Staging (Dis)Connections between the Individual and the Mass in Contemporary Literature: From the Pathological "Mass in Person" to the Globalized Subject

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This article examines literary stagings of the relationship between the individual and the mass in contemporary literature by drawing on four case studies: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002), David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (1999) and David Harrower's play *Kill the Old Torture Their Young* (1998). Ellis and Harrower foreground the erosion of subjectivity within today's abstract society. The dark satire of Ellis's novel highlights how the cynicism of the information age and capitalist exchange reduces the individual to a pathological "mass in person." The depersonalization of social interaction also takes centre stage in Harrower's play. In contrast, McGregor's novel depicts the individual as part of an organic whole, which allows for spiritual connectivity transcending factors such as gender or ethnicity. A different take on the individual and the mass is offered by *Ghostwritten* insofar as it accentuates the interconnectivity of individuals in a globalized world and how power dynamics shape the interplay of the global and local.

Modern cities with their huge crowds of people in unceasing motion may be seen as the epitome of mass civilization. Ever since Romanticism, the alienation and suffering of the individual in the anonymity of the urban mass has become a prominent motif in literature and the arts. A "concentration of attitudes and feelings . . . gathered around the noun *anonymity*," namely the sense of isolation and loss of identity in the urban crowd, for which the Romantic writers provided a vocabulary and

a cluster of imagery (Ferry 201). While the anonymity of city life was also celebrated for the freedom it may offer the individual, and the crowds seen as offering delightful sensuous encounters,[1] the estrangement of the individual in late capitalist society continues to be foregrounded in the literary imagination. In the following essay, different literary negotiations of the relationship between the individual and the mass will be outlined by drawing on David Harrower's play *Kill the Old Torture Their Young* (1998) and three novels: Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho* (1991), Jon McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (2002) and David Mitchell's *Ghostwritten* (1999). While the discussion of Ellis and Harrower focuses on the crisis of the individual due to the forces of capitalism and abstract society, the analysis of McGregor and Mitchell will concentrate on the specific form of interconnectivity between the individual and the mass staged in each of the novels. The discussion of these texts traces not only the literary trajectory of the subject as a pathological "mass in person" (Ellis) to a globalized subject with agency (Mitchell), but will also highlight the functions of literature for the parsing of individual identity in globally informed mass culture.

The yuppie serial killer Patrick Bateman in Ellis's *American Psycho* can be characterized as the "mass in person" (Seltzer 19). The term "mass in person" was coined by Mark Seltzer in his study *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (1998) to refer to "the complete fusion with the mass at the expense of the individual that forms the inner experience" (19). At first glance, this may seem a surprising thesis because the first person narrator Bateman is explicitly set on distinguishing himself from the mass by means of an elite (consumerist) life-style. However, as many critics have noted, Bateman's "psyche is nonexistent. Instead, Ellis gives us a central identity created by external forces, . . . the voice of a man who in real terms is not actually there" (Storey 58). Bateman as the speaking "I" of the novel is depersonalized inasmuch as a vocabulary of interiority has been nearly completely replaced by Bateman's verbatim repetition of the worn clichéd language of consumer or mass culture. What makes Bateman the "mass in person" is not only the replacement of an individualized voice by clichéd language, such as his politicese (15) and his ad-speak (26-27), but the herewith closely related expansion of the commodity form, which is shown to include the subject in its "cynicism of exchange" (Sloterdijk 576; my translation). In capitalism, money is the universal equivalent: qualitatively different things are made equivalent in terms

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1. See, for example, the Baudelaire poem "A une passante" (1857) or Richard Church's poem "Strap-hanging" (1928).

of their exchange value or rather monetary value. By satirically exaggerating the principle of equivalence, Ellis draws attention to the destructive effects of this logic: equivalence leads to indifference because qualitative differences are obliterated. In the nightmarish world of *American Psycho* there is no qualitative difference between consuming commodities, images or people (Weinreich 74-75); serial production is matched by serial killing. Qualitative differences between subjects appear eradicated as names, signifiers of individual identity *par excellence*, are used completely interchangeably and the subject is only perceived in terms of the commodities s/he is wearing.

The capitalist cynicism of exchange is linked to mass media in *American Psycho*: "Timothy . . . pulls out today's newspaper. 'In one issue . . . strangled models, babies thrown from tenement rooftops . . . , a Communist rally, Mafia boss wiped out . . . '" (4). The news work with a purely additive principle so that no meaningful connections between the news items are forged; they are only linked with "and" (Sloterdijk 571-73). The cynicism of exchange is thus correlated with the "cynicism of the informational age" (Sloterdijk) and its indifferent rendering of news items.[2]

The literal "in-difference" between the individual and the mass in *American Psycho* is highlighted by the loss of narrativity. As cognitive narratologists have shown, narratives may be seen as granting access to qualia, i.e. the experientiality of the subject (Herman 256-57). A key trait of prototypical narrativity is its concern with the particular (events, situations). The generic descriptions one is confronted with in Ellis's novel do not grant access to the experientiality of the speaker for the very reason that they lack such particularity, such as Bateman's endless lists of commodities or the holiday description given by one of Bateman's acquaintances (Ellis 137).

The residual subjectivity of Bateman becomes manifest in his "panic-driven quest for identity" (Weinreich 72). His obsession with commodities and his violent killings can be seen as desperate attempts to fill the "existential chasm" from which he suffers (Ellis 179). The failure of his chosen strategies (i.e. consuming and killing) to aid him in maintaining a sense of agency and individuality results from the fact that they follow the very logic of equivalence which gave rise to the "existential chasm" in the first place. Ultimately, Bateman is not an individual but a type encapsulating pathological structures of contemporary society (an "American psycho")—a mass in person, who is completely ghostwritten by his mass media and capitalist environment.

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2. For an in-depth analysis of the interrelation between the cynicism of exchange and the cynicism of the information age, see Sloterdijk 559-97.

Within the fictional world there is no exit (Ellis 399) out of the world of "[s]urface, surface, surface," in which individuality is "no longer an issue" (375). Literature, however, can be seen as a medium combating the cynicism of the additive "and" by inviting the reader to draw connections between the various textual elements during the act of reading.

The state of interpersonal disconnectedness in the urban mass as well as the reduction of individuals to exchangeable units in late capitalist society is also dealt with in *Kill the Old Torture Their Young* (*KTOTY*) written by the Scottish playwright David Harrower. The play is set in an unspecified city and features a host of different characters whose paths intersect. The characters range from a disorientated rock star and a receptionist caught in her daily routine to an old man who claims to have seen an eagle flying over the city. The filmmaker Robert, who returns to his home city to film a documentary of it, succinctly summarizes the problem most of the characters in the play are struggling with: "How do we rescue ourselves from sitting naked in an empty room?" (26)

The isolation of the individual in the mass is emphasized by the setting of the play. Most of the scenes are set in the "non-places," to use Marc Augé's term, typical of capitalist modernity: the office, a petrol station, the airport or hotel room. None of these places depicted in the play provide a sense of "cultural identity and memory, binding . . . [their] inhabitants to the history of the locale" (Tomlinson 109). Instead, social interaction in these places is "instrumental and 'contractual'—the apotheosis of *Gesellschaft*—lifted out of any organic relation with a community existing in continuity through time" (110).

The fact that the characters yearn for what Jan Romein has termed a "common human pattern" and its concomitant sense of place becomes apparent by the way the various characters echo the description given in a trendy city magazine of the way of life supposedly led by bushmen in Africa:

> In Africa the Bushmen believe that when they die a star falls from the sky in order to tell life everywhere else that he who once lived, lives no longer. (15)
> It's how the animals and the rivers, the rocks and the trees learn of his death. The Bushmen believe they are known by all of them. Wherever . . . in life they go, the Bushmen feel they belong. (43)

The common human pattern of pre-industrial society is characterized by "existential concreteness" (Zijderveld 49) because the subject is integrated into a coherent whole or rather a meaningful social order (Zapf 18-19). While these traits are invoked in the article on the exhibition "The Vanishing Tribes

of the World," the article itself says more about the nostalgic yearnings of the modern city dweller than the culture of the Other. What is striking about the quote is not only the harmony with nature and the sense of belonging it glosses, but also the importance of each single human being as his/her death is registered on a cosmic scale. It seems to be such a feeling of connection and sense of importance as an individual which a character like the wannabe actor Darren, for example, strives for when he attempts to overcome the anonymity of city life by asking Angela—a chance encounter—out for a date. He is, however, unable to recognize Angela's individuality because he projects his own wish fulfillment fantasies onto her when he imagines them to be wearing clothes coloured green like "moss-covered trees . . . [n]ear rivers" (56) on their first date. (The intratextual reference to trees and rivers invokes the common human pattern of the Bushmen society.) The common human pattern appears as an anthropological need in *KTOTY*.

The structure of Harrower's play underlines how radically the common human pattern has been destroyed in abstract society with its anonymity and depersonalized relations. According to Hubert Zapf, abstract society is characterized by a high degree of functional differentiation and various processes of abstraction (e.g. rationalization, bureaucracy, capitalism).[3] These factors give rise to an impersonal world where the individual feels s/he is at the mercy of Kafkaesque forces or rather of disorientating social systems with a life and agency of their own. A case in point is the fully incomprehensible bureaucracy Steven Orr, an employee of a television company, has to deal with. Just when he thinks he has completed all the necessary paperwork to get a project done, some "more heads" (11) from the "million and one departments, offices, officials" (11) mysteriously turn up, whose signatures he needs. Harrower's play lacks the traditional conflict between characters because the conflict is between the individual and abstract society as such.[4] In this depersonalized society the subject seems devoid of agency because the actions of characters have no real consequences within the fictional world of *KTOTY*. The pervasive lack of social bonding and personal interconnection in abstract society is driven home by the staged crisis of communication, namely when characters speak at cross purposes (28-29) because communication is overwritten by abstract forces.[5]

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3. Zapf draws on Zijderveld in his outline of abstract society.

4. For a detailed description of abstract society, see Zapf 15-24. Zapf's convincing analysis of how the form of New English Drama changed in response to the strain placed on the individual by abstract society provides a useful frame of reference for an in-depth analysis of Harrower's play. Many of Zapf's key findings also apply to *KTOTY*.

5. See Zapf 24.

In both *American Psycho* and *KTOTY* the relation between the individual and the mass is portrayed in dark colours as forces of abstraction and the depersonalization of social interaction threaten to erode subjectivity. While *American Psycho* does not offer a way out of its surface world, the question of whether the state of interpersonal disconnection may be overcome within the fictional world of *KTOTY* remains open to debate. Harrower does not offer any easy solutions in his play. Comic elements in *KTOTY* not only save the play from sinking into unmitigated gloom, but also serve to debunk discourses and organizational forms aiming at communality (for example, the comic debunking of spiritual discourse in the opening scene of the play or of a religious sect member in part II, scene 7). This ludic undercutting also extends to the arts as represented by the rock star. The rock star appears as a bizarre figure and it is therefore difficult to take him seriously. At the same time, however, he plays a prominent role because he weaves in and out of various scenes and, more importantly, is an integral element of the frame structure of the play. In both the opening and the closing scene, the rock star, while sitting in an airliner, invokes a form of spiritual collectivity. The play ends with his decision to generate communality via music: "His mind drifts back to . . . the open-air stage. . . . He remembers also at one point looking out over the crowd and how on the fringes of it there were people . . . who would not stand still like the others. . . . He knows now these are the people he must reach. He wonders what it will take to get through to them. . . . How to make them become part of the crowd" (72). This vision, however, comes from a character who speaks of himself in the third person, does not even know the name of the city he is in or where he is going and who, in his own words, "is fucked" (3). In a play questioning easy solutions to the problems outlined, it is perhaps fitting that the contribution of the arts towards forging a sense of communal interconnectivity is rendered highly ambivalent.

In contrast to Harrower's play, McGregor's *If Nobody Speaks of Remarkable Things* (*INSRT*) implicitly entails an emphatic evaluation of the crucial role which the arts or rather literature plays in countering the alienation experienced by the subject in urban anonymity. The book encompasses two plot strands narrated alternately. The first person narration of a young woman, who is struggling to come to terms with the shock of her unwanted pregnancy after a one night stand, constitutes the first plot strand and is set in the present. This woman was witness to a car accident three years ago. The second plot strand is set in the past and depicts how the various people living in the street where the accident took place experienced that day, i.e. from the morning to the time of the accident later on. The two plot strands are connected not only

in terms of plot, but also by their staging a development from disconnection to connection on both a microlevel and macrolevel.

The plot strand of the car accident stages connectivity on a macrolevel as it leads up to a moment of spiritual communality in a moment of crisis. The fact that this experience of communality is tied to the redemptive power of names (first name and family name) points to the way in which the relationship between the individual and the mass is conceptualized in the novel. The crowd is not seen as an undifferentiated mass, but instead an awareness of the uniqueness of each individual is highlighted in varying imagery. A parallel between the description of an art work ("thousands of six-inch red clay figures . . . almost identical, each one unique"), for instance, and urban crowds is explicitly drawn (231-32). The fact that the various people living in the street are never referred to by names but rather by epithets (e.g. "the man with the moustache") not only foregrounds the anonymity of city life, but also draws attention to the way we perceive people in the city. In "a community of strangers, we need a quick, easy-to-use set of stereotypes, cartoon outlines, with which to classify the people we encounter" (Raban 26). The use of epithets, which focus on distinct traits of characters, instead of names is indebted to this mode of seeing in the city.

The first and only time the name of an individual is stated in this plot strand is directly after a car has run over a child. It is the name of the child we get to know:

> At the end of the street, the man with the ruined hands . . . thinks of the boy's mother, saying his name, he echoes her, . . . Shahid Mohammed, Shahid Nawaz, . . . he thinks oh Allah have mercy let the whole world hear. He imagines what would happen if the whole street called his name, joining with the mother's small voice, the whole street lifting the words and the words spreading through this city, taking flight like a flock of birds . . . , a chorus of name-saying, a brief redemptive span of attention. . . . He imagines this, he whispers the name alone, . . . like a prayer . . . . (271-72)

In this imagined act of collective name-saying, which is coded in religious terms (e.g. "redemptive," "prayer"), communality goes hand in hand with a focus on the individual. This act of voicing the name of the individual appears as redemptive indeed for the ensuing description implies a causal connection between the act of name-saying and Shahid's coming back to life in the ambulance (272-73). The world of McGregor's novel does not advance a poststructuralist notion of language and identity, but rather a metaphysics of

presence according to which signifier and signified are one: the word comes to life in a truly biblical sense.

The integration of the individual in a religiously coded larger whole is invoked both at the end of the novel (as quoted above) as well as in its opening pages: the city sings and "the song sings the loudest when you pick out each note" (1). In this "non-stop wonder of the song of the city" (3), the individual notes form a "choir," whose "harmony humming [is] expecting more voices" (2). Although the characters living in the street are not shown as having close neighbourly contact, the overarching vision unfolded in the novel is one of a (spiritual) communality, which does not obliterate or threaten the individuality of the subject.

A movement from disconnection to connection is also staged in the first person narration, albeit on a microlevel. At the beginning of the story, the unnamed narrator suffers from her isolation in the urban environment as well as the alienation from her family and even from her own (pregnant) body. This changes when she meets Michael, who contacts her because he wants to meet the secret love of his deceased twin brother. While the narrator had never really noticed Michael's brother, who used to be her neighbour ("the boy from number eighteen" [7]), she does develop a friendship with Michael. It is through this friendship that she is able to "make a connection and keep hold of it" (261)—a connection both to Michael and the growing life within her.

The crucial role of literature in enabling the individual to experience the connection to a larger whole, despite the anonymity of city living, lies in its drawing attention to remarkable things in our everyday life. This, at least, seems to be the claim implicitly made in *INSRT*. These remarkable things—such as the fact that thousands of birds fly in flocks without any of those colliding (239)—open up a spiritual dimension into which the individual may tap. Against this backdrop, the structural properties of McGregor's novel take on added significance. The frame structure of the novel, namely the identical passages at the beginning and at the end (4-5; 275), not only focuses on a moment of "sacred time" (3) but also stages wholeness in structural terms. In light of the religious discourse on the level of contents, the wholeness of the textual body may also be linked to the religious field. One may be reminded of the etymological meaning of "holy," which goes back to the Old English word *hal* ("whole"). Moreover, the literary narrative is glossed as a regenerative force. The first person narration always encompasses nine paragraphs, each made up of nine sentences, thus connecting the form with the miracle of new life (pregnancy). This semantization of the form emphasizes literature's

invoked potential to increase our sensitivity for spiritual dimensions in contemporary city life.

The ability of literature to draw our attention to remarkable things around us is firmly placed in the context of media rivalry within McGregor's novel. On the one hand, the cinematic style of the novel highlights how our perception of reality is permeated by mass media. On the other hand, we learn that the car accident was not deemed important enough to be reported about in the news media; the novel, with its filmic style of narration and quoting of news speak, appears to be making up for this lapse of the other media. This point is driven home by the fact that the depiction of the car accident heavily draws on the genre of live news coverage: "if this was live on CNN the correspondent would be saying no the brakes are not active yet no not by a long way now back to you in the studio" (253). The ability to perceive the remarkable quality of things and events, such as that of the car accident, is shown to be a pre-condition for experiencing interconnectivity in McGregor's novel.

The specific form of interconnectivity staged in *INSRT*, the integration of the individual as part of a larger spiritual whole, has a number of blind spots. It is striking to note the way in which the neighborhood, where the accident took place, appears as a self-enclosed world. We are not presented with a heightened awareness of processes of globalization, but instead with a cosmic perspective which glosses over differences. The ethnicity of the city dwellers is, for example, only hinted at so that for some readers the non-Western name of the hurt child may come as a surprise. Against this backdrop I would agree with Sally Vicker's finding that the book depicts not a specific locale, but a "mythic street, on a mythic day, in a mythic summer, for this is really a mythic book, for all its seeming naturalism." I would add that the metaphysics of presence, which informs the relation between the individual and the mass, also add to the "mythical" nature of the story.

The global perspective neglected in McGregor's novel is dramatically foregrounded in Mitchell's *Ghostwritten*. The novel is divided into nine loosely connected episodes and a brief coda at the end, which brings you back to the events portrayed in the beginning of the book. The episodes, each set in a different country, take you from east to west, from Okinawa via Mongolia, Petersburg and Ireland to New York. The chapters are lightly interwoven on the level of plot by loose connections between the characters featured in the episodes (e.g. the ghostwriter in the chapter "London" happens to save the life of the scientist who is the first person narrator of the ensuing chapter set in Ireland). The recurrence of textual elements (e.g. phrases, things) also links the disparate episodes.

By setting each of the episodic stories in a different locale and highlighting how the actions of an individual in one country affect an individual in a different country, the novel pays tribute to the interplay of the global and local with its concomitant stretching of social relations over space. The way in which the death of a British lawyer, Neal Brose, who worked for a Hong Kong law firm, is shown to affect individuals in different localities is a case in point. While his ex-wife in London is shocked and saddened by his death, the crook he laundered money for is assassinated because his mobster boss did not believe the story that the lawyer had died. *Ghostwritten* presents the global as constituted out of different localities, whereby the global dynamic influences local units.[6] The episode featuring Brose, for example, is set against the backdrop of global cash flows, i.e. the financial crash of South East Asia, whose shockwaves carried through to other parts of the world. The abrupt transitions from one country to the next at the beginning of each chapter can be read as an aesthetic staging of what David Harvey terms the "time-space compression" (147) in a globalized world. The sense of distance between the countries shrinks dramatically through the spatial jump cuts between the chapters.

Globalization is emphatically not portrayed as homogenization or even Americanization in the novel. The opening chapter of *Ghostwritten* is narrated by the perpetrator of the Tokyo gas massacre, who is a member of a doomsday cult. His is a perspective firmly bound to strict binaries: the clean versus the undifferentiated mass of the unclean, who deserve to die. The homogenization of the masses he subscribes to also informs his perspective on place: "The same shops as anywhere else . . . Burger King, Benetton, Nike. . . . High streets are becoming the same all over the world" (11). In contrast, the first person narrator of the next chapter, set in Tokyo, draws attention to the creative appropriation of foreign cultural elements: "Then one of them asked why Japanese kids try to ape American kids. . . . I wanted to say that it's not America they're aping, it's the Japan of their parents that they're rejecting. And since there's no homegrown counterculture, they just take hold of the nearest one to hand. . . . It's us exploiting [American culture]" (43). While the key to the "cultural impact [of globalization] is in the transformation of localities themselves" (Tomlinson 29), the result is not homogenization, but rather transculturation.

The notion of globalization as homogenization is undermined by the portrayal of the local in *Ghostwritten* and by the multiperspective structure of

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6. On such an interplay between the global and the local, see also Robertson "Glocalization."

the novel as such. *Ghostwritten* "links the plurality of space and genre by treating the separate first person narrations as genre nut shells following their own, detached story line" (Griffiths 82). Instead of genre contamination, a "parallelity of genre [is established] within the framework of its narrative system" (82). The generic patterns thereby range from the thriller to science fiction. The specific locality of the chapters and their generic distinctness points to an understanding of globalization as a "complex social and phenomenological condition . . . in which different orders of human life are brought into articulation with one another" (Tomlinson 11) as the different perspectives in the novel are played off against each other.

The different perspectives introduced in the novel serve to highlight the "*power geometry*" (Massey 149) entailed in processes of globalization. As a contrasting of Neal Brose and the woman who runs a tea shack on the Holy Mountain in China shows, the time-space compression is in need of social differentiation. As Doreen Massey has argued, "There are differences in the degree of movement and communication, but also in the degree of control and of initiation. The ways in which people are placed within 'time-space compression' are highly complicated and extremely varied" (150). The Chinese woman who has spent all her life as a mountain dweller seems to be "simply on the receiving end of time-space compression" (Massey 149) as masses of tourists are driven up the Holy Mountain. In contrast to the Chinese woman, the jet-setter Brose is presented as a person with a high degree of mobility and who initiates global flows and movements in terms of cash transactions.

The complex structure of time-space compression gives rise to the question of agency in the globalized world. The title of the novel can be taken to refer to a host of ghosts and ghostwritings. These include the supernatural appearance of ghosts, the meeting with ghostly doubles of the self, a ghost in the machine created by a scientist, the act of ghostwriting somebody else's story as portrayed in the chapter "London," and last but not least the feeling of being ghostwritten "by forces around us" (Mitchell 287) or by a deity. The leitmotif of the subject being ghostwritten or predetermined by forces beyond his/her control is connected to the urgent question around which *Ghostwritten* revolves: "Why do things happen the way they do?" (60) Although we are not provided with a definite answer as to whether "chance or fate control[s] our lives" (283), the scales seem to tip in favour of the agency of the subject due to the fact that the emphasis on chance in various guises (e.g. chance encounters, gambling) is more pronounced in the novel than the discourse on fate. While local experience is penetrated by processes of globalization (e.g.

mass tourism on the Holy Mountain), the local actions of the individual is also shown to have a global effect (e.g. Neal Brose) so that structures generated by globalization processes and individual agency do not cancel each other out.

In *Ghostwritten*, the glocal nature of the world requires a heightened self-awareness of the global interconnectivity of events, individual actions and structures.[7] The reader is encouraged to develop such an intensified awareness by inviting him/her to spot the web of connections introduced between the characters, of which they themselves are unaware. This textual strategy, aiming to activate the reader, is driven by a humanist impulse. "If we, in 'real' life, fail to see how much we have in common, fail to make the kinds of meaningful connections that his novel so ingeniously invites you to detect, we're doomed" (Mendelsohn). It is in keeping with such an outlook that a monological approach to the other is shown to have murderous effects (as in the case of the perpetrator of the gas attack).[8] Attempts at neatly compartmentalizing one's life are also exposed as destructive in the long run, such as Brose's striving to keep his different "selves" or lives separate.

The overall structure of the novel foregrounds globalization as "a heightening of . . . self-consciousness" in terms of being constrained to locate ourselves "within world history and the global future" (Robertson, *Globalization* 27). At the same time, each of the episodes offers different takes on the globalized subject as the brief discussion of Brose and the Chinese woman shows. A striking portrayal of the globalized subject is presented in the chapter "Mongolia," whose first person narrator is a ghost-like entity transmigrating from human mind to mind on the quest for his origins. The access of the spirit to the experientiality and history of different culturally rooted lives—memories he takes with him—render this entity a globally written subject. At the same time, the "possibility of other *noncorpora* roaming the globe in a similar fashion adds to the definition of . . . [globalization] as a network wreathing

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7. The concept of glocalization refers to the "simultaneity and interpenetration of what are conventionally called the global and the local" (Robertson, "Glocalization" 30). The term "glocal" is a portmanteau word, blending "global" and "local." It was first used in capitalistic business jargon before Roland Robertson adapted it for his globalization theory. With the concept of glocalization, Robertson aims to highlight how "globalization—in the broadest sense, the compression of the world—has involved and increasingly involves the creation and the incorporation of locality, processes which themselves largely shape, in turn, the compression of world as a whole" (40).

8. His monological approach to life even extends to reading habits: "I have always preferred maps to books. They don't answer you back" (15).

itself around and through us" (Griffiths 87): ". . . I am: *noncorpum*, and *non-corpora*, if ever the day dawns when the singular becomes a plural" (Mitchell 165).[9] Such a day dawns in the chapter "Night Train," set in New York. The reader learns of a sentient satellite or rather a "concorporeal sentient intelligence wandering the surface of creation" (413), who is able to "duplicate [it]self and spend . . . [the year] in several places at once" (410).

The circular structure of the novel can be interpreted both as a metahistorical comment and as part of the textual strategy aimed at activating the reader to train his/her ability to draw connections between heterogeneous elements. The prominence of circular elements in *Ghostwritten* stages a "circular nature of history" (Griffiths 84). In a similar vein to much historiographic metafiction, *Ghostwritten* challenges linear teleologies of official history or grand narratives by focusing on the "'petites histoires' situated on the periphery of society" (98).[10] At the same time, the circular structure or rather "the sheer semantics of geometric form" invokes the "connotations of wholeness and inclusiveness" (Tomlinson 10) we associate with the global. By taking the reader back to where s/he started from, the reader is stimulated to re-read the novel with a view to the "ghostly presence" of each of the characters in the lives of the others, thus forging connections between the dynamics of a globalized world. The circular structure of the novel is thus not to be read as an introduction of closure, i.e. the notion of a shared single communality, but instead directly linked to a notion of a dynamic global unicity as "circles and wheels spinning separately together" (Mitchell 307).

A comparison between the literary stagings of interconnectivity in *INSRT* and *Ghostwritten* shows how significant shifts in perspective result if processes of globalization are brought to the fore. In McGregor's novel, the relation between the individual and the mass is one of participating in an organic unity, a single spiritual communality transcending time and space, which allows for the subject to retain his/her status as an individual. The individual as part of an organic unity is invoked through the portrayal of the city as having a body ("skin on the veins of the city" [1]). Processes of globalization are only hinted at through references to multiculturalism, such as the mentioning of Indian restaurants (5) or providing some clues as to the

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9. Griffiths interprets the spirit as "a narrative manifestation of the Freudian unconscious" (85) or rather, due to the spirit's roaming of the globe, of the "collective unconscious" (87). In the above quote, I have replaced the term "unconscious" with "globalization" as I only partly agree with Griffith's reading.
10. For a detailed discussion of *Ghostwritten* as historiographic metafiction, see Griffiths.

ethnic background of the city dwellers. However, these references remain superficial as the dominant focus lies on a spiritual connection transcending factors such as gender or race. The frame structure of the novel appears as a marker of closure: unicity in a sacred moment of time informed by a metaphysics of presence. The sense of disconnection, which results from the anonymity of city life and the perceived lack of a meaningful social order, can be surmounted if one becomes sensitive to the remarkable things which shape our lives on a daily basis. The lyrical description of quotidian things and events can be seen as a textual strategy to encourage the reader's adoption of a perspective sensitive to what Jane Bennett terms "the enchantment of modern life."

Ghostwritten also draws heavily on religious discourse, and foregrounds an anthropological need for a meaningful social order and for answers to the question of why things happen. In contrast to *INSRT*, the dynamic between the individual and the mass is firmly placed within a global frame. Instead of a non-specified city neighbourhood, which appears as a self-enclosed or rather "mythic" world, the reader is invited to trace global interconnections against the backdrop of world history as witnessed by the "common man or woman" (e.g. the Cultural Revolution in China as seen from the perspective of the tea shack owner). The crucial point about *Ghostwritten* is that the novel draws attention to how the staged interconnectivity between individuals worldwide is shaped by power geometry. The individual is not part of a harmonic or organic whole, but of a shifting global network fraught with contradictions and deep tensions. Accordingly, the frame structure of *Ghostwritten* is not a figure of closure, but serves to emphasize the complex nature of global interconnectivity.

As the above discussion of the literary works has shown, the relationship between the individual and the mass ties in with key issues of contemporaneity. The question of how individual identity may be forged within a society marked by processes of abstraction and depersonalization is a central theme in the texts analyzed. In the dark satire *American Psycho*, the individual has been eroded by the cynicism of exchange and of the information age so that only a residual subjectivity remains. Due to the depersonalization of Bateman, he appears as the mass in person. While such an extreme pathology does not occur in Harrower's play, the individuals portrayed also suffer from the effects of abstract society. Social interaction does not lead to connectivity because it is overwritten by forces of abstraction. While in McGregor's novel a moment of spiritual communality is emphatically invoked, the question of whether a development from disconnection to connection is possible for the characters

in *KTOTY* can only be answered with a "perhaps." With this "perhaps" Harrower's play is situated between the pessimism of *American Psycho* and the optimism of *INSRT*.

A further reason for including Harrower's play in this brief survey of contemporary literature was the fact that the play is also interesting in terms of genre development. It demonstrates how the structure of drama changes when the relationship between the individual and the mass is conceived in terms of abstract society. As "personal interaction is the genuine medium of drama," the changing nature of social bonds will necessarily affect its structure (Zapf 26; my translation).

Last but not least, the discussion of *Ghostwritten* brings a reassessment of the dynamic between the individual and the mass in the light of globalization processes. While status as an individual is lost in *American Psycho* and threatened in *KTOTY*, *Ghostwritten* is driven by a humanist impulse and offers the promise of a globalized subject with agency without taking recourse to a controversial metaphysics of presence. All in all, the analysis of the four literary texts also serves to draw attention to the uses of literature in the modern world of mass civilization. These potential functions include social critique, training the reader's ability to forge connections, increasing a reader's sensitivity for remarkable things in one's life as well as heightening his/her awareness regarding global interconnectivity. With these findings, this article has certainly just scratched the surface of what literature knows about the individual and the mass and what functions literature may fulfill in the light of this knowledge.

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