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Network Fictions and the Global Unhomely

Aris Mousoutzanis[1]

[1] University of Brighton, GB
 A.Mousoutzanis@brighton.ac.uk

The paper suggests that the increasing proliferation of network fictions in literature, film, television and the internet may be interpreted through a theoretical framework that reconceptuallises the originally strictly psychoanalytic concept of the *Unheimlich* (Freud's idea of the 'unhomely' or 'uncanny') within the context of political, economic and cultural disources fo globalisation. 'Network fictions' are those texts consisting of multiple interlocking narratives set in various times and places that explore the interconnections of characters and events across different storylines: novels such as William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003), Hari Kunzro's *Transmission* (2005) and *Gods Without Men* (2011), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), or Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled* (2005) are some examples. My argument is that central to these fictions is a sense of a 'global unhomely'. The sense of displacement, unhomeliness and global mobility that is conveyed in these fictions is fundamental to the experience of the *Unheimlich*. In addition, the ability of the concept to convey a combined sense of the familiar and the strange is useful in exploring the ways in which these fictions engage with theoretical debates on globalisation that perceive the interaction between global flows and local cultures either in terms of homogenisation and uniformity or of heterogenisation and hybridity. Moreover, the repetitive temporality of the *Unheimlich* is another distinctive aspect that allows a reading of the disjunctive, non-linear temporal structure of these fictions from this perspective. The 'repetition compulsion', however, that Freud considered to be an example of uncanniness was also theorised by him as a post-traumatic symptom, and this implicit association of uncanniness with post-traumatic experience also allows to interpret the persistent preoccupation of these fictions with suffering and disaster, as well as their explorations of the ways in which collective tragedy and personal trauma reverberate within an increasingly globalised, interconnected world.

By 'network fictions' I refer to a group of narratives that have been proliferating during the last two decades in literature, film, television and the Internet, which interweave multiple interlocking narratives set in different times and spaces around the globe and involve many characters, often in a state of mobility and travel, who get involved in or affected by incidents from another storyline. Examples of literary fictions include novels like William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* (2003), Hari Kunzru's *Transmission* (2005), David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* (2004), or Rana Dasgupta's *Tokyo Cancelled* (2005). A list of television shows that may be seen as following this trend would include American series such as *Heroes, Lost,* or *Flashforward* whereas examples from cinema include films such as Steven Soderbergh's *Traffic* (2000), Paul Haggis's *Crash* (2004), Stephen Gaghan's *Syriana* (2005), and Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu's *Amores Perros* (2000) and *Babel* (2006), among others. The term 'network fictions' has already been used by David Ciccorico (2007) to refer exclusively to hypertext literature and fictions published on the web and one potential predecessor of the above fictions might be classic hypertext fictions of the 1990s, such as Michael Joyce's *Afternoon, A Story* (1987), Shelley Jackson's *Patchwork Girl* (1995), Geoff Ryman's *253, or Tube Theatre* (1996), or Judd Morrissey's *The Jew's Daughter* (2000). This article therefore seeks to extend the use of Ciccorico's term to include the texts I will discuss in this chapter, which will be seen as efforts to reproduce the nested, network structure of hypertext writing within more established, conventional linear means of narrative production. Neil Narine (2010) discusses this trend in film as 'global network cinema', a term whose importance lies in highlighting the significance of the global in these fictions, whose nested structure and preoccupation with ideas of networking and interconnectedness may be seen as in par with their engagement with other themes and concerns tightly related to the political, economic and cultural realities of globalisation. Rita Barnard specifically discusses these literary fictions as the first instances of a 'global novel' whose defining features include 'human interconnection, causality, temporality, social space' (2009: 208). These novels, for Barnard, pave the way for 'a new kind of plot, with new coordinates of time and space, that may serve as a corollary to the brave new world

of millennial capitalism and perhaps even provide the conceptual preconditions for a cosmopolitan society' (2009: 208).

My argument is that a useful theoretical concept for examining these fictions is the concept of the 'global unhomely', a rewriting of Sigmund Freud's (1919) concept of the *Unheimlich* – often translated as 'uncanny', but also 'unhomely' – within the context of contemporary discourses of globalisation. The global unhomely, this discussion will argue, is central to these fictions to the extent that several recurring themes and concerns that these fictions engage with, each of them in varying degrees and in their own distinct way, may be read against Freud's theorisations on the *Unheimlich*. First of all, the relationship, interplay and conflict between global flows and local cultures that many of these fictions explore, which has been an ongoing topic in theoretical debates on globalisation, may be reconceptualised within the context of Freud's theory as the encounter between the familiar and strange which is the defining feature of the experience of the uncanny. The relevance of the concept, however, lies even further, in the pervasive sense of unhomeliness, mobility, and travel that various characters experience in several of the above fictions. But displacement in space is also often accompanied by disruption in time, and the non-linear or repetitive temporal structure of these fictions may be seen as reproducing the temporality of the uncanny, which is determined by what Freud termed the 'compulsion to repeat'. Such a reading is encouraged even further by the fact that many of these narratives deal with stories of abuse, suffering, tragedy and trauma, insofar as the repetition compulsion was also diagnosed by Freud as a major post-traumatic symptom. Finally, the effort of many of these fictions to suggest new forms of communities and new ways towards a cosmopolitan future may be seen as a response to the pervasive sense of unhomeliness, to create new 'homes' in response to the global unhomely. The discussion below will proceed to explore each of these different ways in which the global unhomely is both a central experience within these fictions and a major theoretical concept that may be adopted to analyse them.

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The defining experience of the *Unheimlich* is the combined sense of familiarity and strangeness that Freud saw as symptomatic of the return of the repressed: 'one the one hand it means what is familiar and agreeable, and on the other, what is concealed and kept out of sight' (1919: 224–5). Instances of the uncanny that he mentions in his text include the encounter of waxwork figures, automata and doubles, the involuntary repetition of the same thing, or the sense of 'omnipotence of thoughts', among others. Freud interpreted the uncanniness of these experiences as symptomatic of the resurfacing of repressed past psychic structures, either narcissistic in the case of the individual or animistic in the case of communities. This simultaneous experience of familiarity and strangeness is reproduced by contemporary network fictions in their representation of the experience of globalisation, which has been seen as both a homogenising process that brings about uniformity across distinct cultures and as a heterogenising force that generates hybrid cultural forms through the interaction of global flows and local structures. 'The debates on cultural globalisation', John R. Short and Yeong-Hyun Kim have pointed out, 'have polarised into whether the recent surge of cultural flows and global consciousness has increased or decreased sameness between places around the world' (1999: 75). The first approach is usually associated with the 'cultural imperialism thesis', first formulated by Herbert Schiller in the 1970s, according to which the West in general and the United States in particular exert influence over the rest of the globe through their media products and popular consumer culture – Hollywood, television shows, McDonalds, Coca Cola, and so on. Cultural imperialism, for Schiller, refers to

> the sum of the processes by which a society is brought into the modern world system and how its dominating stratum is attracted, pressured, forced, and sometimes bribed into shaping social institutions to correspond to, or even promote, the value and structures of the dominating centre of the system. (Schiller 1976: 9)

Whereas the cultural imperialism thesis still holds currency in varying degrees within different local and national contexts, the theory has also received criticism for a

number of reasons: its lack of consideration of the increasing importance of transnational corporations and non-governmental organisations within the global political and economic landscape; its assumptions of local and national cultures as organic, authentic and 'pure'; its implied understandings of local audiences as passive and its lack of consideration of local responses or even appropriations of global flows. In other words, Schiller's theory underestimates 'the way in which forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices' (Rowe & Schelling 1991: 231). The last critique follows the orientation of the second approach that perceives of the interaction between global flows and local cultures in terms of hybridity, 'glocalisation' (Robertson 1995) or 'transculturation' (Lull 2000). According to this approach, global corporations need to adjust their policies to the local culture in order to operate effectively and their products are therefore hybridised. Robertson (1995) has coined the term 'glocalisation' to refer to this simultaneous and mutual interplay between cultural homogenisation and heterogenisation, whereas James Lull has borrowed the term 'transculturation' from anthropology in order to refer to 'a process whereby cultural forms literally move through time and space where they interact with other cultural forms and settings, influence each other, produce new forms, change cultural settings and produce cultural hybrids – the fusing of cultural forms' (2000: 242–3).

Network fictions engage directly with this theoretical background. Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* is positioned firmly within the above debate from its very first story. Set in Okinawa, the story follows the narrator Quasar who has fled after participating in a terrorist gas attack on Tokyo's underground station reminiscent of the sarin gas attack unleashed by the Aum Shinrikyo cult in 1995. From its beginning, therefore, the novel finds itself enmeshed in major political issues of the global order of things, such as terrorism, which is indeed presented as 'the dark side of globalisation' (Giddens 2002: xvi). Quasar's motivations include his sense of feeling 'betrayed by a society evolving into markets for Disney and McDonald's (Mitchell 1999: 8). As he walks through a tourist area, he meditates: 'The same shops as anywhere else . . . Burger King, Benetton, Nike . . . High streets are becoming the same all over

the world' (12). The last phrase turns out to be a *leit motif* reiterated by other characters in later stories of the novel, as in the novel's story set in Petersburg, where the narrator contemplates: 'All these new shops, Benetton, The Häagan-Dazs shop, Nike, Burger King, a shop that sells nothing but camera film and key-rings, another that sells Swatches and Rolexes. High streets are becoming the same all over the world, I suppose' (217). The repetition of phrases, characters, thematic and plot *motifs* across different stories is a formal feature of Mitchell's fictions, whose multiple narratives are 'suggestively and uncannily connected through recurring tropes and chance encounters' (Vermeluen 2012: 382). The novel emerges as an 'eerily perfect candidate' (381) for what Susanne Rohr (2004) has termed the 'novel of globalisation' in its explorations of the ways in which 'planetary circuits of complicity and responsibility as well as immaterial cash flows and networked media produce connections that are neither random nor fully systematic—neither the result of pure chance nor of one all-powerful and centrally controlled conspiracy' (Vermeleuen 2012: 382).

Similarly, in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, Cayce Pollard's original perception of Europe as a 'mirror universe' of the United States where '[p]eople smoke, and drink as though it were good for you, and seem to still be in some sort of honeymoon phase with cocaine' (2003: 6) changes by the end of the novel to a perception of the globe as 'a world where there are no mirrors to find yourself on the other side of', a world where "all experience [has] been reduced, by the spectral brand of marketing, to price-point variations on the same thing" (341). Cayce is a coolhunter assigned by the mysterious Belgian businessman Hubertus Bigend to identify the creator of the 'footage', an anonymous film whose fragments are uploaded randomly on the Internet that has a curious addictive quality and is immensely popular around the world. During her search around the world, she is confronted with dealers of antique calculators and retired World War 2 cryptographers in London, computer geeks and mysterious assassins in Tokyo, the Russian Mafia in Moscow, and unknown competitors who are on the hunt for the same thing as Cayce. At the same time, other characters work together with or against Cayce in places like Ohio, New York and Paris. When, towards the end of the novel, she finds herself in

a meal with members of a Russian elite that is now no different from a capitalist oligarchy, she wonders if this is not really a 'Russian meal' but rather a meal in a 'country without borders' (241). Global culture is described by Cayce's counsellor as 'liminal', a 'word for certain states: thresholds, zones of transition' (253) – in other words, uncanny: a concept that 'is often to be associated with an experience of the threshold, liminality, margins, borders, frontiers' (Royle 2003: vii).

The appeal of the online forum dedicated to the footage lies in providing a safe haven from this wider sense of displacement and unhomeliness. To Cayce, it feels like 'being at home. The forum has become one of the most consistent places in [Cayce's] life, like a familiar cafe that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones' (Gibson 2003: 4). *Pattern Recognition* is, in this respect, exemplary of another feature of network fictions, their attempt to suggest new forms of community, a new 'home', in response to the feeling of homelessness, displacement and global travel that characters of these fictions experience. Another representative example from another medium would be J.J. Abrams's TV series *Lost*, whose main setting, an island moving in time and space, populated by a multicultural group of survivors of a plane crash who engage in geopolitical negotiations and conflicts with the local inhabit-ants, may be seen in itself as a symbol for the realities and tensions of globalisation. Furthermore, many of the show's characters were often in a constant state of mobil-ity around the globe before or after their time on the island: Sayid Jarrah (Naveen Andrews) was in search of his beloved Nadia (Andrea Gabrial), Kate Austen (Evangeline Lilly) was 'born to run' in a chase across countries and continents by Federal Marshal Edward Mars (Fredric Lane), and Penny Widmore (Sonya Wagler) was searching for her boyfriend Desmond Hume (Henry Ian Cusick), who found himself on the island after a shipwreck while on a race around the world. The experience of entrapment in the island was therefore combined with a sense of constant mobility and flux in *Lost*, which may be seen within the context of discourses of globalisation. Whereas the main plot was focused on the island, the forces of global corporate capital were hardly absent from the universe of *Lost*. The enemies of the survivors of Flight 815, the 'Others', operated in the outside world as the privately funded Mittelos Bioscience

corporation, whereas the character most representative of the global corporate power turned out to be the wealthy industrialist Charles Widmore (Alan Dale), who set up an intricate plan to find the island's location allegedly with the intention to exploit its resources. Widmore's motives, however, turned out to lie beyond any potential exploitation of the island: he just wanted to return back 'home' from where he had been exiled by the Others. He turned out to be only one of several characters whose actions were driven by a quest to locate and arrive to what they understood as 'home': Jack Shephard (Matthew Fox), John Locke (Terry O'Quinn), Ben Linus (Michael Emerson), Juliet Burke (Elizabeth Mitchell), to name but a few. The 'loss' of *Lost* thus consisted in the eruption of the unhomely, at an individual, familial, communal or global level (Mousoutzanis 2011). In fact, the unhomely turned out to be at the heart of the very origins of the mythology of *Lost.* The episode 'Across the Sea' (6.15), set in an unidentified ancient past, reveals the motivations of the murderous Black Smoke of the island, then still a human simply named the Man in Black (Titus Welliver). After he finds out that he and his brother, the godlike figure of the island Jacob (Mark Pellegrino), were abducted from their mother Claudia (Lela Loran) when they were still newborn by an unnamed woman called Mother (Allison Janney), who then raised them as her own children, he becomes determined to escape from the island. When Mother asks him why he is so desperate to leave, he replies 'I don't belong here!'.

It was in response to this pervasive sense of unhomeliness and displacement that *Lost* perpetually emphasised the significance of home, community and utopia, an emphasis that led to the final closure to the show. The importance of community was underlined by recurring scenes, usually at the end of an episode, where the camera panned around the group of survivors during scenes of harmonious everyday life activities. A second set of scenes focusing on communal existence, however, complementary to the previous ones, were those featuring moments of burial and mourning. In the universe of *Lost,* mourning was one of the practices to safeguard a sense of community and its boundaries. By the end of the show, Jacob directly revealed to the major characters that he chose to bring them together because they were all 'flawed' and 'lonely'. In this sense, *Lost* exemplified an argument often made

in trauma studies, that trauma creates new identities based on shared experiences of victimhood and suffering. In a world that has witnessed what Charles Turner has described as a 'rejection of the claims of collective belonging and obligation which a state or political community might make on individuals' (1996: 47), grief, suffering and trauma have become one of the best ways to think about social collectives as, in Judith Butler's words, it 'furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order' (2004: 22). The finale of *Lost* provided a closure to its narrative that was entirely consistent to its effort to respond the global unhomely: all the major characters were driven, despite themselves, to a church at an unidentified time and place, in order to reunite, remember, and let go.

Furthermore, the experience of dislocation in space in these fictions is often accompanied by a sense of disruption of time, a non-linear, cyclical, repetitive temporality that is also indebted to an economy of uncanniness. As Nicholas Royle puts it, the 'un-' of the uncanny 'unsettles time and space' (2003: 2). That *Lost* was progressing in cycles was only confirmed by its final images, which return to the Pilot's opening shots of Jack's eye, and himself on the ground staring at the tops of trees before a blue sky. The multiple interweaving narratives and plotlines of the series were also progressing through repetition of symbols, phrases, plot elements and incidents. Furthermore, the history of the island itself was nothing but a series of arrivals, invasions, conflicts and settlements: 'They come, fight, they destroy, they corrupt, always ends the same', mutters the Man in Black in 'The Incident', himself repeating Mother's words in 'Across the Sea'. In other words, *Lost* was compulsively restaging 'the constant recurrence of the same thing – the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations' (Freud 1919: 234). The sense of entrapment and displacement inflicted by global forces and agents in the present is seen as in a continuum with past histories of invasion, destruction and corruption of local cultures enacted by colonialism. The global unhomely is only the most recent transmutation of the sense of unhomeliness discussed by Homi Bhabha as the 'the paradigmatic colonial and post-colonial condition' (1994: 9).

Nevertheless, an even more representative example of a network fiction that reproduces the repetitive structures of uncanny temporality would be Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*, a novel consisting of six narratives set in different times and places that are interconnected with each other through repetition of narrative patterns, characters, phrases, or recurring symbols, such as a birthmark, in the novel, or the phrase 'I will not be subjected to criminal abuse', in the film adaptation by Tom Tykwer and the Wachowskis (2012). It is perhaps easier to interpret the function of repetition in *Cloud Atlas* from the perspective of Friedrich Nietzsche's doctrine of the Eternal Recurrence, not only because the novel is preoccupied with Nietzschean themes such as the nature of truth and perspective or the will to power, but also because the doctrine is directly referenced in the sections on 'Letters from Zedelghem', in which the old music composer Vyvyan Ayrs tries to compose his final major work that he names 'Eternal Recurrence'. However, the reiteration of references to 'criminal abuse' mentioned above already underscores the extent to which the function of repetition in *Cloud Atlas* may also be understood with regard to Freudian theory; the novel's different narrative threads compulsively restage histories of slavery, oppression, exploitation, and violence. The compulsion to repeat was also diagnosed by Freud as a post-traumatic symptom: patients repeatedly re-enacting the traumatic event in dreams or hallucinations try to come to terms with an experience that was too overwhelming to assimilate at the moment of its occurrence: 'It is as though these patients had not finished with the traumatic situation, as though they were still faced by it as an immediate task which had not been dealt with' (Freud 1920: 275). 'Post-traumatic experience', therefore, Roger Luckhurst points out, 'is intrinsically uncanny, finding cultural expression in ghostly visitations, prophetic dead, spooky coincidence or telepathic transfer' (2008: 98). In the case of *Cloud Atlas*, the repetition of themes and concerns across different storylines seems to both suggest continuities among different histories of oppression and violence and warn against the potential destruction of human civilisation in the distant future. Mitchell suggests analogies between the colonial violence inflicted against the tribe of the Moriori in New Zealand during the colonial period

of the 'The Pacific Journal of Adam Ewing' and the exploitation of the artificially constructed 'fabricant' clones by the totalitarian corporate state of Nea So Copros in the future dystopia of 'An Orison of Sonmi-451'. The post-apocalyptic future of 'Sloosha's Crossin', the novel implies, may be the logical outcome of the perpetual re-enactment of oppression and violence upon the weak by the strong. As Jonathan Boulter argues, 'the desire to annihilate a people (the Moriori), to enslave the Other (the clones of 'An Orison'), leads logically to the annihilation of an entire species' and 'the apocalypse at the centre of the novel in "Sloosha's Crossin'" is merely a repetition of the apocalypse writ on a smaller scale in the previous narratives' (2011: 133). Through the nested structure of the novel, Mitchell 'subtly yet consciously embeds postcolonial critiques in his fiction' and articulates, according to Nicholas Dunlop, 'a persuasively subversive reading of the history, present and projected future of colonialism and its associated ideologies' (2011: 205). Even further, the structural feature of uncanny repetition serves to suggest connections between practices of exploitation by contemporary global market forces and histories of subjugation and slavery by past colonial regimes, thus underscoring the continuities between colonialism and globalisation.

The preoccupation with disaster and trauma, however, does not simply affect the temporal and narrative structure of these fictions but even allows for the emergence of a networked narrative in the first place, and thus emerges as a formative feature for a fiction of globalisation even as it highlights the centrality of the global unhomely for this kind of fiction. As Neil Nerine explains, in global network films, like *Traffic, Syriana*, or *Babel*,

> a traumatic event or discovery typically shatters a Western protagonist's ordered world, connecting multifarious people and motivating their various journeys through the narrative action. Networks thus emerge where there appeared to be none before, and discrete agents find themselves connected. A central trauma – a car accident, an act of violence – is often operative, but not always. (2011: 213–4).

The central place of repetition within the very idea of narrative itself has been discussed by Peter Brooks, who has read Freud's seminal text on traumatic neuroses, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), as 'a model of narrative plot' (1977: 285). Brooks combines formalist and structuralist theories of narrative with psychoanalysis in order to suggest that narrative is 'a repetition of events that have already happened, and within this postulate of a generalized repetition it must make use of specific, perceptible repetitions in order to create plot, that is, to show us a significant interconnection of events' (288). 'Interconnection' is, therefore, as fundamental to narrative just as disruption, conflict, trauma is to plot, which starts 'from that moment at which story, or "life", is stimulated from quiescence into a state of narratability, into a tension, a kind of irritation, which demands narration' (291). It is within this theoretical context that the centrality of disaster, disruption, and trauma in fictions that both explore the repercussions of global interconnectedness and find themselves embedded in nested, networked narrative structures may be understood. Classic hypertext narratives, that Barnard considers to be predecessors of network fictions like *Ghostwritten*, are often organised around a major accident. One of the founding texts of hypertext literature, Michael Joyce's *Afternoon: A Story*, revolves around a car accident that may have involved his ex-wife and son, in a narrative of 539 screens that are interlinked with unmarked 'hot words' on the screen that the reader must follow in order to try to understand what happened. Geoff Ryman's *253; or, Tube Theatre*, on the other hand, explores the relationships among 253 passengers on a London underground train in 253 vignettes of 253 words each, before the train crashes after the driver falls asleep. These fictions, then, both anticipate the recurrence of plane crashes and car accidents in network fictions of the twenty-first century, even as they underscore the significance of the technological accident – 'the exemplary scene of trauma *by excellence*' (Caruth 1996: 6) – in modern psychiatric discourses of traumatic neuroses, which were first formulated in the 1860s in response to the proliferation of railway accidents in Victorian Britain (Schivelbusch 1977). At the same time, the reiteration of the technological accident in these fictions betrays anxieties about the circulation of global

flows that these technologies facilitate. Janet Murray, however, has also discussed the pervasiveness of trauma in hypertext fictions as pertinent to the idea of nested narrative itself in a manner that relates to, and arguably even updates, Brooks's discussion of linear narrative:

> The proliferation of interconnected files is an attempt to answer the perennial unanswerable question of why this incident happened . . . . These violence-hub stories do not have a single solution like the adventure maze or a refusal of solution like the postmodern stories; instead, they combine a clear sense of story structure with a multiplicity of meaningful plots. The navigation of the labyrinth is like pacing the floor; a physical manifestation of the effort to come to terms with the trauma, it represents the mind's repeated efforts to keep returning to a shocking event in an effort to absorb it and, finally, get past it. (1997: 38)

Finally, the centrality of compulsive repetition in specific and of the *Unheimlich* in general in this type of writing may be seen in relation to the interest of these fictions in the interplay and conflict between the predetermined and the accidental. The combination of the familiar and strange within the *Unheimlich* may be related to the dialectic between determinism, that is inherent within discourses of global interconnectedness, and contingency – or *tuché*, to borrow the term that Jacques Lacan borrowed from Aristotle in his own theorisations of trauma: 'What is repeated . . . is always something that occurs – the expression tells us a lot about its relation to the *tuché – as if by chance*' (1973: 54; original emphasis). The accident is a recurring motif in these fictions, not only in the sense of a major event that determines and organises the overarching narratives of these fictions – such as the crash of Flight 815 on *Lost* or 9/11 in *Pattern Recognition*, which has left Cayce with a post-traumatic symptom that makes her oversensitive to corporate brand logos, something that makes her a good coolhunter (see Mousoutzanis 2014). Furthermore, the accident is pertinent in these fictions in the sense of the random, the unpredictable and the unexpected – as in the

case of *Ghostwritten*, which is repeatedly preoccupied with the ways in which chance encounters and events affect other people's lives, how individual lives are 'ghostwritten' by other people. As Tim Cavendish says, in the London section of the novel, '[w]e're all ghostwriters . . . . And it's not just our memories. Our actions, too. We all think we're in control of our own lives, but really they're pre-ghostwritten by forces around us' (Mitchell 1999: 295–6). Other fictions have explored this theme with more direct reference to the significance of global information systems. In Kunzru's *Transmission*, for instance, the main character Arjun Mehta moves from India to the US after he is offered a job as a computer programmer in an online security company. In order to avoid being made redundant after a decline in demand for computer security, Arjun releases a malicious computer virus that only he will be able to create a cure for and that will provide work for him and his company. The virus, however runs out of control and infects not only computer systems all around the world, but also the lives of all the main characters in the novel, whether in London, New Delhi, or LA:

> From his college terminal Arjun watched in fascination as malicious code flared up like a rash on the computing body of the world, causing itching and discomfort to a public educated by science fiction and the Cold War to regard the convergence of machines and biology with uneasy reverence. Computer virus. Future terror. (Kunzru 2004: 109)

The uncanniness of trauma, however, lies not only in the element of contingency and unpredictability that lies within it, but also in its strictly determinist nature. For one thing, trauma is indebted to what Freud called 'psychic determinism', the assumption that past events of someone's life will determine their mental and psychological state in the future. Furthermore, the transmissibility and communicability of trauma is another aspect that highlights its pertinence in fictions of global networking. Trauma is, in Luckhurst's words,

> worryingly transmissible: it leaks between mental and physical symptoms, between patients . . . . , between patients and doctors via the mysterious

processes of transference or suggestion, and between victims and their lis-
teners or viewers who are commonly moved to forms of overwhelming sym-
pathy, even to the extent of claiming secondary victimhood. (2008: 3)

From this perspective, we may see these fictions as a series of narratives that explore
the communicability of trauma, the ways in which it reverberates around an increas-
ingly globalised, interconnected world, across time and space. Global network films,
for instance, according to Narine, 'dramatise and interrogate how suffering can pro-
liferate as transnational trading networks metastasise' (2010: 211). Literary fictions of
this type, on the other hand, for Boulter, 'are precisely about how historical traumas
are transmitted from person to person without any necessary connection between
subjects (2011: 17).

   These explorations of the repercussions of disaster within a global culture is also
accompanied by an effort within these fictions to suggest the ways in which a cos-
mopolitan sensibility may arise in the face of disaster and suffering under the global
order of things. Barnard has argued that the 'playful hyperlinking' may give the
impression of randomness' but at the same time the 'engagement with the potential
of global catastrophe may' bring about a 'desire for agency and global responsibility'
(2009: 214). It is because of their cosmopolitan sensibility that, for Barnard, some of
these fictions either belong to the genre of Science Fiction or borrow elements from
this genre. Cosmopolitan sensibilities need to be projected to the future, to futuristic
vision of global communities living in harmony and empathy for the suffering of dis-
tant others. And if the novel, as a form, emerged during the period that witnessed the
consolidation of the nation-state as a dominant political formation (Anderson 1991)
and found its earliest articulations in the form of historical fictions about a national
past, a global novel with cosmopolitan sensibilities will need to be projected forward
to the future. 'There is no memory of the global past', Ulrich Beck has highlighted,
'But there is an imagination of a globally shared collective future, which character-
izes the cosmopolitan society and its experience of crisis' (2002: 27). The desire for
agency for a global cosmopolitan future, according to Barnard, 'may begin to call into

being a utopian cosmopolitan society: a society whose time and space . . . are beginning to find narrative expression' (2009: 214).

A number of issues need further attention in the examination of this emerging set of narratives in the early twenty-first century. One would be the gender politics underlying the narrative production of these fictions that are written almost exclusively by men. A notable exception would be Kamila Shamsie's *Burnt Shadows* (2009), a novel whose exploration of the lives of two families extends from the end of the Second World War in Japan, to India shortly before its partition in 1947, and from Pakistan in the early 1980s to New York and Afghanistan during the aftermath of the terrorist attacks of 9/11[1]. Other attempts to include novels like Zadie Smith's *NW* within this group of fictions seem problematic, if only because Smith's novel is primarily focused on the local (even in its title), and this theoretical gesture might risk gendering the dialectic and conflict between the global and the local as male and female, respectively. Another issue that needs further examination, already discussed briefly by Barnard, relates to the question of language, particularly in the case of literary fictions, and the problematics of writing in English, or any single language for that matter, for the sake of producing narratives that seek to respond to the encounter with difference and otherness during the period of globalisation and to suggest ways for a more cosmopolitan identification with the distant other. These are only two of the issues that need further exploration while concentrating on a narrative trend that seems to have already established itself in popularity by authors and audiences in the early twenty-first century.

Competing Interests

The author declares that they have no competing interests.

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