

# How Can Literature Respond to a Global Age? From Globalization to Universality and the Poetics of Partial Connections with References to David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas*

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**Abstract** The duality of the local and the universal and its application to literary works in our age of globalization are likely to be deemed irrelevant because a global or multinational world is, *per se*, often identified to the universal. Consequently, it should be wise to avoid binary approaches to the duality of the local and the global, and to conflate the latter with the universal that is to be contrasted with the singular. Moreover, the local has no direct logic or semantic opposite — *global* is not the strict antonym of *local*. By substituting partial connections between historical, cultural, symbolic and anthropological facts to the prevailing designations of both dualities (local/universal, singular/global), contemporary novels respond to any universalism that these dualities invite to imagine. Rushdie, Mitchell, and Murakami exemplify this use of partial connections.

**Key words** Universal; universalities; partial connections; Rushdie; Murakami

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which relies upon the notion of enigmaticity, an extensive redefinition of mimesis, and comparative references to the anthropological frames that literary works disclose.

## Introduction

Jonathan Hart invites us to consider the duality of the local and the universal and its application to literary works in our age of globalization; the latter is likely to make us consider this duality as irrelevant since a global or multinational world is, *per se*, often identified to the universal. Let us stress that this identification equates the universal with universalism and its many exemplifications, ideologies and imaginations. Globalization is an economic fact and should be qualified as obviously imagined, since no one has ever seen the globalized world, as Nestor Garcia Canclini wrote in *La Globalización imaginada*.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, it will be wise to avoid binary approaches to the duality of the local and the global. Let us remark that the universal, to which globalization is often assimilated, is first to be contrasted with the singular, and that the local has no direct logic or semantic opposite — *global*, the root of the modern “globalization,” is not the strict antonym of *local*.

The issues attached to the three notions of local, universal, and global, and their effects on and use in literary works have been addressed from many perspectives: national, transnational, cultural, multicultural, social, economic, literary, and ideological. They have referred to wide critical frames such as postmodern, postcolonial, diasporic; or political and philosophical paradigms such as Empire<sup>2</sup> or general intellect<sup>3</sup> and finally anthropological perspectives. The mutual implications and exclusions of the notions of local, singular, and global, and of most realities they designate, eventually command a kind of general relativistic approach to the world itself<sup>4</sup> which should prompt us to revise our usual approaches to globalization. These issues and their critical frames are often partially denied because the notion and reality of globalization are neither new nor clearly definable<sup>5</sup>, and because the alliance of globalization and literary works is considered a tradition that started with modern globalization in the nineteenth century. This tradition includes many kinds of works with explicit and non-problematic representations of globalization. Jules

1 The title of the book is explicit. See Canclini.

2 See Negri and Hardt.

3 See Virno.

4 See Bruun.

5 See Assayag.

Verne's novels offer relevant nineteenth-century examples; in the twentieth century, Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra* views world history since the sixteenth century as global and exemplifies the connections of global history, evocations of nations and places, and the totalizing potentials of the novel as genre. Literary forms that appeared in the nineteenth century, such as detective and science fiction novels, have become world literary forms. The enunciative autonomy of poetry, initiated by Romantic writers and defended by Symbolist poets, imposed the notion of world poetry, which, because of its enunciative status, fits the circulation of literary works in a global age while its initial enunciative conditions are not denied. These critical issues are also restricted by descriptions of various scales<sup>1</sup>, according to which writers can represent our world, its parts, and its social, national, cultural and human divisions. Consequently, many critics think it relevant to defend a simple critical approach: the local, the universal, and globalization presuppose that literary works have qualities and potentials that enable them to be widely displaced and to fit many audiences across the world while not negating their origins and initial places.

This short enumeration of current comments about globalization, the universal, the local, literature and world literature and their realities does suggest that the model one chooses to apply is a definition of the specific relations between these notions and the representations one attaches to them. Here, we suggest restricting these issues to basic approaches to literary works on the one hand, and on the other, to the influence of the issues we have mentioned on the characterizations and poetics of literary works. These poetics are defined, not according to usual poetical categories, but to specific poetical frames whose condition is the play, which we call partial connection(s)<sup>2</sup>, between writing, globalization, and the local and the universal, with no reference to any kind of binarism and any hierarchical view of the local and the global. These remarks lead to two final suggestions: the doxic duality of the local and the globalized, and the invitation of the partial connections of world novels to deconstruct that duality.

### **The Local, the Universal, the World and Literature: Some Critical Debates from Sloterdijk to Borges**

In order to give a clear view of the three notions and/or realities discussed here — local, universal, global/world at large — let us offer an initial remark. In most Western languages, the word “local” has no specific antonym, while universal has

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1 See Tanoukh.

2 See Strathern.

one: “singular.” The singular is often designated as the concrete.<sup>1</sup> The word “local” should be contrasted with the qualifiers “distant,” “non-native,” and any word which refers to the world at large. This contrast must be constructed because the local is, by definition, a place that shows its specific characters and is explicitly limited to itself. Consequently, we as readers or interpreters cannot *literally* identify either the universal or the world within the local, which literary works represent, although we understand that the local is involved in what — *a world, the world* — should seem to complete it and which literary works should in some way enable us to delineate. This mutual implication of the local and the world at large — the latter is the completion of the former — cannot be directly demonstrated because the world transcends the local and neither the world nor the local can be a measure for the other. Because it cannot be directly identified, this alliance of the local and the world produces the need to interpret literary works today. The more literary works make this need and its question obvious, the more they circulate, are widely read and identified as world works, they are recognized across the world and characterized as evocations of the world at large, although no shared image of the local and the global is available and no reference to the local is excluded. To restrict approaches to literatures’ links with globalization to the recognition of domination fails to consider that literary expressions cannot avoid representing the issues we have defined here, either explicitly or implicitly.

In the past, shared or reciprocal images of the local and the global have included the Renaissance reflective relationship between the world/macrocosm and the local/microcosm, and the nineteenth-century notion of the “world spirit” that implied a reading of the local and the world according to a broad frame of historicism. Peter Sloterdijk’s remark about today’s global world highlights the latter’s paradox which makes impossible to directly designate its interconnection with the local: “the earth [to be read as a synonym of the world, in our opinion] rose as the only and true orb, the basis of all contexts of life [...]; it is itself the drama of globalization” (*In the World Interior* 275), because our earth (our world) has “been discovered, interconnected and singularized” (*In the World Interior* 276). We should be aware of the contradiction between the earth, the world, qualified as the “true orb, the basis of all contexts of life” (*In the World Interior* 276), and its singularity: our “singularized” world can no longer be seen as the totality, to which the “world spirit” and the duality of microcosm and macrocosm refer; however, it delineates a context that is a singularity. Literary works, which represent the alliance of the

1 The notion of “concrete universal” refers to Hegel; Sartre used it widely in his literary criticism.

local and the world, must handle a double paradox: the world, the macrocosm, has become a singularity that is equal to any singular local, while the world's singularity is the context of all local singularities, with no shared measure of both levels of singularity. This lack of balance between both kinds of singularities questions the possibility and relevance of any allied or implied representations of the local and the world, and it also compels writers and readers to imagine means to explicitly answer this question.

Before we identify these means, which writers and readers construct, we must reject some critical views that equate the singularity of literary works and literature in general with hospitality: small-sized singularities can include evocations of the world at large, whatever extension of this evocation is shown. This theory, which runs from Jacques Derrida to Derek Atridge<sup>1</sup>, renews the characterization of mimesis — literary works always represent the world at large and the real in some way — while the use of the word “hospitality” connotes or implies ethical views. An idealistic approach to literature, in the belief that any literary work can represent the human community and the world,<sup>2</sup> is restored in order to respond to the lack of balance between the world and literary works. The most effective argument against this kind of idealistic reading of the alliance of the world and the local in literary works is offered in Borges's *cuento*, “The Aleph.”<sup>3</sup> The narrative and argument of this story demonstrate that only two kinds of representations of the world at large are available and that both fail. First, it designates and depicts countless places (locals) in the world; second, it designates and depicts the orb and unique totality that is the world. The first kind results in many enumerations: the world is only the endless series of its locals and singularities. The second kind can only be conceived as an impossible view: the world as a totality transcends any local or singular reality and can be referred to only by using a “fantastic” image of its totality. The enumerations and the final fantastic image of “The Aleph” demonstrate that allied representations of the world and its many “locals” are useless.

Since literature can neither represent the hospitality that Derrida defines nor reconstitute images of the world's totality, it must simultaneously represent singularities and offer images of the general context which should be assessed as the relevant definition of the world in our global age. Remarkably, the double singularity of

1 See Derrida and Atridge.

2 This theory recalls Lukacs's idealism, which can be read in the first chapters of his *Theory of the Novel*. Homer's epics refer to a world that is complete and cannot be disassociated from the human community, which is also viewed as complete.

3 See Borges.

any place and human action and of the world viewed as a general context, which we have identified in Sloterdijk's characterization of our present-day world, does not require specific references to globalization, and allows us to define the quasi-philosophical task of literature "as a quasi-science of totalizations and their metaphors, as a narrative theory of the genesis of the general, and finally as meditation on being-in-situations — also known as being in the world" (Sloterdijk, *In the World Interior* 288). We should read this quotation along with the conclusions of "The Aleph" in order to define the responses of literary works to the paradox of the double singularity. They respond by describing the *universality* of the world as equally inclusive of all singularities and the specific universals they imply, and in defining specific relations that characterize the condition of "being in the world" and which justify viewing the world as a context. Let us reiterate that these responses are associated with a specific kind of poetics, which we call poetics of "partial connections."

### **From the Singular and the Local to the World's Universality in a Global Age: David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas***

For a more specific reading of our remarks on Borges's "The Aleph" and Sloterdijk's conclusions about the world's singularity and its many singularities, we must stress that both kinds of singularity make this world, our world, a sort of non-world. This means that it seems contingent, with no stable identification, and does not constitute a background or context for the many singularities. In other words, even if we say, as Sloterdijk does, that our world is also a totality and a kind of general context, we cannot represent this general context. Critics are prone to emphasize that this difficulty cannot be deleted and that, in today's world novels, exemplified by David Mitchell's works in general and by *Cloud Atlas*<sup>1</sup> in particular, evocations of our world are only language games and have no "function but to reawaken all differences in an ephemeral instant" (Jameson 6460). Singularities are constant, and the world's context can be only equated with an arbitrary instantaneity, which Fredric Jameson's reading of *Cloud Atlas* identifies as the end of realism and the time of the futureless world of the global age. This kind of critique is implicitly contradictory for two reasons: Jameson interprets *Cloud Atlas*, the novel of the world's singularities, from the angle of his own universal approach to history, and the worldview it commands frames Jameson's argumentation; and, to read the instantaneity of past and present events in the novel presupposes the universal context that our world— a single world — constitutes.

1 See Mitchell.

Jameson's implicit contradiction shows that David Mitchell's novel's many places and disparities cannot prevent readers from referring to, and eventually identifying, the universal and our world as a whole in *Cloud Atlas*. In other words, in novels of our global age, the local and the universal, the local and the world at large can assemble, although we cannot discern any explicit rules for constructing or designating this assembly. Because these rules are missing, the critical issue, which is attached to the world/local duality, should be formulated as follows: how can singularities — any place in the world, and the latter viewed as a singular place — suggest inferences about a whole world and its representations, which are not to be confused with the current and prevailing images or narratives of globalization?

The link between the local and the world cannot be represented because the latter cannot be viewed as an encompassing whole although all the locals share a common ground, this world, our earth, or as Sloterdijk says, our orb. Consequently, the image of the world as a general context and a whole must be generated by texts. This generation results from a process that begins with the duality of the universal and the singular. These notions cannot be disassociated and should be read in any characterization or qualification of any agent, place, or object. They are consequently involved in any literary text and allow readers to indirectly infer images of the world as a possible whole composed of the designations and descriptions of many locales.

The link between the universal and the singular, which is not a substitute for the missing link between the world and the local, is first logical and semantic. On the one hand, when the universal is free of any kind of actualization, the singular or the concrete remains an abstraction. On the other hand, the singular amounts to a "pure" designation if it misses the background of an encompassing perspective, whatever the latter is — semantic, rhetoric, symbolic, or plural; these various perspectives can be combined. The universal commands its exemplification, and the singular, namely, any nomination of any agent, object, or data, the inference of the universal. Literary works often use fables and arguments that claim universal relevance, and do not separate them from actions, circumstances, depictions, enunciations, which are obviously singular and question any assertion of the universal, and show the latter always open to dispute. For example, in *Hamlet*, even the most universal characteristics of life and death are to be debated. Any singularity is the obvious questioning of its own limits. Imagism and objective poetry, which describe specific agents, objects and scenes, rely upon this paradox. This questioning alliance of the universal and the singular enable literary works to present a plural world and to unite the local and the universal, before they delineate the images of the world as a

whole.

The specific questions of the singular and universal imply a shared location. The world, which is the location of all the examples of these questionings and of all particular persons, agents, and objects to which they apply, is plural. Because these persons', agents', and objects' qualifications play upon the singular and the universal, all of them are involved in an entity of a different order. This entity, which cannot be an abstraction, is the world. It supplements these persons, agents, and objects with its own properties, and contributes to a metaphysics of presence in which persons, agents, and objects are manifest presences. Shared location and supplementary order make the questions that apply to local singularities, our singular world and the universals they imply, a unique set and leave them open. These questions are as many as the singulars that can be identified and the universals that can be conceived of. The world, which is the shared location of many, plays upon the singular and the universal, and a supplementary order is to be viewed as a *universality*. In other words, the world is the singularity that makes the iteration of the same kinds of persons, agents, objects, and disputes about them possible, whatever the variations of their specific locations and qualifications are. *Cloud Atlas* explicitly designates the world as the space of these iterations and variations.

This shift from the local to the *universality* of the world, or the alliance of both, presupposes a necessity and an incompleteness of a particular kind. The necessity is that the agents and readers of the literary work must represent the local to themselves as the opening of a possible whole, a counterpart and an alternative to the local and its disputes over the qualifications of persons, agents, and things. The incompleteness is the condition of the necessity, and is shown in the duality of singular and universal. The cognitive and ethical multiplicity of the universal triggers a demand for an interpretation that should hold the many examples of the universal/singular duality relative to one another. The shift from the local to the *universality* of the world is a response to the multiple universals that are available, as well as a hermeneutic and rhetorical move. Because universals and singulars are many, literary works present continuous cultural reexaminations and contradictory standpoints, and show that no place from without can give meaning to a holistic view of them. Borges's conclusion in "The Aleph" is correct: a place from without makes the viewer perceive an impossible image. To suppose and suggest the world's *universality* presupposes this impossibility and makes the world the *locus communis* of all questions that are attached to singulars and universals. David Mitchell's *Cloud Atlas* exemplifies this universality. In contrast to Fredric Jameson's conclusion, the novel offers an appropriate image of the world as long as we limit our reading to the

recognition of the presentation of universality: in the world, there are many stories that are connected in many ways and make this presentation possible.

Readers read these connections. They can neither totalize their implications nor identify the conclusion of each story as imposing any final meaning, nor can they apply continuous critical paradigms. They simply read histories, which have specific locations and designate the universality of our world because they are singular and connected. Because readers recognize the world's *universality* within literary presentations of the local, we should substitute characteristics such as affectability and responsivity, which remain irreducible for local or universal communities of readers, for the deciphering of and responses to a specific texts. By *local communities*, we refer here to particular and, more or less, broad cultural reading codes; by *universal communities*, we mean anthropological or cognitive definitions of reading practices.

### **Literatures, Works, the World's Context and Partial Connections: The Lessons of *Cloud Atlas***

Our identification of the shift from the local to the universal and the world's universality, with references to a world novel, *Cloud Atlas*, allows us to contrast world novels, which exemplify this shift, with global novels, and to specify the distinctive representation of the local present in world novels. Grand narratives, or collections of small narratives, of globalization do not necessarily exclude designating the local and the world, then viewed as a universal reference. We might even say that they often highlight this designation and this reference. Olivier Rolin's novel *L'invention du monde*<sup>1</sup> describes global news networks and transcribes news circulated in and around the world: these transcriptions are always identified as local and characterized as inseparable from local dailies and the events the latter report. *L'invention du monde* can be read as a postmodern version of many literary and film narratives inspired by the various stages and the long progress of globalization, and do not exclude references to the local and the world at large. For example, Jules Verne's *Around the World in Eighty Days*<sup>2</sup> exemplifies nineteenth-century globalization as it presents images of many places that represent the world. With their depictions of global plots and enemies of world order, two contemporary films, Zhang Ymou's *The Great Wall* and Justin Kurzel's *Assassin's Creed*,<sup>3</sup> are fables that do represent localities and can be read as linked to contemporary globalization. The

1 See Rolin.

2 See Verne.

3 See Zhang and Kurzel.

connected short narratives of *Cloud Atlas* are similar to the series of news reports in *L'invention du monde*, and the novel itself is similar to Verne's novels and Zhang's and Kurzel's films in that all these works feature identical plays upon space and history. Consequently, the characterization of the world's universality in *Cloud Atlas* must be complemented in order to differentiate the world novel *Cloud Atlas* from the aforementioned global novels.

One single theme and its logic drive each of the narratives of *Around the World in Eighty Days*, *L'invention du monde*, *The Great Wall*, and *Assassin's Creed*. For Verne, this theme is transport and world travel; for Rolin, networks and continuous flows of news; and for Zhang and Kurzel, the defence of world order. All references to places and locals are subsets of the set these main themes define: remarkably, in *L'invention du monde*, the many local dailies and news that are referred to do not stop the flow of information. Paradoxically, these many references do not appear as excursus although they are digressive. Globalization is a paradigmatic theme: many references to many "locals" are equated with the universal because any data in these works explicitly or implicitly refer to this paradigm. In these works, no one is in search of the world: agents scarcely describe themselves and point to their implications in one another and in the world *per se*. Without this double implication, the world and its agents, objects and places, which are universalized by the theme of globalization, can neither view this world as a universality or a concrete context, nor their places and agents as potential generalizations.

Compared to these works, *Cloud Atlas* might seem a kind of deconstruction of the grand narrative of globalization and, consequently, as another kind of globalization narrative. It would teach us that we can have no historical and coherent narrative of globalization because the latter contradicts any sense of the future and prevents us from viewing the world as a wide and unique context. That is a way to rephrase and support Fredric Jameson's reading of the novel and to define globalization novels as a kind of tautology: globalization is globalization. However, this is only one side of the reading that *Cloud Atlas* should produce. All of the stories of *Cloud Atlas* belong to specific places and times, and to our single world, our earth, which is consequently divided into many times and places. The world that is imagined as global can be neither described nor explicitly referred to, and forbids any image that would make it possible to play upon some of its parts or figures.

This invalidation of grand narratives of globalization relies upon an explicit narrative organization. All the "stories" of this novel are interconnected and are read twice, with the second reading reversing the order of the first. Each story appears consistently sized, but seems to expand because of its connections with

the other stories, with the two readings and their reversed order. *Cloud Atlas*'s narrative organization demonstrates that the designation of the world's universality is associated with relations between various agents, objects and places. Since the novel's stories are simultaneously autonomous and connected, pairs of them share some elements, and the double reading compels us to identify the whole novel as a play upon its first and second halves, the reader has to conclude that any part of any story can be a part of another story. Relations can be delineated through partitions of and extractions from continuous stories, data, actions, persons, and places. To designate the world as a general context requires a non-linear progression of the overall narrative of the novel, and a division of the world into places that match the paradoxical play upon parts and continuities, discontinuities and relations. Agents, objects, and times are linked in heterogeneous connections, and are included within the universality of this world, which is altered by these singularities.

The paradoxical partial connections of universality respond to the *doxa* of globalization. The image of the world as a whole, which this *doxa* suggests, does not deny the diversity of cultures, but implies that globalization is likely to impose kinds of world symbols and practices that might prevent recognition of specific places, agents, actions. Partial connections, which *Cloud Atlas* exemplifies, invite us to conclude that any worldview must take into account its local discontinuities and, more remarkably, show that the singular is the condition of the universal.

Because of this unavoidable alliance of the universal and the singular, more specific readings of the supposed unique world of globalization and the universality of the world are possible. It would thus be helpful to reconsider Jameson's double assertion about *Cloud Atlas*. According to Jameson, the novel offers no view of history, or at the very least a contradictory one: on the one hand, it designates the future by a return to the past, and on the other, it points to the universalism, variety, and continuity of the means of communication. In other words, the modern world cannot be read according to the continuity of history, but according to the universalism of the means of communication. This universalism should not be equated with the universal, but is only one of the many universalisms that have been identified in the present day. Our gloss of Jameson applies to contemporary paradigmatic views of globalization: the assertion of its universalism does not specifically address issues of the duality of the singular and the universal. *Cloud Atlas*'s interconnected and partially overlapping stories present one more positive consequence: because the elements that are repeated from one story to another apply to different times, they are means to figure transcultural, transnational and cross-temporal connections that offer a kind of overview of the world, while still referring

to local times and places. This paradox responds to the limits of the paradigmatic (and *doxic*) themes that are attached to the representation of globalization *per se* and its universalism.

### **From World Novel to Literature's Rejection of Universalism, Recognition of Relativism and the Universality of Partial Connections**

Our observations of the use of partial connections in *Cloud Atlas* and responses to the paradoxes of the singular/universal duality and representations of the world apply to contemporary literature in a broader sense: they invite us to return to their predecessors that have made prevailing references to globalization. The world novel, as exemplified by *Cloud Atlas*, defines symbolic, formal and poetical means for contrasting two opposing worldviews. One is the representation of contemporary societies and cultures and their images of human beings and universalism; the other is the recognition of relativist approaches to cultures and to humanity, and the restoration of world images and designations of the universal that contradict universalism.

The use of the world's universality and partial connections among world novels interrogates the limits of cultures and of humanity as a whole, and the consequences of the latter which prevailed in Western modernity. These limits are the foundation of the paradox of cultural comparisons and hybridity. Comparisons do rely upon distinct and separate identities, as does hybridity, with the latter defining the union of distinct identities. The idea of an "essential" human being presupposes the same kind of argumentative logic. Peter Sloterdijk has stressed that extended recognitions and comparisons of differences express, in our post-unilateral world, the return of cultures to their identities and places; his remark obviously applies to Europeans (*Ecumes* 203).<sup>1</sup> In other words, globalization should be interpreted not according to its doxic duality of the local and the global, but according to its paradox. Globalization implies the recognition of differences under the aegis of a universalism that, though asserted in a post-colonial age, repeats the abstract universalism of the unilateral age — the age of Western Empires — and implies recognition of differences and, consequently, of locals. This recognition does not require the specific identification of differences and local relations, because these differences have been drawn inwards our globalized world and "de-

1 Cf. Sloterdijk's *In the World Interior of Capital* (emplacement 383): "Globalization has been saturated in the moral sense since the victims began reporting the consequences of perpetrators' deeds back to them from all over the world – this is the essence of the post-unilateral, post-imperial, post-colonial situation."

spatialized the real globe” (418). The poetics of partial relations in *Cloud Atlas*, which our reading has defined, offers an implicit critique of this recognition of differences which does not address the specific issue of the duality of the local and the global. As *L'invention du monde* demonstrates, to represent differences under the aegis of some universalism does not question the representations of the local or the global. Conversely, partial relations allow a writer to destructure the order of representations, either local or global, and to reinscribe them in various times and spaces with no alteration of their basic identifications, which are repeated without implying any systematic comparison. The particular visions attached to a place or to a type of universalism are relativized: they are compared but also, and more importantly, seen and described through other places or types of universalism. In *Cloud Atlas*, the literary means of these re-inscriptions and descriptions are the overlapping and repeating narratives and the permutations that result or which readers might infer, with no suppression of the mutual alterity of narrative segments that are united: diversity is constantly activated. Because the duality of the local and the global imposes this relativization, the local and global frame the differences between any place and any other places. Neither the global nor the local can be a sum or fragment of any place, as no one can be a sum or a fragment of his/her own identity and his/her own place and culture. Transcultural novels and their relativistic approaches to cultures, novels of the posthuman and novels with double anthropological perspectives offer relevant exemplifications of this relativization and the global/local paradox.

Many contemporary novels offer relativistic views of cultures and question the universal that these cultures profess. Most universal assertions are ideologically loaded or meant to be interpreted as kinds of universalism. This argument is constant in Salman Rushdie's novels, but does not, however, exclude the designation of the universal. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*,<sup>1</sup> singularities such as characters, locations, and actions should be read as the ruined images of the universal, history as a series of disparate events; many characters simultaneously display a hyper-selfhood and an empty one. Critics have often defined the novel as a chaos, a representation of the hell of the world and of language, and a negative example of postmodernism and its void, while they recognize that the novel denounces political or religious authority, identified as an illusory universalism.<sup>2</sup> It should be more productive to read *The Moor's Last Sigh* as a baroque novel with many folds. Innumerable designations of singularities do not imply that these singularities are contingent, nor

1 See Rushdie.

2 For a good summary of these assessments, see Gonzales.

do they exclude any mutual compatibility: they belong to various social, national and historical orders. However, these singularities are not wholly equivalent to the societies, cultures and times from which they originate: they do not completely fit the part/totality relationship, and do not suggest an encompassing context. They are parts of a unique world — our world, and a unique novel — the novel we read, and are consequently compatible, seen and described through one another and other places or types of universalism. *The Moor's Last Sigh* makes these singularities, their determinations, their distance and their compatibility obvious, by indirectly uniting two worlds and two times, present-day India and Boabdill's fifteenth century, and by multiplying intertextual references, the narrator's identifications, voices and locations. On the one hand, the worlds and times present in the novel allow the narrator to establish many perspectives, which do not suggest any necessary links between these two places and times, and to define writing as an exercise of simultaneity, overlapping, and transition. On the other hand, because connections between the two poles do not refer to any specific authority or causality that could be considered to define them, the shifts from one pole to the other and from one perspective to another are easy, and no singularity can be viewed as entirely defined by one of these poles or perspectives. The whole novel relies upon these multiple poles, perspectives, times and places, and their partial connections. These connections are partial because none of these multiplicities and attached singularities are identical, and none can be disassociated. The novel further relies upon characters who are defined only by partial identities: their selves are at once deflated, inflated and variable, that is, isolated, multi-relational and metamorphic, explicitly singular and compatible with many selves. *The Moor's Last Sigh* consequently excludes the recognition of any kind of universalism: any universalist assertion supposes a stable enunciator. The universal is designated by this world and its history, which make many variables identifications of places, times, characters and actions, and their partial connections possible. No person, no place and no time offers a perspective for itself. Each singularity extends the other, only from the other position. What these extensions yield are different capacities to elicit more relations. The universal is meant to be read in the continuous and reciprocal translations of the singularities that the novel's narrative and partial connections designate. No universalism is to be recognized, whatever it is. Radical relativism is the best means to evoke the universal, the world's universality, the many singularities and their many locals.

Novels of the limits of the Anthropos and the posthuman, allow us to read the singular and the universal and their manifest paradoxes, although they focus

on the possible absence of the human being who is in search of the universal. Cyborg novels, such as *Cyborg* by Martin Caidin<sup>1</sup> or *Hyperion* by Dan Simmons<sup>2</sup>, exemplify this focus. Cyborgs are mixed subjects; at the same time both human beings and technological devices, they seem to resist any reference to the universal. However, they are meant to be viewed as simultaneously universal and partial. They are like human beings, and partial, because they are complemented by specific and partial technological objects, and because those objects are produced by repetitive techniques and can be reproduced, they demonstrate a kind of universality. Because of the alliance of technology and the human, and of the universal and the partial, cyborg novels make the demand for completeness and interpretation obvious, and respond to this demand in a specific manner. The cyborg, a fantastic being, allows us to identify cyborg novels as anti-mimetic: such novels exclude literal repetitions of the singular and the universal, which both humanity and technology exemplify. Partial similarities between cyborgs and humans and technological devices are substitutes for these literal repetitions, and inspire reflections on the otherness that the cyborg represents. This otherness demonstrates a double paradox: it is manifest even though the human being is obviously supported by technology. In other words, the latter confirms the humanity of the former; the human being does not seem discontinuous with what it is not or should not be. On the one hand, the double paradox makes extended comparisons possible: the human part of the cyborg is to be compared with other human beings, and its technological parts with other technological devices. On the other hand, the same paradox makes technology and humanity reciprocal extensions even though they are obviously discontinuous. Other plural relations indicate a multiple world and enable readers to infer concepts and universals that account for these paradoxical relations. This inference from the complexity of the cyborg presupposes that the universal should be indicated by the composition of elements that can be comprehended from the perspective of various orders that allow moves from one to another. In the world of the universal, no order, either human or technological, prevails.

To apply the play upon double anthropology to characters — that is, to human subjects — in novels is an easy means of picturing various worlds as equally accessible, of characterizing subjects who are fully committed to their worlds, and of showing that these characters' identities are incomplete. This play reconstructs the duality of difference and compatibility, endows it with a maximal scope, and suggests an extension of each subject's position in another. Novels characterize

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1 See Caidin.

2 See Simmons.

these subjects as able to perceive national, cultural and social relationships as simultaneously part and not part of themselves.

The main dual typologies of the subjectivity described in contemporary anthropology is useful to describe these specific partial connections and the implicit universal they designate, even though they do deny the extent and diversity of the world. This typology is exemplified in the theories of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Philippe Descola<sup>1</sup>. Lévi-Strauss distinguishes the centrifugal subject from the centripetal subject: the former refers to non-western, particularly Asian, subjectivities, and the latter refers to anything and anyone in relation to him/herself. This is the basic definition of the romantic subject, which, *mutatis mutandis*, still applies to people in Western cultures. Lévi-Strauss cites the contrast between European and Asian, specifically Japanese, behaviours as the archetypal example of the distinction between these two types of subjectivity. Descola, meanwhile, differentiates the naturalist subject from the analogical subject. The former refers to the modern, post-seventeenth-century subject, who is conceived and viewed according to the duality of mind/spirit and nature. All human beings belong to nature; each human being possesses a singular mind or spirit. The analogical subject is the individual of *cultures premières* in anthropology. All natural beings have different bodies, according to their species and to each being; each has an analogical mind that perceives similarity between humans and animals, humans and plants, or animals and plants. Descola uses the concept of the analogical subject mainly to discuss the concept of animism.

Many contemporary works can be read according to Lévi-Strauss's and Descola's typologies. The magical realism of many South American novels suits the duality of animism and individualism, as do many African postcolonial works, such as Ahmadou Kourouma's *En attendant le vote des bêtes sauvages*.<sup>2</sup> Haruki Murakami's *Kafka on the Shore*<sup>3</sup> links the psychological and existential portrait of its main character — a high school student who exemplifies the distraught Western individual and his/her centripetal subjectivity — to Shintoism and animism. Each of these anthropological dualities allows us to interpret the entire work, but excludes any saturating interpretation, so that we can discern only partial connections between the worlds, anthropological perspectives, and characters within the work.

Partial connections, double anthropology, and types of subjects demand that we view these characters neither as individuals nor as persons defined by a holistic

1 Claude Lévi-Strauss and Philippe Descola.

2 See Kourouma.

3 See Murakami.

view of their community. Therefore, no individual or collective identity is self-sufficient, and each one is defined by what it is not more than by what it is. The move from “what it is” to “what it is not” justifies the shift from the local to the world at large, and shows that “what it is not” is to be recognized as the means to designate the limit and the possible extension of “what it is.” We must therefore ask: are a place and its agents an identity as such? Let us say that, because of the use of double anthropology, an identity is shown as wholly deployed in the world; it is not secret and always appears to extend the other, but only from the other’s position.

Reading postcolonial novels, novels of the posthuman and novels of mixed anthropological perspectives along with one example of the world novel, *Cloud Atlas*, and its designations of the duality of globalization and the local, shows that this duality and its paradoxes highlight the constant question of how to identify and describe places, viewed according to various scales such as the local, the global, and persons, viewed as dependent upon these scales’ variations yet capable of recognizing that they are subsumed neither by the local nor by the global, and identifying themselves neither as a sum nor a fragment of their own designations. The local and global issue in today’s literature(s) may be interpreted as one more questioning of power and dominant relations. This interpretation reduces the issue to the confrontation of two universalisms: the one that is identified with globalization, and the other with the rights of the local. The world’s universality, which our reading of *Cloud Atlas* has defined, allows us to refer the local and the global to the many reciprocal perspectives that are implied by any situation and position of persons and do not apply to human beings only. Remarkably, this approach to the duality of the local and the global invites us to reinterpret postmodern and postcolonial works, and see them not only as earlier construals of competing universalisms in modernity, but also as designing ways to represent relational singularities that respond to the paradoxes of two kinds of wholes: the world and the local. Partial connections and double anthropology enable us to reread the various approaches we have initially enumerated as presuppositions of the duality of local and global.

### **Imagined Globalization, Its Universalism and Our Manifold Commonsense World**

Let us rephrase these final remarks and our whole argument: globalization, a word that applies to economic flows, book trade, international relations, travel and travelers, and many other persons, can be conceived of only according to many bifurcations. Because no one has ever seen the totality it implies, it is one of the present-day versions of universalism. Literary works exemplify these bifurcations

and interpret them from the angle of bifurcations imagined and to be read in the world and in the local. The duality of the local and the world prevents us from suggesting any kind of universalism. Poetics of partial connections and the singular and universal duality that is attached to the local and to the world make it obvious that many kinds of authenticity are recognized by writers as they identify the duality of the local and the world. Novels offer no final synthesis; the multiplicity and variability of the views which this duality makes possible are a challenge to literary form. This is the only conclusion to be drawn from Borges's fable, "The Aleph." Avoiding deliberate framing or encompassing of the local and the world does not equate with departing from our commonsense world — that is, from our most immediate views of the local and what is beyond it — but with restoring it through displacement and partial connections. That is the response to globalization, its imaginations and universalism. However, it leaves an ambiguity: in *Cloud Atlas* and the postcolonial, posthuman and multi-anthropological novels discussed here, persons who appear to give coherence to networks — the connected stories of *Cloud Atlas* and all kinds of connection in the other novels — are also particles of the organization of their location, their local. This ambiguity defines the imagination of the local and the world in the novels discussed in this paper and their responses to the imagined universalism of globalization: our experience of our structurally manifold commonsense world and its partial connections counterpoise any universalism.

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