novels that do not make use of free indirect discourse. Initially, this produces some

confusion as Mitchell's readers—who are already being asked to train their ear to the protagonist's peculiar diction, idiomatic expressions and phonetically transcribed narration—attempt to distinguish direct discourse from internal monologue.

It is thus easy to miss the important detail that this confusion is not just ours but Zachry's too, and explicitly identified by Mitchell as a pathological manifestation of Zachry's guilt at being the author of violence that he did not intend but proved incapable of avoiding because of his inaction. At the outset of his narrative, Zachry recalls how, when he was nine years old, the Kona murdered his father and enslaved his brother as the three of them were travelling through the titular Sloosha's Crossing. As he relieves himself in isolation from his family, he is taunted by an internal voice which, throughout the narrative, is anthropomorphised as Old George, an animistic entity that is simultaneously god, devil, judge and tempter:

> *Oh, a darky spot you're in, boy*, murmed the mufflin' ferny.
>
> 'Name y'self!' shouted I, tho' not so loud. 'I got my blade, I have!'
>
> Right 'bove my head some'un whisped, *Name y'self, boy, is it Zachry the Brave or Zachry the Cowardy?* Up I looked an' sure 'nuff there was Old George crossleggin' on a rottin' ironwood tree, a slywise grinnin' in his hungry eyes.
>
> 'I ain't 'fraid o' *you*!' I telled him. (Mitchell, 2004: 249, italics in original)

Returning to his companions, Zachry disturbs a band of Kona, panics and leads them to his father and brother, who attempt to defend themselves. But instead of assisting them, Zachry 'stayed at the lip o' the clearin' because 'fear was pissin' in my blood an' I cudn't go on' (250).

Up to this point in the narrative, speech marks are used to frame direct discourse. But as he represents Zachry's misleading account of the events to the rest of the tribe, Mitchell first switches to reported speech and thereafter uses italics—hitherto the means of representing Zachry's anthropomorphised inner voice—to frame direct discourse. The effect of this formal device is to privatise speech over the course of the rest of the narrative and, since this section of the novel is narrated autodiegetically, render all instances of public communication throughout 'Sloosha's Crossin' an'

Ev'rythin' After' as a form of internal monologue. In its very form, then, this section of the novel organises itself not around a coherent understanding of what Arendt (1973: 296) describes as 'a place in the world that makes opinions significant and actions effective'—which is to say, a political understanding of the world—but rather around the question of subjectivity. Indeed, in many ways Zachry functions as a neat allegory of a 'problem of freedom' that Arendt (2006: 163) identifies as having emerged 'when freedom was no longer experienced in acting and in associating with others but in willing and in the intercourse with one's self'.

The halting progression of *Cloud Atlas* towards an account of the public and the political that is never quite realised provides an important—and useful—corrective to cosmopolitan thinking with respect to its capacity to challenge neoliberalism. In the course of offering this corrective, it also reveals a continuity between, on the one hand, the cosmopolitanism of vulnerability that leads back through current thinkers such as Judith Butler and Paul Gilroy to Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas, and, on the other hand, the liberal cosmopolitanism whose genealogy ultimately returns us to Kant. There has long been a tendency to see these two accounts of cosmopolitan ethics as distinct. In fact, critics frequently position the first as an attempt to reject the teleological Enlightenment metaphysics of the second. But insofar as this discussion of *Cloud Atlas* is concerned, there is reason to understand these two accounts of cosmopolitan ethics in close relation with one another, since the novel places Ewing's liberalism at the end of the novel within a broader framework which, as we have seen, excises the teleological implications from *humanitas* while retaining a minimal ethical humanism.

If what Mitchell represents at *Cloud Atlas*'s conclusion is a form of liberal cosmopolitanism stripped of its teleological dynamics, then the continuity between Enlightenment and contemporary cosmopolitan discourse becomes yet more obvious, for reasons that were identified by post-Marxist thinkers nearly two decades ago. It is not clear that liberal cosmopolitanism, even if stripped of its teleological dynamics, is able to reach beyond a problematic characteristic of liberalism itself, namely a tendency to marginalise dissensus in such a way that democratic participation is

reduced to a combination of economic competition and ethical sentiment. As Chantal Mouffe argues: because '[f]or liberalism the opponent is not an adversary [...but r]ather ... a competitor or a debating partner [...it can] only oscillate between ethics and economics, and [is] bound to miss the specificity of the political' (1999: 5).[22] This comment is of some relevance to *Cloud Atlas*, which seeks a solution to humankind's tendency to predate upon itself by marginalising agonistic dissensus in favour of ethical commitment on the one hand and procedural dialogue on the other. For what else is Ewing's imagined conversation with his father-in-law during the much-quoted conclusion of the novel than, alternately, a debate and a call for ethical engagement?

> If we *believe* that humanity may transcend tooth & claw, if we *believe* divers races & creeds can share this world ... peaceably..., if we *believe* leaders must be just, violence muzzled, power accountable & the riches of the Earth & its Oceans shared equitably, such a world will come to pass ... I hear my father-in-law's response. 'Oho, fine, *Whiggish* sentiments, Adam. But don't tell *me* about justice! Ride to Tennessee on an ass & convince the red-necks that they are merely whitewashed negroes & their negroes are black-washed Whites! Sail to the Old World, tell 'em their imperial slaves' rights are as inalienable as the Queen of Belgium's! Oh, you'll grow hoarse, poor & grey in caucuses! You'll be spat on, shot at, lynched, pacified with medals, spurned by backwoodsmen! Crucified! Naïve, dreaming Adam. (Mitchell, 2004: 529, italics in original)

It is the imagined comments of Ewing's father-in-law that betray the agonistic consequences of Ewing's position. Outwardly, however, Ewing himself appears to be satisfied that his ethical commitment will be consequential without needing to take account of the fact that it requires that he identify himself as an adversary of a range of people who disagree with him. Indeed, his staging of the

[22] Mouffe—a democratic socialist—turns to the Nazi jurist Carl Schmitt in order refine her understanding of specifically political relations, under which people 'face each other as ... interested ... persons, as citizens, governors or governed, politically allied or opponents' (Schmitt in Mouffe, 1999: 41).

disagreement with his father-in-law as a civilised debate says a great deal about his own unwillingness to identify those who do not share his position as not merely misguided contributors to a reasonable discussion but political enemies who must, rhetorically speaking, be defeated. His closing comment—'what is any ocean but a multitude of drops?' (Mitchell, 2004: 529)—represents a fantasy of reconciliatory singularity instead of acknowledging that human plurality necessarily produces political conflict. And what is most problematic about this form of thinking is its tendency to marginalise dissensus in a way that, according to Mouffe, is likely to result in 'the actual *disappearance* of democratic forms of government and … the triumph of the liberal form of governmental rationality that Foucault called "governmentality"' (2000: 42, italics added). As a form of non-teleological cosmopolitanism, Ewing's ethical commitment at the end of the novel thus risks intensifying the very dynamics he seeks to remedy: the ills which, in 'An Orison of Sonmi~451', are illustrated so forcefully.

As one critic (McMorran, 2011: 172) has suggested, '*Cloud Atlas* offers the ultimate philosophical litmus test for its readers, a means of separating the optimists from the pessimists'. It is not clear to me that, examined with reference to its two main preoccupations—the relationship between unfreedom and predation on the one hand and, on the other, the articulation of a cosmopolitan, non-teleological ethics—there are grounds for interpreting the novel optimistically. My aim throughout this essay has not been to suggest that cosmopolitan ethics is unwelcome, or that the ethical turn is unhelpful. Nor has it been to challenge in a fundamental way Schoene's more specific formulation of the cosmopolitan novel. Shaw (2017: 57) argues that *Cloud Atlas* 'appraises and evaluates forms of inclusive community which are not yet achievable or articulable in the contemporary moment', a reading of the text with which I concur. But whereas both Schoene and Shaw treat Mitchell's equivocations as characteristically—and optimistically—cosmopoetic, I think that those equivocations issue a somewhat knottier challenge to cosmopolitan thought which demands that it escape the trap of the 'subject question'. What I have sought to argue here is that Mitchell's novel expects cosmopolitan ethics to perform work

that, more properly speaking, can only be performed by a world-orientated and specifically political understanding of freedom-as-action. As Arendt pointed out long ago, 'for the first time in history all peoples on earth have a common present: no event of any importance in the history of one country can remain a marginal accident in the history of any other' (Arendt, 1970: 83). However, she also argues that we are in dire need of 'a freedom which is not an attribute of the will but an accessory of doing and acting' (Arendt, 1961: 165). In its imagination of planetary conviviality, *Cloud Atlas* deserves to be recognised as a cosmopolitan novel, even if it is a rather tortured example of the genre. However, because of this, Mitchell's novel also functions as an instructive example of the ways in which the most earnest ethical commitment can be hamstrung by a cosmopoetic imaginary that finds the imagination of freedom-as-action impossible.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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How to cite this article: Beaumont, A 2018 Cosmopolitanism without a World? David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*. *Open Library of Humanities*, 4(2): 21, pp. 1–39. DOI: https://doi.org/10.16995/olh.349

Published: 02 October 2018

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