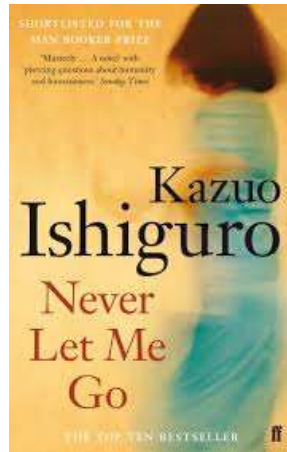
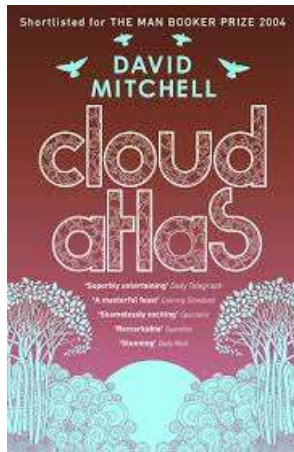


Book Review*

The (Re) Definition of Human Subjects in the Post-Apocalyptic Dystopia of Clone Object



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* This contents is an analysis of issues through a book review:

Mitchell, D., **Cloud Atlas**, Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2014.

Ishiguro, K., **Never let me go**, Alfred A. Knopf, 2005.

“I believe that encounters with lively matter can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is; expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interests.”
Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*¹

In the pre-modern realm, the notion of apocalypse was associated with religious mythology. Apocalypse was an ultimate battle between vice and virtue, which was believed to culminate in the final fate of humanity, Final Judgement. Pre-modern apocalypse was, hence, a unitary narrative that recognizes only the authority of God over human beings. Since modernity took shape in the seventeenth century, secular subjectivity bred multiple notions of apocalypse which entails “the perception of human experience and meaning within the flow of history” (Herzberger, 1991: 247). Ihab Hassan defines (modern) apocalypse as an idea that “involves a sense of outrage at the void of life as well as an expression of the fragmented chaos of human existence” (page 248). There is thus an afterwards to modern apocalypse which anticipates the successive time after its happening. In other words, modern apocalypse is indeed a post-apocalypse that explores *liminality*, an erratic and ambiguous state

¹ Bennett, J., *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, 2010: 122.

of societal transitions through which the meaning of human experiences is explored, rather than the prospect of finality.

One of the prospects of the post-apocalyptic perceptions is projected through dystopian narratives which anchor their arc with a tie-in to the contemplation of the human race under the assumption of collective futurity (Schmeink, 2016: 19, 33). Dystopia produces the imagery of post-apocalypse at the dichotomy of humanism and posthumanism (as well as the non-human) in which the latter is vital for the purpose of assuring the established essence of the former. As an essential ideal that governs the dystopian reality, humanism prides on anthropocentric perspectives through which it aspires to establish human agency that is depicted as a mournful lost of humanity in the dystopian world (King and Page, 2017: 23-24). Through the lenses of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, the ideal of human agency is normalized as a universal value in the discourse of humanism which places its superiority over non-human beings as well as objects. Thanks to such lenses, human beings secure their ontological hierarchy as a distinct race against other beings/objects. In post-apocalyptic dystopia, human ontology is, hence, portrayed through anthropocentric perspectives of human subjectivity which relies heavily on “the knower (human consciousness) on the one side, and the merely known (the objectified [non-human]) on the other” (Sanbonmatsu, 2007: 217).

The Janus-faced emblem of the knower and the merely known finds its genesis in the Enlightenment legacy of Rene Descartes and Immanuel Kant. As the pioneer of the narrative of human supremacy, Descartes proposes the notion of *cogito ergo sum* which is literally translated in English as “I am thinking, therefore I exist” (Descartes, 2006: 54). This little phrase *cogito ergo sum* conceptualizes an anthropocentric understanding of individual subjectivity through which knowledge can be produced and comprehended by the mind that is “entirely” separate from the body (Descartes, 2007: 25). “The human being, in this account, is completely known, knowable, and present to the very being that is engaged in the meditation on what it means to be human” (Badmington, 2003: 17). Descartes further explains his casual argument by providing a comparison between humans and animals by which rationality is a principal quality that distinguishes humans from non-humans (“Descartes, 2006: 46-47). Non-humans, which he refers to machines and monkeys as examples, are simply bodies that possess not the ability to reason, for machines or monkeys can discern no difference between true and false (47). Based on Descartes’ train of thought, humans are placed at the highest echelon of all beings, on which the mind that ‘knows’ rationality is, in essence, the most powerful faculty in the metaphysical reality.

Hopping on the Cartesian ride, Immanuel Kant significantly accentuates the distinction between humans and non-humans by postulating oppositional notions of “*the phenomena*” and “*the noumena*” (Harman, 2017: 68). By the noumena, Kant means “things-in-themselves” whose existence is beyond human experience (page 68). To put simply, the noumena includes objects that exist for the sake of corporeal existence. The phenomena, by contrast, signifies “everything that humans are able to encounter, perceive, use or think about” (page 68). Human consciousness, argued by Kant, can be explained by the phenomena that, in turn, constitutes unique autonomy allowing humans to glide through life with morality.

In the context of the post-apocalyptic dystopia, I might as well ask whether the non-humans whose agency is oftentimes called into question should simply be regarded as Descartes’ monkeys or Kant’s noumena? One of the narrative themes of the post-apocalyptic dystopia is concerned with human cloning. The so-called ‘clone narratives’ mainly deal with two kinds (qtd. in Marcus, 2012: 406). On the one hand, there are narratives such as David Rorvik’s *In His Image: The Cloning of a Man* (1978) which directly explore the scientific mechanisms in relation to the power relations regarding the ethics of human cloning. On the other hand, narratives such as Kazuo Ishiguro’s *Never Let Me Go* (2005) divert their attention away from scientific talks to merely treating cloning as a given-a section in the constitution that is simply there.

Although set in different timelines, David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004) and Kazuo Ishiguro's *Never Let Me Go* are regulated by the clone narratives that avoid the ethics of scientific cloning. In the two texts, the fabricants (a name given to the clones in *Cloud Atlas*) and the students (a referred-to title of the clones in *Never Let Me Go*) are depicted as feeble slaves floating helplessly in the stream of the human regime. The fabricants and the students arrive at the parallel eventuality in which they indeed accept their pre-written fate. In the face of the imminent fate, the clones also acknowledge that they, as the non-humans, are not endowed with free will in the human world. At this point, I might ask further whether the clones are simply objects since they are the noumena, the things-in-themselves without agency?

Clones as Objects

In *Discipline and Punish* (1975), Michelle Foucault argues that discipline produces what he calls "docile bodies." Through his analysis of modern institutions, i.e., hospitals, schools, and militaries, Foucault postulates that modernity views "the body as an object and target of power," and that utility becomes an ideal imposed upon bodies that function within the economic, political, and transnational contexts of the new industrial age (page 136-137). In order to instill this docility into individuals, the docile bodies must be monitored constantly by a web of superior gazes (page 170-172); concurrently,

the internalization of individual articulation is reinforced by a certain set of carefully crafted discourses to create an illusion of “disciplinary individuality”—an illusion that they are being observed at all time, and hence, docile bodies automatically discipline themselves to comply with the invisible system (page 189).

Intrinsically, this 360-degree disciplinary institution is a structure named by Jeremy Bentham as *the Panopticon* that is later adopted by Foucault to explain his principle of *panopticism* that is “a new ‘political anatomy’ whose object and end are not the relations of sovereignty but the relations of discipline” (page 208). Under the Panopticon, docile bodies conduct their behaviors in compliance with discipline instead of the power relations directly between the status quo and its loyal subjects.

In the world of *Cloud Atlas* during the narrative of Sonmi-451, the Panopticon operates as a capitalist corporate called Papa Song’s. According to Sonmi-451’s testimonial, the fabricants are indoctrinated with “the Six Catechisms” (page 185). Through a daily ritual, the fabricants are programmed to believe in labour as an ultimate ideal that should be upheld by the fabricants. It is this Catechism that the fabricants strive to conduct their entire lives towards on a promise of “Xultation” which is a retirement heaven thought to be the long-awaited fruit of their labour for the corporate named Papa Song’s. In collaboration with the Six Catechisms, a chemical substance fed to the fabricants called

“Soap” functions to suppress what Sonmi-451 deduces to suppress “the [e]xpression of an innate personality possessed by all fabricants” (page 187). Under the spell of Soap, the fabricates are made unable to realize their individual subjectivities but rather form a collective subjectivity as the pivot on which their workmanship as waitresses at Papa Song’s oscillates.

In *Never Let Me Go*, the Panopticon operates as a school establishment called Hailsham. Kathy and her crew were brought up with ‘universal’ knowledge of the world (specifically Britain) that is constructed entirely by Hailsham’s told-and-not-told doctrine. Miss Emily, as the director of Hailsham, ensures that the students are “sheltered” by the fact that they are clones, and that they are fed with an incessant dose of foggy truths, which is just sufficient to cultivate and sustain the state of subversion. During Kathy’s time as Ruth’s carer, they reminisced their youthful time hiding out in their secret places. They both expressed a petrifying attitude towards Miss Emily’s watchful gaze:

If you saw Miss Emily coming, your heart sank because she’d always know you were there hiding. It was like she had some extra sense. You could go into a cupboard, close the door tight and not move a muscle, you just knew Miss Emily’s footsteps would stop outside and her voice would say: “All right. Out you come.” (page 44)

Under strict surveillance, Hailsham operates as the Panopticon that ‘disciplines’ the students to submit to a familiar sense of omnipresent

surveillance. As expected, the result is that the students are consciously cautious when they interact with each other. Every interaction has to be fabricated carefully in a banal manner that sufficiently exhausts public attention.

Whether they are Papa Song's fabricants or Hailsham students, these clones are trapped within the panopticon of discipline that is designed by the human regime for the purpose of possessing their docile bodies. In *Never Let Me Go*, human society possesses their physical bodies to cultivate and utilize their organs in organ transplantations. Human health is, in consequence, sustained by compliant "donations" from the clones. Perhaps owing to her ethical stance, Miss Lucy blurts out the origin of the students' existence:

"You'll become adults, then before you're old, before you're even middle-aged, you'll start to donate your vital organs. That's what each of you was created to do. You're not like the actors you watch on your videos, you're not even like me. You were brought into this world for a purpose, and your futures, all of them, have been decided. So you're not to talk that way any more. You'll be leaving Hailsham before long, and it's not so far off, the day you'll be preparing for your first donations. You need to remember that.

If you're to have decent lives, you have to know who you are and what lies ahead of you, every one of you.” (page 81)

Despite hearing their entire life laid before them in such a no-way-out statement, neither do the clones make a scene nor toy with any alternatives even later on. Every single one of them including Kathy accepts and performs their ultimate roles as organ donors for the sake of human society that they share no part of.

In *Cloud Atlas*, human society possesses the labour of the clones to deliver services in the wheel of human consumption. The human economy is, in consequence, fueled by the free workforce of the fabricants. As a result, their life ticks in a 24-hour clock of Papa Song's' industry as described by Sonmi-451:

“A server is woken at hour four-thirty by stimulin in the airflow, then yellow-up in our dormroom... we recite the Six Catechisms... At hour five we man our tellers around the Hub, ready for the elevator to bring the new day's first consumers. For the following nineteen hours we greet diners, input orders, tray food, vend drinks, upstock condiments, wipe tables, and bin garbage. Vespers follows cleaning, then we imbibe one Soapsac in the dormroom. That is the blueprint of every unvarying day.” (page 185)

It is in the same manner as the Hailsham students that the fabricants' goal is to a life of unwavering devotion to serving Papa Song's as tireless labours as they aim for nothing more and nothing less. With complete compliance the clones exhibit, it is not too ambitious to conclude that they are successfully molded into docile bodies. To borrow Kant's words, they turn into the noumena, objects without the mind. Jane Bennett refers to W. J. T. Mitchell as she clarifies the definition of objects: 'objects are the way things appear to a subject-that is, with a name, an identity, a gestalt or stereotypical template' (qtd. in Bennett, 2010: 2). The key here is that, to the subjects or humans, the clones are as good as objects, for their ontology is without agency. The clones are possessions of the human panopticon that produces objects whose name, identity, gestalt, and stereotypical template are engineered to serve the good of the human regime.

The Intra-Action Between Clone Objects and Human Subject

I have attempted to look at the agency of the clone objects through the anthropocentric subjectivity which perceives it in relation to consciousness. As anthropocentrism interpret ontology as a trajectory of knowledge, the clones whose thoughts are controlled by discipline are thus not regarded as agents of free will essentially. To examine whether the clone objects are as passive as human subjects perceive them to be, as well as to examine whether the relationships between

the clone objects and the human subjects can only be understood under the construction of the panopticon, it is now most appropriate to shift the paradigmatic focus of this paper to the non-anthropocentric perspective developed within the metaphysics of objects which is known by the name of object-oriented ontology or OOO.

Marked its beginning from Martin Heidegger and Jacques Derrida, Graham Harman defines OOO, in the simplest sense, as “a ‘flat ontology’ which opposes the standard modernist assumption that human thought is something completely different in kind from all of the trillions of non-human entities in the universe” (Harman, 2017: 106). While OOO accepts the plausibility of Kant’s noumena, it refuses to project anthropomorphic perceptions into objects and poses another dimension of ontology that is beyond the humanistic bound; as Graham notes, “Fire and cotton are also opaque to each other even if they are not ‘conscious’ in the same way as humans or animals” (page 259).

Karen Barad frames “a posthumanist performative approach” which proposes the thought-provoking redefinition of “ontology, materiality, and agency” under agential realism that embraces “matter’s dynamism” (Barad 2007, 135-136). My main focus for this part is the notion of agency; not only Barad challenges the anthropocentric version of agency solely by philosophical causality, but as a physicist, she also explains that at the atomic level of physicality, there exists

no inherent distinction between ‘humans’ and ‘nonhumans’ (page153). With no hierarchical ontology among all beings, she thus expounds:

“Agency is a matter of intra-acting; it is an enactment, not something that someone or something has. It cannot be designated as an attribute of subjects or objects (as they do not preexist as such). It is not an attribute whatsoever. Agency is “doing” or “being” in its intra-activity.” (page 178; emphasis added)

In other words, agency is a performative matter. Unlike Judith Butler’s idea of performativity which perceives gender as a cultural interpretation or a mere container of meanings, Barad’s performativity is the mutual constitution of meaning produced by entangled matters, as she writes, “[Matter] does not require the mark of an external force like culture or history to complete it. Matter is always already an ongoing historicity” (page 150-151). In this respect, the noumena and the phenomena mutually ‘acting out’ in the interrelated stage of agency within the dynamics of materiality and materialization. Human bodies and nonhuman objects ‘intra-act’ with one another in order to materialize their state of being in all dimensions (e.g. cultural, social, or physical).

Back to the universe of *Cloud Atlas* and *Never Let Me Go*, through the OOO pair of eyes, I am obliged first to delve into my afore-investigated argument that touches on the humans' possession of the clones. By constructing the panopticon in both a physical construction, as well as an idea (i.e., panopticism), humans are, therefore, the proprietors of the clones. The proprietors are, however, one of the actors in the intra-activity of the identity project. Jean-Paul Sartre witnesses an intertwined convergence of proprietors and belongings, to which he states, 'The totality of my possessions reflect the totality of my being, I *am* what I have'(qtd. in Belk, 2017: 121). By possessing objects, the identity of the owners is shaped in the process in which he lays out three methods of appropriation that trigger the state of having into the state of becoming: "master[ing] or gain[ing] control," "creat[ing]," and "know[ing]" (page 121-122).

Through the possession of the clones, the clones "...unavoidably [become] a part of [humans], symbolizes [humans], and represents [humans] (page 122). Within the panopticon where the intra-activity takes place, clone objects are created, taken control of, and known by human subjects, which constructs a quintessential component of human identity that is the notion of authenticity. In both *Cloud Atlas* and *Never Let Me Go*, the clones are indoctrinated to internalize their subjectivity through the discourse of humanism. According to Kate Coper, humanity can be explored through a binary opposition of

concepts such as authenticity and “inauthenticity” (qtd. in King and Page, 2017: 29). Authenticity, in this case, finds its supposed genesis in the Greek revival of human understanding in the eighteenth century, which is essentially a nostalgic yarn for the more pastoral and purer past before modernity. Hence, the reinterpretation of the human body blossomed in which humans are thought to be an embodiment of authenticity (Mosse, 1985: 49).

In *Never Let Me Go*, the division between humans and clones is drawn by being ensouled. In order to be categorized as humans, the clones have to prove that they do possess souls through the aesthetic endeavor. While the guardians educate the students that humanity (aka soul) is a flower of artistic/cultural consciousness as Miss Lucy emphasizes this to Tommy that “[artifacts] revealed what you were inside...they reveal your soul,” the hierarchical footing between the guardians and the students is ensured through the ability to acquire humanistic sensibility (Ishiguro, 2005: 173). The guardians secure their superiority over the students on the merit that they are thought to be naturally endowed with such sensibility. Without this value, Miss Emily replies in the end, “...it is not a notion universally held” that ‘inauthentic’ clones should be endowed with souls like ‘authentic’ humans are (page 258).

In *Cloud Atlas*, the difference between humans and fabricates is highlighted by intellectuality. In order to “ascend” from the status of being nonhuman, the fabricates such as Sonmi-457 and Hae-Joo should realize one’s subjectivity which springs into life the intellectual fountain that enriches individual expressions. During one of Sonmi-451’s sightseeing with Hae-Joo, she encounters a media fashion scout named Lily who mistakes her Sonmi look for a fashion statement. During their brief dialogue, Lily acclaims: “I’ve been spying on you!...But that’s what a woman of your flair, your *prescience*, my dear, must expect” (page 228). Here, the authenticity of humans is established as an ingenious inventor who can toy with the idea of the uncanny crossover between the fabricants and the purebloods.

In the intra-activity, the human proprietors become their human selves through the possession of the clone objects. Both the main actors in the agency performativity mutually take part in establishing human identity as oppositional opposites. While humans pose as authentic subjects, clones balance the equilibrium by posing as inauthentic objects. Exploring the panopticon again through the OOO microscope, the clones are no longer a mere container of meaning or a bodily production of non-humanistic value. To speak an anthropocentric language, the clone objects also exert their ‘agency’ by enforcing as well as reinforcing the yin-and-yang of authenticity and inauthenticity that signifies human identity.

Conclusion

In the narrative of post-apocalyptic dystopia, the meaning of posthumanism is the prevailing veil that is embedded within the contradictions of humanism. The ongoing conversation points to the establish argument that posthumanism is an extension of humanism itself. Throughout the literary tradition of humanism, anthropomorphism is the fundamental lens of projecting the reality in relation to the ontology of beings. From this perspective, the clones in *Cloud Atlas* and *Never Let Me Go* are imprisoned in the panopticons constructed by the human empires under the humanistic gaze of authenticity. Without agency of their own, they are simply objects in the possession of humans. The clone objects are, so to speak, whatever the human subjects perceive them to be. The theory of object-oriented ontology, nevertheless, speaks otherwise. From the stance of OOO, agency is a concert filled with nothing but performers. On the stage of intra-activity, every matter mutually participates in the ontological sphere. The clone objects are, hence, the collaborators of the panopticon as well. In other words, they also join in shaping human identity as much as human subjects shape their identity as the non-human.

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