COSMOPOLITANISM AS CRITICAL AND CREATIVE PRACTICE: AN INTRODUCTION

Eleanor Byrne and Berthold Schoene

Has cosmopolitanism become uncontroversial? As a concept it seems endlessly flexible and suits almost everybody while offending no one in particular. If we are all citizens of the world already, and nobody would seriously want to contest this, then is there still a need to plead for a cosmopolitan outlook, a cosmopolitan inflection to political decisions taken at national and international levels, or by international bodies? Clearly, for peoples yet to access even national recognition in an international arena, the injunctions of a cosmopolitan commitment in a globalised world are urgent and risky in equal measure. Numerous examples might demonstrate this point. For instance, on 29 November 2012, the United Nations General Assembly voted to upgrade the status of the Palestinians to that of a 'non-member observer state'. This followed a bid to join the international body as a full member state in 2011, which failed, due to a lack of support in the UN Security Council. The long-term effects of this decision are as yet unknowable. Palestinians may now participate in General Assembly debates, and their chances of joining UN agencies and the International Criminal Court have improved. But conversely the Israeli response to the vote has been to withhold $120 million worth of funds from Palestine and initiate aggressive settlement projects in East Jerusalem. Importantly, cosmopolitanism advocates that we have conversations across borders, and that in these conversations the rights of both parties to speak are universally regarded as self-evident.

Eleanor Byrne, Manchester Metropolitan University
Ellie Byrne is Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Literature at Manchester Metropolitan University, UK. Her research and teaching covers twentieth century British and Postcolonial literature and theory. She has written on Salman Rushdie, intersections between postmodernism and postcolonial theory and postcolonial archives. Recent publications include a monograph, Homi K. Bhabha, (Palgrave, 2009), 'Texting Obama' Comparative American Studies, vol.10, Double issue 2–3 (Co-Editor), 2012. She is currently researching a monograph on the representation of Hawaii in contemporary literature and culture.

Berthold Schoene, Manchester Metropolitan University
Berthold Schoene is Professor of English and Director of the Institute of Humanities and Social Science Research at Manchester Metropolitan University. His publications include *Writing Men* (2000), *Posting the Male* (2003), *The Cosmopolitan Novel* (2009), *The Edinburgh Companion to Contemporary Scottish Literature* (2007) and *The Edinburgh Companion to Irvine Welsh* (2010).

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Cosmopolitanism is traditionally defined either with reference to its late eighteenth-century Kantian legacy as world citizenship facilitated by international trade legislation or, in its more contemporary manifestation, as 'a form of radicalism that has flourished since the fall of the Berlin Wall' (Fine, 2003, p.452) driven less by economic interests and bourgeois self-realisation than an egalitarian cosmopolitics informed by a strong ethical sense of world-communal commitment.

Especially since 9/11 cosmopolitanism has asserted itself as a counterdiscursive response to globalisation and a critical methodology aimed at counterbalancing the ongoing hegemony of what in *The Cosmopolitan Vision* Ulrich Beck has termed 'the national outlook'. Invoking a world threatened by global risks Beck calls on communities to reconceive their nationalist self-identification by opening up and contributing to global culture with '[their] own language and cultural symbols' (Beck, 2006, p.21). The new cosmopolitanism promotes a departure from nationally demarcated and compartmentalised views of the world. However, keen to avoid imposing a new universalism, it stresses the indispensability of local diversity and difference for the propagation of any sustainable world-communal future.

As the world finds itself increasingly disempowered by globalisation's seeming intractability, any meaningful political intervention becomes ever harder to initiate. Presumably this is where, as a means of potential resistance to globalisation, cosmopolitanism as an ethically informed geopolitical discourse could gain considerable momentum. Such an understanding of cosmopolitanism as dissent is not without its critics. Timothy Brennan, for example, identifies the new cosmopolitanism as 'a veiled Americanism' (Brennan, 2001, p.682). He refers to it dismissively as 'cosmo-theory' which, in his view, does little more than provide glib rhetorical copy for economic globalisation, and the cultural oppression and exploitation that accompany it. 'Globalization bears on cosmopolitanism as structure to idea', Brennan asserts. 'It is that purportedly new material reality to which the new ethos – cosmopolitanism – responds' (2001, p.662). What Brennan's critique exposes is cosmopolitanism's enmeshment in the operations of neoliberal capitalism and Americanisation, which pursue not smooth worldwide homogenisation, let alone democratic popular equivalence, but quite simply reinscribe the centuries-old exploitative core-periphery relations of Western imperialism. Whereas in the twenty-first century capital has indeed gone cosmopolitan, in political, social and cultural terms transnational exchange remains largely a one-way system, segregating the proverbial global village into enclaves of unprecedented security and affluence, on the one hand, and increasingly anomic ghettoes of terror, cultural dislocation and economic hardship, on the other.

Brennan's critique zooms in on one particular manifestation of cosmopolitanism, namely the American academy's embrace of the Clinton Administration's new market globalism, which was soon matched by Tony Blair's coinage of a political 'Third Way'. This new market globalism set out to marry neoliberalism's

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1 'Palestinians win upgraded UN status by wide margin', BBC News Middle East, 30 November 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world middle east 20550864 (accessed 3 January 2013).

'free market' agenda to social responsibility and commitment, keen to design a roadmap for exiting the rampant monetarist turbo-capitalism to which, according to Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, there was no alternative. Under Clinton and Blair globalisation appeared to develop a social conscience, and Brennan is right to point out that many American intellectuals fell for the allure of this expertly-spun fantasy of bringing progress and prosperity to the new post-Cold War world. Unfortunately, not only did they fail to recognise the manifold ways in which this so-called Washington Consensus massively exacerbated the same old inequalities both at home and worldwide, they also took for granted the consolidation of global American hegemony that inevitably ensued. According to Brennan, the kind of cosmopolitanism endorsed in this work made a significant contribution to America's systematic 'transform[ation of] the *kosmos* into their [own] *polis*', as Sheldon Pollock memorably put it (Pollock, 2002, p.25). But should one really allow this errant variant of cosmopolitanism, specific to a particular group in a particular place and time, to disqualify for good any other possible manifestations of cosmopolitical engagement?

One major objective of our special issue is to explore the impact, and impact-generating potential, of cosmopolitanism within both critical and creative practice. Can cosmopolitanism be retrieved from being seen as a mere by-product of globalisation, a philosophy or – more appropriately – a lifestyle that has developed out of the increasing cosmopolitanisation of everyday life, especially in the developed world? If we did choose to see it as the latter, then cosmopolitanism would indeed be little more than a euphemism for Americanisation or, worse still, a mere marketing buzzword aimed at rendering globalisation more palatable to the West's educated, politically-engaged and culturally-active middle classes. Despite his acknowledgement that cosmopolitanism does set out to promote an ethical connection of the individual with the world as a whole, Craig Calhoun, for instance, expresses concern that 'equally often cosmopolitanism imagines a world that is simply an object of consumption, there for individuals' pleasure' (Calhoun, 2008, p.109). It is a view crisply exemplified by Kimberly Yuracko's interpretation in *Perfectionism and Contemporary Feminist Values* (2003) that 'the goal of cosmopolitanism is self-expression and self-realization', and that 'cosmopolitanism presents individuals with a wide range of options; they choose the one that will bring them the most pleasure and gratification' (quoted in Calhoun, 2002, p.109). Highlighting the primacy of individual choice over communal responsibility and

commitment, Yuracko falls prey to a common fallacy fairly widespread among US American academics, which is to conflate cosmopolitanism with neoliberalism. This overlooks and indeed disingenuously obfuscates the irresolvable tensions between Western consumerist individualism, on the one hand, and the pursuit of pan-global cosmopolitical equivalence, on the other.

Originally an economic doctrine championing the free market and wary of any form of state intervention, neoliberalism has come to equate political liberty with economic freedom, making the latter the primary foundation of a free and prosperous society. Opposed to the post-World War II welfare state, which was built on the premise that markets must be regulated, by taxes and labour rights, to ensure social justice and mobility, neoliberalism rose to worldwide hegemony in the 1980s under the political reign of Reagan and Thatcher. Neoliberalism's acutely self-centred view of the human is memorably expressed in Thatcher's declaration of 1987 that 'there is no such thing as society! There are individual men and women and there are families and no government can do anything except through people and people look to themselves first' (Thatcher, 1987). Not without irony, neoliberalism's ascent appears to have been fuelled by the legacy of the countercultural 1960s, which had taught a whole generation to regard individual freedom and self-realisation as life's most pressing pursuits. According to Tony Judt, 'what united the '60s generation was not the interest of all, but the needs and rights of each', adding that 'individualism – the assertion of every person's claim to maximized private freedom and the unrestrained liberty to express autonomous desires and have them respected and institutionalized by society at large – became the left-wing watchword of the hour' (Judt, 2010, pp.87–8). Instead of making use of the state as an instrument for forging a fairer and more democratic future, people from across the political spectrum now saw the state as a bully and big brother that interfered with the citizenry's basic human right to self-fulfilment. The aspiration of the hour was to create a 'small state' that would enable individuals to live their lives unencumbered by society's norms and needs. Measures were taken to rein in the public sector which was believed to disempower and infantilise the citizenry, while a free-market economy was established – again, not without irony – by governmentally enforced deregulation. In our own day and age faith in the free market has not only become the world's chief political rationale, it has moreover infiltrated even the most intimate spheres of our lives, thus effectively elevating neoliberalism to the status of ideology of the now. According to Jodi Dean, free market exchange has

become 'a guide for all human action' (Dean, 2008, p.48), while David Harvey asserts that neoliberalism 'has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (Harvey, 2005, p.3).

As oppositionally imbricated as dystopia and utopia, and frequently confused in both popular discourse and right-wing opinion-making, neoliberalism and cosmopolitanism are probably best understood as the twin ideologies of contemporary globalisation: whereas the former champions free market forces and remains primarily motivated by the generation of profit, resulting in the creation of winners and losers, the latter advocates fair-trade agreements intended to benefit all humanity by establishing worldwide equality and justice. According to Pheng Cheah, what the rivalrous vying for predominance between these two ideological mindsets ultimately reveals is nothing less than a clash between two seemingly irreconcilable world pictures, centred on 'the world' and 'the globe' respectively:

> ' The world is a form of relating or being-with. The globe, on the other hand, the totality produced by processes of globalization, is a bounded object or entity in Mercatorian space. When we say "map of the world," we really mean "map of the globe." It is assumed that the spatial diffusion and extensiveness achieved through global media and markets give rise to a sense of belonging to a shared world, when one might argue that such developments lead instead to greater polarization and division of nations and regions. The globe is not the world. This is a necessary premise if the cosmopolitan vocation of world literature can be meaningful today. '
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> (2008, p.30)

Worth noting is also, of course, that cosmopolitan ideals are frequently hijacked by the neoliberal project, which excels at posing as a herald of freedom, independence, community, and global prosperity while in fact perpetrating barely concealed neo-imperialist 'mercatorial' designs.

Contemporary cosmopolitanism as critical and creative practice must attempt to extricate itself from the stranglehold of its neoliberal twin so it can evolve into an ethically responsible mode of resistance to globalisation. In our view, an important part of this effort is the willingness to imagine and conceive of global community as radical conviviality. Far from incorporating a neat fulfilment of utopian designs of multicultural concord and harmony, such radical conviviality manifests as the messy, unmanageable and motley sprawl of humanity across the globe.

For any politics, poetics or cultural practice to do justice to humanity as it presents itself, it must first accept that there cannot, of course, ever be one 'correct' cosmopolitanism; instead, it must embrace the existence of a plurality of cosmopolitanisms, the particular motivation and disposition of each depending on its local specificity, as every nation, and indeed every citizen of every nation, including the stateless, will make their own unique contribution to global culture.

Effectively, what cosmopolites should expect to encounter and have to engage with as they go abroad is other cosmopolitanisms. What Calhoun regards as 'a key problem in an otherwise attractive concept' is exactly this 'notion that cosmopolitanism (a version of ethical goodness) can be achieved without deeper change'. As far as Calhoun is concerned, 'cosmopolitanism should not be simply a free-floating cultural taste, personal attitude, or ethical choice; it must be a matter of institutions' (Calhoun, 2008, p.109), and how could one fail to agree with him? However, Calhoun's portrayal of cosmopolitanism as primarily an idealist personality trait to be cultivated by individuals of their own accord is misleading as it falls short of capturing the cosmopolitan impulse as always already immanent in literally myriad forms of communal intermingling and hospitable engagement that are congenital to the human condition. Obviously, cosmopolitanism would also spectacularly fail in its opposition to universalism if it tried to reach any kind of definite global institutionalisation before achieving popular ubiquity. More importantly, however, we simply cannot afford the luxury of waiting for a wholescale governmental restructuring of the world. In its current state our world resembles a babel that obstinately resists systematic corralling into fixed belief systems or uniform political schemes. Spheres of cultural difference no longer overlap and cross-fertilise politely, if ever they did, but clash in struggle and agitation, sparking sometimes signs of wonder, sometimes pure cataclysm. It is also crucial to understand that the agential and significatory power of cosmopolitanism exceeds momentary acts of charitable hospitality or humanitarian solicitude. Cosmopolitanism is best seen as everybody's challenge to respond ethically to the ceaseless, random happening of encounter and communication that constitutes everyday human living throughout the world.

We would like to propose three tentative principles for a counterdiscursive cosmopolitanism, that is, a cosmopolitanism which aims to resist and, by so doing, unsettle the apparent intractability of globalisation as neoliberalisation. The three principles we propose are glocality, relationality and inoperativity. Glocality

refers to the rootedness, originality and specificity of all cosmopolitan agency. Rather than perpetrating an erasure of local culture, globalisation initiates a commingling and interpermeation of the global with the local. Put differently, wherever it takes purchase, globalisation meets with resistance and is subjected to processes of locally-specific transformation. Consequently, cosmopolitanism is never first and foremost about acknowledging and interacting with other cultures, but about acknowledging and interacting with 'other' cosmopolitanisms – other, locally-specific and initially-alien responses to the world and its increasing globalisation. Each encounter with a stranger thus posits a challenge to one's own cosmopolitan disposition and agency – what Marsha Meskimmon has designated as everybody's 'response-ability' (Meskimmon, 2011, p.7) – and this challenge is all the more pronounced and urgent when the stranger is also a foreigner.

Cosmopolitan relationality is offered by us in opposition to postmodern relativity: that, and how the parts relate to each other individually and *in toto,* matters greatly in cosmopolitanism. In contrast to postmodernism, cosmopolitanism has a predilection for segmentation over fragmentation, conviviality over individual self-realisation, and processes of transformation over states or degrees of hybridity. This kind of cosmopolitan relationality can also be seen to feature prominently in Judith Butler's query concerning individual responsibility and communality in *Frames of War*:

> ❛ Is it only as an "I," that is, as an individual, that I am responsible? Could it be that when I assume responsibility what becomes clear is that who "I" am is bound up with others in necessary ways? Am I even thinkable without that world of others? In effect, could it be that through the process of assuming responsibility the "I" shows itself to be, at least partially, a "we"? ❜
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> (Butler, 2009, p.35)

This process of self-reflection leads Butler to her concept of 'grievability' through which she aims to expose common sectarian and nationalist curtailments of human fellow feeling in an increasingly globalised world. 'Those we kill are not quite human, and not quite alive', Butler writes, 'which means that we do not feel the same outrage and horror over the loss of their lives as we do over the loss of those lives that bear national or religious similarity to our own' (p.42). A cosmopolitan world would suffer the loss of 50 people killed in a bomb blast in a Baghdad market square as acutely as the loss of 50 people killed in an attack on the London Underground. Butler urges us to demand to see more of the pictures and hear more of the stories behind anonymous statistics: who are the three Iraqi bystanders that were killed together with the British soldier whose face we are shown and whose name we are told? And who was the suicide bomber that killed all of them with so little discrimination? It is crucial we demand to be empowered to grieve all victims of violence irrespective of their citizenship or religious denomination.

The third principle of counterdiscursive cosmopolitanism is inoperativity, which is a term borrowed from the work of the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy. The act of imagining global community, Nancy insists, must remain inoperative; it must be impartial, ateleological and without any definite purpose other than perpetuating human conviviality. The act of imagining global community must refrain from conceiving of humanity in terms of a project or 'work' destined for completion. Such a strictly operative approach would subject humanity to a programme of self-fulfilment, or end-of-history 'salvation', as envisioned by virtually all types of fundamentalism, be they religious or political. Any attempt to establish global community by seeking to accomplish perfect consent, harmony and agreement can only prove injurious. What keeps community alive and well is disparity, dissent, struggle and agitation. Nancy envisages community as always in the process of 'coming' instead of having come already or, in fact, as ever being meant to come together for good. The principle of cosmopolitan inoperativity declines to identify itself as an ideological '-ism' that grasps global conviviality only to manage and contain it. By contrast, cosmopolitan inoperativity facilitates our imagining of global community as a relational, 'glocal', 'being-in-common' or, quite simply, as radical convivial living, for now, in the here and now.

It is through its cultivation of glocality, relationality and inoperativity that cosmopolitanism demonstrates and develops its counterdiscursive potential – as a critical and creative practice, as a politics and a poetics, and, at the same time, as both a particular chosen individual style and a congenital human inclination towards community. More importantly perhaps, it is also by dint of these attributes that it becomes seriously contentious and controversial, even offensive. Cosmopolitanism will, of course, alienate nationalists, fundamentalists and racists – and that it will do so should go without saying. It will also obstruct the kind of global management and entrepreneurialism that treats the world primarily as an enterprise, a market place and exploitable commodity. Its ethic

would insist on pausing to grieve the many lives lost in the devastating Japanese earthquake and tsunami of March 2011, and by so doing acknowledge – however momentarily – the precariousness of human existence, something that politicians, economists and their think-tanks almost immediately turned into a reckoning of the catastrophe's likely impact on the economy. Counterdiscursive cosmopolitanism will not agree with whoever values fiscal stability more highly than social justice; with whoever claims that there is no such thing as society; with whoever regards the state as inhibitive rather than crucially instrumental in the development of community; with whoever speaks about the public and private sectors as if they were opposed, even inimical, to each other. Nor will it agree with whoever implements multicultural policies in order to compartmentalise society and carve up the world, which is already perceived as far too unprofitably particularised and fragmented; with whoever absolves themselves of cosmopolitan responsibility by segregation or proscription, quite as if either method could ever transport alleged undesirables out of our world, or hide the fact that those we mishandle in such ways are not in fact aliens, but inalienable members of global community.

The seven contributors to this special issue explore what, in their view, cosmopolitanism does, or might be able to do, or ought to be doing, especially in terms of thinking about their own work as critics, artists and writers. What motivates our work on cosmopolitanism? What are we setting out to achieve? What the contributors share is a common interest in probing the potentialities and limitations of cosmopolitanism as counterdiscursive critical and creative practice. Cosmopolitanism is presented here as epistemology and critical/creative method instead of merely a lifestyle, an attitude, or a political position always already ideologically contaminated and hence devoid of deconstructive capability. Inspired by Ulrich Beck's *Cosmopolitan Vision* the contributors conceive of cosmopolitan practice as a response to globalisation, as an 'outlook' or 'method' that is purposeful and deliberate rather than complicit or merely ancillary. Instead of searching for signs of cosmopolitanism in art, literature and critical theory, the contributions to this volume are linked by a concern with artistic, literary and theoretical practice as by and of itself already cosmopolitan. In what ways can creativity and the imagination as they express themselves in literature, art and theory be identified as practices that not only help raise a cosmopolitan consciousness but, beyond that, instigate and initiate actual forms of emancipatory transnational understanding and agency?

Three of the seven contributions that make up this special issue (those by Connell, Garfield and Schoene) came out of the proceedings of a symposium on 'Cosmopolitanism as Critical and Creative Practice' hosted by the Institute of Humanities and Social Science Research at Manchester Metropolitan University in May 2011 as part of its annual research programme on globalisation. The remaining four papers were specially commissioned for this collection. Berthold Schoene's opening essay reads Geoff Ryman's interactive novel *253* as a text that conceives of global community through 'global narration' which produces a thick description of global contemporaneity. Marsha Meskimmon explores what she terms the precarious ecology of cosmopolitanism as always unfinished. Through readings of works by three artists (Joan Brasil, Catherine Bertola and Johanna Hällsten) she explores the role of 'wonder' as having the potential to align subjects in the world through a shared experience of affective states at once precarious and precious. Elaine Speight advocates 'place listening' as a radical form of embedded, relational and sustained engagement with, as well as within, specific places. Through a discussion of her own communal art project, *Palimpsest*, she explores the potential of different forms of urban walking to facilitate a nuanced cosmopolitan intervention into essentialised notions of space. Renate Dohmen takes a critical look at articulations of the cosmopolitan in critical receptions of the work of Thai-Argentinian artist Rirkrit Tiravanija, whose installations, she argues, are too easily read as paradigmatic of 'relational aesthetics'. Dohmen asks how Tiravanija's works reconceptualise home, and being at home in the world, through a cosmopolitan lens.

Rachel Garfield discusses examples of minimalist art practice, proposing that a concept of cosmopolitan maximalism might more fully illuminate the particular aesthetic dynamics at work in her examples. She describes this as a form of excessive overloading, or density, which explores multi-positionality by enabling the viewer to insert themselves into the narrative of the work. Liam Connell explains the usefulness of the concept of offshore cosmopolitanism. By examining the ways in which the 'offshore' involves a bifurcation of the nation state under global capitalism, he discusses the ways in which the idea of national belonging struggles to survive in representations of the offshore in a range of contemporary cosmopolitan novels. Finally, following Jacques Derrida's work on hospitality as an aporia, Eleanor Byrne discusses the limits and conditions of a cosmopolitan un/conditional hospitality, which she does through an analysis of the official UK Citizenship Test. In an additional text she then offers an encounter

with unconditional hospitality in the work of the Swedish-Finnish children's writer Tove Janssen. Artist John Timberlake offers a visual afterword with original artworks based on a virtual grand tour of the world facilitated by Google Earth.

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THE WORLD ON A TRAIN: GLOBAL NARRATION IN GEOFF RYMAN'S *253*

Berthold Schoene

Abstract

The focus of this essay is an exploration of Geoff Ryman's interactive novel 253, *which was originally released online in 1996 as* 253, or Tube Theatre: A Novel for the Internet on London Underground in Seven Cars and a Crash *and two years later also published as a 'print remix'. Examining Ryman's text as an example of contemporary global narration, Schoene explores the cosmopolitan techniques and structural devices employed in* 253 *not merely to envisage the individual's immersion in global community but to facilitate an enduring interactive experience of it. Aligning the hypertextuality of* 253 *with Jean-Luc Nancy's philosophy of community, Schoene argues that Ryman's use of hyperlinks does not destroy plot, but deconstructs it, reconceiving it as fluid and 'inoperative' instead of strictly telos-driven. With close reference to Ryman's 'The World on a Train', his BBC News tribute to the 52 victims of the 7/7 London terrorist attacks, the essay concludes by looking at the new cosmopolitical currency acquired by Ryman's novel – a currency it did not originally have in the mid-1990s.*

Recent developments in communication technology have made the world a smaller and more easily navigable place. The world is now more efficiently connected and as a result we seem to be living within much closer reach of each other. Yet, at times, it looks as though instead of evolving into new global neighbourhoods, buzzing with multicultural diversity and cosmopolitan fellow feeling, the globe has begun to shrink into a claustrophobic, inhospitable throng, tighter and more compact than before, but hardly any more intimate or empathic. Individuals lead ever more atomised and isolated lives while the population of the world as a whole finds itself corralled into fiercely inimical identities. Contemporary cosmopolitan fiction's effort at imagining global community is compounded not only by the sheer number of people in the world, but also by the unwieldy anonymity, mounting competitiveness and neoliberal fractiousness of these people, and as a result cosmopolitan community becomes increasingly difficult to represent within the confines of a single narrative.