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Erick Heroux
National Chengchi University

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The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home

By Erick Heroux <heroux@nccu.edu.tw>
Assistant Professor of English
National Chengchi University
Taipei, Taiwan

“A Wary Yet Optimistic Global Soul”


Pico Iyer is a fairly well-known travel writer and novelist, particularly for an English-language audience to read about Asia, and especially for the new phenomena of “travel” in an era of global consumption, borderless mass media, local hybridities of several cultures, surprising fusions of East and West, and the dubious effects of tourism. The book that established him in 1988 was Video Night in Kathmandu: And Other Reports from the Not-So-Far East. Iyer has brought the now faded ’60s “New Journalism” of Joan Didion and Norman Mailer up to date for a renewed multicultural and rapidly emerging global soul. This kind of writing continually remixes straight reporting with subjective and private revelations, along with thoughtful forays off into other texts on the topic at hand. In this recent book, Iyer reveals his personal experience as a kind of “global soul” – an upbringing and education and lifestyle that is postnational or transnational and cosmopolitan – while also reporting about the positive and negative experiences of a diverse global cast of characters. This is a soul, like any other, composed of both problems and promises. Iyer is respected among the literati as a book reviewer and cultural commentator. We read this book as an exemplary belle lettre essay — part autobiography, part travel narrative, part social analysis — that is at the frontier of global culture(s).

The author of The Global Soul knows that we are a bit confused today, and his ambition is to provide a sustained yet accessible meditation on the grounds of this confusion about a new global horizon of human experience. Each chapter explores with wit and occasional wisdom a
different location and situation around the world. A deceptively breezy yet densely metaphorical overview in the first chapter, Iyer describes his experience of sudden homelessness when his house burned down in California, where he was then taken in by a poor migrant worker from south of the border, an interesting kind of unknown neighbor whose experience of home and homelessness oddly resonates with the nevertheless different class of homelessness that Pico Iyer experiences. The second chapter on “The Airport” presents his observations and multicultural conversations in the disorienting non-place of LAX, really a kind of liminal space, a threshold of cultural arrival and departure, where he deliberately lived for over a week. There Iyer watched them come and go and return again, those globe-trotting souls from every corner, not quite merging in the deceptively “neutral” zone of the modern terminal. What emerges there at LAX might be a kind of 3rd space hovering beyond both the modernism of its architecture and the dizzying hodge-podge of languages and cultural assumptions that swirl through the masses of people in transit. This is a space that is strangely familiar yet uncomfortable, welcoming and inclusive, yet impersonal and . . . well, transitory. But such global non-places present a universal culture of their own, one that everyone from everywhere can navigate.

The third chapter (yes Iyer does escape from the airport) visits his frequent-flyer bi-national friends in Hong Kong, where he surveys the “Global Marketplace”. The fourth chapter discusses Toronto as perhaps the single most cosmopolitan city in the world today. Iyer reviews contemporary fiction from authors in Toronto and also interviews residents about the conflicts and satisfactions of living in an officially multicultural city that has somehow passed a threshold beyond multiple immigrant groups toward a globalist city. The fifth chapter reports about the disappointments of the Olympic Games held in the supposedly “world-class” city of Atlanta, U.S.A. The Olympics are now an uneasy amalgamation of both corporate marketing, central control, and genuinely populist enthusiasm, of both international fair play and also nationalist pride. In Atlanta, the games floundered into a provincial backwater of religious fundamentalism, racism, and business-minded boosterism, and ended with a small but frightening terrorist bombing. The chapter is a model of social analysis behind the current events at the global gathering. Iyer reveals the many contradictions of a cosmopolitan Olympic Village under the shadow of global capitalism that is “mass producing images of nationalism and universalism without much troubling to distinguish between them” — all the while held in a “McSuburb” of transnational corporate culture. While it falls short of the mark, this chapter comes close to a critique of that economic globalization we usually hear about in tones either shrill or honeyed, that global system of neoliberalism and enforced trade, of eroded labor rights and ecological damage. Iyer’s book admits of such topics only in the background. His foreground is the related world of cross-cultural flow, of diaspora and travel, of universal “determinitorialization”. This latter term is all the rage among current theorists of global cultural effects. Iyer uses a more felicitous language to describe in a more detailed way what this means for actual human beings. Still the upshot is abstractly dialectical: both good and bad at once, a loss of local autonomy along with a gain of broader horizons and choices.

Moving on then to post-imperial London, chapter five sets down among the kind of people who immigrated there from the colonial periphery, seeking to find the imagined ideals of a literary English culture, but only to discover instead an often disillusioning land of racist exclusion and
under-educated ignorance. This leads to a discussion of Nobel laureate V.S. Naipaul, as he is the exemplary writer of this disorienting “voyage in” to the fallen center of Empire. Iyer sees this as an older generation of immigrants from the far flung provinces of the old imperial system, a generation of voluntary exiles whose disappointments the real England versus the idealized one do not overlap much with his generation that grew up without a sentimental view of British centrality, but rather grew up as more globally polycentric. This younger generation of writers includes Rushdie and Gunesekera and Kureishi.

Throughout The Global Soul, Pico Iyer very often refers to discussions with the more famous novelists that he personally knows: viz., Kazuo Ishiguro and Salman Rushdie, a circle of top prize-winners that hints at an entirely new kind of literary generation. Future historians will not refer to them as “the lost generation” (Hemingway, Gertrude Stein, et al) nor as something like the countercultural Beat generation, and such; these writers are neither bohemian nor road running for the exit. Instead they seem to have settled in at home for the duration: it’s just that this home is dynamically hybrid, or cultivated from their own multiple roots and grafts and sprouts. They write as cosmopolitans of a new sort – beyond the traditional “good European” postnationalist (the phrase is Nietzsche’s 19th century version of high multiculturalism that remained within the bounds of euro-centrism). They write, that is, as cosmopolitans from below, exploring how one emerges despite racism and loss of ethnic “authenticity” into a creative globalist sensibility, an identity that refuses the either/or dilemmas of the old empire and yet likewise refuses the lazy way out through consumption of eclectic “lifestyles”. Our attention is drawn equally to both the tense difficulties such new cosmopolitanism and also to the liberating potentials of creative fusions, proliferating choices. Given our time in which one might choose the best from two or three or so worlds, where one might also choose the worst from those same worlds, the possibilities for good and bad have become more interesting.

Pico Iyer also draws upon the literary works of much older classics, Emerson for example, in his meditations upon a set of conflicted meanings for humanity today, upon the inevitable consequences and choices with which we are daily confronted. Hence, this book shows how a sustained discussion about the effects of globalization on our personal experience can draw upon literary works in an edifying manner. The Global Soul is a book that can pull this off while simultaneously reporting from the frontlines of global contradictions with very personal confessions thrown in to reveal how these supposedly abstract universals of the global process come down to rest in one particular soul, one very wary yet optimistic soul.

The final chapter unveils Iyer’s personal life today, married and living in a suburb of Tokyo. Although his wife Hiroko barely speaks any English, and Iyer barely speaks any Japanese, they have established a feeling of being at home in the world, married to it, so to speak. As the final word of this book of tensions and uncertain paradoxes, Iyer attempts to show that a globe-trotting cosmopolitan can indeed find a sense of peace.
27 THOUGHTS ON "THE GLOBAL SOUL : JET LAG, SHOPPING MALLS, AND THE SEARCH FOR HOME"

**best rowing machine**
**on January 29, 2014 at 5:03 PM** said:

I am really impressed with your writing skills as well as with the layout on your weblog. Is this a paid theme or did you customize it yourself? Anyway keep up the nice quality writing, it is rare to see a great blog like this one these days.

**tickets**
**on January 29, 2014 at 5:18 PM** said:

Simply want to say your article is as amazing. The clarity in your post is simply great and i could assume you’re an expert on this subject. Well with your permission let me to grab your RSS feed to keep updated with forthcoming post. Thanks a million and please keep up the gratifying work.

**Fashion For Charity**
**on January 29, 2014 at 9:44 PM** said:

I am curious to find out what blog system you’re utilizing? I’m experiencing some small security issues with my latest website and I’d like to find something more secure. Do you have any suggestions?

**Nickolas Querta**
**on January 30, 2014 at 6:16 PM** said:

I am now not positive where you are getting your information, but great topic. I needs to spend some time studying more or figuring out more. Thanks for excellent information I
was on the lookout for this information for my mission.

Cleveland Fleharty  
on January 31, 2014 at 2:54 PM said:

Dit blog is een totale verspilling van tijd!

Santino Palombi  
on February 1, 2014 at 6:49 AM said:

Thank you a lot for sharing this with all folks you actually understand what you’re talking approximately!

Bookmarked. Please also talk over with my website =). We can have a hyperlink alternate contract between us!

best espresso machine  
on February 3, 2014 at 8:40 PM said:

WOW just what I was searching for. Came here by searching for halifax remortgages

best vacuum for hardwood floors  
on February 4, 2014 at 2:18 AM said:

Excellent pieces. Keep posting such kind of information on your site. I'm really impressed by it. Hey there, You have done an excellent job. I will certainly digg it and individually suggest to my friends. I'm sure they will be benefited from this web site.
scroll saw reviews on February 4, 2014 at 4:15 AM said:

I visited various sites but the audio feature for audio songs present at this web site is really superb.

Jerilyn on February 4, 2014 at 4:18 AM said:

I am extremely impressed with your writing skills as well as the layout on your blog. Is this a paid theme or did you customize it yourself? Anyway keep up the excellent quality writing, it’s rare to see a great blog like this one today.

best infrared grill on February 4, 2014 at 4:47 AM said:

What’s up friends, nice piece of writing and pleasant arguments commented here, I am really enjoying by these.

tickets on February 4, 2014 at 5:26 AM said:

Hello there! I just wish to give you a huge thumbs up for your excellent information you have here on this post.
I’ll be returning to your blog for more soon.

Great article! This is the kind of info that are meant to be shared around the internet. Shame on the search engines for noow not psitioning this submit higher! Come on over and talk overrr with my weeb site. Thank you =)

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**best clothes steamer**
**on February 4, 2014 at 5:24 PM said:**

Heya this is somewhat of off topic but I was wondering if blogs use WYSIWYG editors or if you have to manually code with HTML. I’m starting a blog soon but have no coding knowledge so I wanted to get guidance from someone with experience.

Any help would be greatly appreciated!

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**vacuum sealer reviews**
**on February 4, 2014 at 8:03 PM said:**

Wow! This blog looks exactly like my old one! It’s on a completely different topic but it has pretty much the same layout and design. Excellent choice of colors!

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**best folding bike**
**on February 4, 2014 at 9:42 PM said:**

Thanks for finally writing about > The Global Soul : Jet Lag, Shopping Malls, and the Search for Home | Interface < Liked it!

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**best recumbent exercise bike**
**on February 4, 2014 at 10:56 PM said:**

This text is priceless. Where can I find out more?
christian ministry bylaws  
on February 5, 2014 at 5:05 AM said:

Simply wish to say your article is as astonishing.  
The clarity on your putt up is just excellent and i could suppose you’re knowledgeable in this subject.  
Well together with your permission all will be able to seize your RSS feed to stay up to date with drawing close post.  
Thanks one million and please continue the rewarding work.

http://www.toplista.polskabezbarier.pl  
on February 5, 2014 at 6:52 AM said:

That is a really good tip particularly to those new to the blogosphere.  
Simple but very precise information... Many thanks for sharing this one.  
A must read article!

northwest haiti christian mission  
on February 5, 2014 at 9:57 AM said:

Do you have a spam problem on this blog; I also am a blogger, and I was wondering to know your situation; many of us have created some nice procedures and we are looking to exchange solutions with other folks, bee sure to shoot me an e-mail if interested.

on February 5, 2014 at 10:41 AM said:

Your style is very unique compared to other folks I’ve read stuff from.
Thank you for posting when you’ve ggot the opportunity,
Guess I will just book mark this blog.

top100clans.to.ohost.de
on February 5, 2014 at 11:04 AM said:

Simply wish to ssay y: ur article is as astounding. The clarity in your publish is just nice
and d that i could think you’re an expert on this subject.
Fine along with your permission all w me to seize
your RSS feed to stay up to date with forthcoming
post. T hanks a milli n and please keep up the gratifying w ork.

Demetrius
on February 5, 2014 at 11:49 AM said:

It’s approporate time to ma ke some plans for the future a nd it is time to be happy.
I’ve read this post and if I could I desire to suggest
you few nteresting th ings oor advice. Maybe
you could write next articles referring to th is article.
I desire to read even more t hings ab out it!

http://astrofos.mireene.co.kr/xe/lifeabout/2974866
on February 5, 2014 at 12:27 PM said:

Magnificent beat ! I w ould like to apprentice while you amennd your
website, how could i subscfibe for a blog site? The account helped me a acceptable
deal.
I had been a little bit acquainted of thisis your broadcast offered bright clear idea.

christian ministry egypt
on February 5, 2014 at 12:29 PM said:
Greetings! Quick question that’s totally off topic.
Do you know how to make your site mobile friendly?
My website looks weird when viewing from my iphone4. I’m trying to find a theme or plugin that might be able to fix this issue.
If you have any suggestions, please share. Thanks!

Ping Grewe on February 5, 2014 at 12:41 PM said:

Es ist ein Problem, mit dem Prozess des Programms. Ich bekomme bei einem Fehler. wie kann ich das Problem lösen?


Hi, i believe that i saw you visited my wweb sithe thus i gott here too return the favor?, I’m attempting to find things to enhance my site! I assume its good enough to use a few of your ideas!!