



## THE LOCAL-GLOBAL NOVEL O ROMANCE LOCAL-GLOBAL

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### ABSTRACT

John Tomlinson (1999) argues that there are certain events, such as the fallout in Chernobyl, the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the communist world, the creation of the European Union, global summits on climate change, wars in Beirut, the Gulf, Somalia, or Bosnia, that “may add to the extension of the individual’s ‘phenomenal world’”. Such is the case for the characters in Michel Laub’s trilogy of novels: *Diário da queda* (2011), *A maçã envenenada* (2013), and *O tribunal da quinta-feira* (2016). In these novels, global catastrophes (the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the AIDS epidemic) are juxtaposed, both formally and narratively, with the personal tragedies suffered by their protagonists, thus creating an analogous relationship with the local/global dialectic. This paper studies Laub’s trilogy as global novels, seeking to subvert the market term by adding the “local” modifier, in an attempt to understand the nature of world literature in the twenty-first century. The Local-Global Novel, of the kind produced by Laub, complicates Anderson’s (1983) notion of nations as imagined communities by adopting the world as a community in which individuals, and their narratives, can be seen as *singular-plural* (NANCY, 1996).

**KEYWORDS:** World Literature, the Global Novel, Twenty-First Century Fiction

### RESUMO

Há certos eventos, afirma John Tomlinson (1999), como o desastre de Chernobyl, a queda do Muro de Berlim, o colapso dos regimes comunistas, a criação da União Europeia, cimeiras globais a respeito de mudanças climáticas, guerras em Beirute, o Golfo, Somália ou Bósnia, que podem contribuir ao “mundo fenomenal” dos indivíduos. Esse é o caso dos personagens da trilogia de romances de Michel Laub: *Diário da queda* (2011), *A maçã envenenada* (2013), and *O tribunal da quinta-feira* (2016). Nestes romances, catástrofes globais (o Holocausto, o

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genocídio em Ruanda e a epidemia de AIDS) são justapostas – tanto ao nível narrativo quanto ao nível formal – às tragédias pessoais dos protagonistas, construindo, assim, uma relação análoga com a dialética local/global. Este trabalho examina a trilogia de Laub como romances globais, visando subverter este termo do mercado ao acrescentar o modificador “local”, na busca de entender a natureza da literatura mundial no século XXI. O Romance Local-Global, do tipo escrito por Laub, complica a noção da nação como uma comunidade imaginada (ANDERSON, 1983) ao adotar o mundo como uma comunidade em que indivíduos, e suas narrativas, podem ser vistos como *singular-plural* (NANCY, 1996).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE:** literatura mundial, o romance global, ficção no século XXI

In her debut novel, *Asymmetry*, Lisa Halliday (2018) writes:

Today, you could stand in Firdos Square and Google how the Bengals or the 49ers or the Red Sox or the Yankees or Manchester United or the Mongolia Blue Wolves are doing *right now*; you could check out the temperature in Bay Ridge or Helsinki; you could find out when the tide will next be high in Santa Monica or Swaziland, or when the sun is due to set on Poggibonsi. There is always something happening, always something to be appraised of, never enough hours to feel sufficiently appraised.

Halliday’s quote neatly illustrates what British sociologist John Tomlinson has called “complex connectivity” in his understanding of globalization, as it relates to culture. For Tomlinson (1999), “...globalization refers to the rapidly developing and ever-densening network of interconnections and interdependences that characterize modern social life”. Connectivity presents itself most often as a global-spatial proximity. Distances seemingly shrink, Tomlinson (1999) argues, “through the dramatic reduction in time taken, either physically (for instance via air travel) or representationally (via the transmission of electronically mediated information and images) to cross them”. Shrinking distances result in the stretching out of social relations across them. Being connected does not abolish concrete distance, but does change the way we think about and experience this distance, as Tomlinson (1999) asserts, in such a way that “we think of such distant spaces as routinely accessible, either representationally through communications technology or the mass media, or physically, though the expenditure of a relatively small amount of time (and, of course, money) on a transatlantic flight”. However, one of the challenges of this connectivity is the reality of cultural difference. How much does the connectivity of the Globalized Age allow intercultural interaction and proximity, beyond the technological modality, at the level of locality?

The reconfiguration of social relations across a global territory allows for the penetration of distant events into local experience. For most people then, Tomlinson (1999) writes, the experience of global modernity “is that of staying in one place but experiencing the ‘dis-placement’ that global modernity *brings to them*”. The impact of globalization “is felt not in travel but in staying at home”, making “the distinction between literally travelling to distant places and ‘travelling’ to them by talking on the telephone, typing at the computer

keyboard or watching the television set”, Tomlinson (1999) later writes. Through the paradigm of connectivity, Tomlinson (1999) emphasizes globalization as a two-way process between the local and the global:

As connectivity reaches into localities, it transforms local lived experience but it also confronts people with a world in which their fates *are* undeniably bound together in a single frame... Local experience has to be raised to the horizon of a ‘single world’ if we are to understand it, and local practices and lifestyles increasingly need to be examined and evaluated in terms of their global consequences.

This two-way process undermines the relationship between culture and the fixity of place, for “meanings are equally generated by people ‘on the move’ and in the flows and connections between ‘cultures’” (TOMLINSON, 1999). Tomlinson further highlights this two-way process through the metaphor of routes and roots, suggesting that the two exist simultaneously and are both subject to the transformations of global modernity.

Metaphors and narratives are essential to Néstor García Canclini’s understanding of globalization as imagined. Since globalization does not mean one thing to all people, its meaning is produced through acts of imagining that “express the ways individual and collective subjects represent their place and their agency in [the] processes of [globalization]” (CANCLINI, 2014). “What is usually called globalization”, Canclini (2014) writes, “appears as a collection of processes of homogenization and, at the same time, an articulated fragmentation of the world that reorders differences and inequalities without eradicating them”. This collection of processes amounts to a collection of narratives that result from local-global and local-local connections. Metaphors and narratives facilitate the linkage between the local and the global. Narrating stories in the global era, Canclini (2014) argues, “even if they tell our own history, where we were born and live, is to speak for others, narrating not only what exists but imagining outside of our cognitive framework”. Metaphors “explain the meaning of something by comparison with something different” (CANCLINI, 2014). Metaphor and narrative, as constitutive of the imaginary, “produce knowledge in their attempt to grasp what becomes fleeting in the global disorder, that which cannot be delimited by borders but rather crosses them” (CANCLINI, 2014). Metaphors “tend to figure, to make visible that which moves, combines, or mixes” (CANCLINI, 2014). Narratives “seek to trace an order amid the profusion of travels and communications, in the diversity of ‘others’” (CANCLINI, 2014). Through emphasis on metaphor and narrative we can understand the local-global relationship of globalization better. This relationship ought not to be thought of as an opposition, but rather as a dialect in the Hegelian sense, a process that might be located on the borders or in “translocal situations”, as Canclini calls them, and that works in service of their diversity. The Local-Global Novel creates these translocal situations through its narrative form, reordering geography and social relations, planting roots and charting routes.

## The nation and the novel

The novel has long been theorized over as it relates to ideas of the national. This is only natural, considering that the novel as a genre emerged at the same time as national borders and identities were becoming more clearly defined. The novel as an imaginative instrument for the creation of national communities is likely best elaborated in the work of Benedict Anderson. In his now canonical book, *Imagined Communities*, Anderson (2006) defines the nation as a collective act of imagining, calling attention to print-languages, more specifically the novel and the newspaper, which highlight simultaneity across time, regions and dialects, and thus are “the technical means for ‘re-presenting the *kind* of imagined community that is the nation”’. Anderson argues that these print-languages established the basis for national consciousness in a variety of ways: by unifying communication between written and spoken languages, by applying a fixity to language through the permanence of the book-object, and by creating a kind of hierarchy among certain dialects.

Let us examine the role of unified communication in the construction of national identity. Through print-media, Anderson (2006) argues, speakers of a wide variety of vernaculars:

become capable of comprehending one another via print and paper. In the process, they gradually became aware of the hundreds of thousands, even millions, of people in their particular language-field, and at the same time that *only those* hundreds of thousands, or millions, so belonged. These fellow-readers, to whom they were connected through print, formed their secular, particular, visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally imagined community.

Communities are thus formed through the reading of the same language in the same time-space.

In an era of mass translation and immediate access to information, world literature scholars are asking how the novel might operate as a cultural tool for imagining the globe. Indeed, if the construction of nationhood is an imaginative act that is reinforced through cultural fictions as we see in Benedict Anderson – and that globalizations are also imaginative, *pace Canclini* – then it does not seem so hard to imagine that the twenty-first century novel might imagine a global community, given the an ever-increasing set of cultural fictions it has to draw upon. Rebecca Walkowitz (2015), author of *Born Translated: The Contemporary Novel in the Age of World Literature*, has urged philosophers of the nation to “ask how the translation of literary texts into more languages and faster than ever before establishes networks of affiliation that are less exclusive and less bounded to the nation’s ‘community of fate’”. The Digital Age has offered us new opportunities to create new communities based on shared experiences that are not contingent upon a shared language. In her own reading of Anderson, Walkowitz underscores the novel’s capacity to represent simultaneity, not just textually but as an object as well. The novel functions, per Anderson, as a container for the collectively among strangers: the readers

who imagine themselves as participants in a simultaneous reading public and the characters that constitute a collectively. As Jonathan Culler (1999) has written, this container for collectively is staged by the novel's formal structure, "involving what can be called 'the space of a community'... the novel's formal encompassing of different kinds of speech or discourse enacts the possibility of a community larger than any one individual can know". Anderson's novel as a constitutive factor of the imagined community is not the container of national characteristics that might be possessed, but rather engenders community through simultaneous imaginative action – action based on the assumption that a text has an original language that will coincide with the language of its readers. We need to ask, Walkowitz prompts us: what happens when these languages are not the same?

The newspaper equally functions as a container for simultaneity through its use of juxtaposition, Anderson (2006) argues:

If we were to look at a sample front page of, say, *The New York Times*, we might find there stories about Soviet dissidents, famine in Mali, a gruesome murder, a coup in Iraq, the discovery of a rare fossil in Zimbabwe, and a speech by Mitterrand. Why are these events so juxtaposed? What connects them to each other? Not sheer caprice. Yet obviously most of them happen independently, without the actors being aware of each other or what the others are up to. The arbitrariness of their inclusion and juxtaposition... shows that the linkage between them is imagined.

Here, we hear echoes of the connectivity portrayed in Halliday's quote. Google appears as another form for engendering juxtaposition, for shrinking distances between faraway places. The novel also has recourse to this kind of compression and juxtaposition through its *emplotment*.

### **The world and the novel**

The relationship between globalization and literature has gained steam in the twenty-first century as a hotbed for scholarly debate. New genres – the global novel, transnational fiction, planetary poetics – have emerged to attend to this growing phenomenon. I present here my own addition this taxonomy: the Local-Global Novel, which I approach specifically from the context of Brazilian letters of the twenty-first century.

The Local-Global Novel is a species of the Global Novel that foregrounds the local while examining the effects of globalization on local experience. My own nomenclature seeks to privilege this locality without dressing it up as planetary or cosmopolitan, though it may very well be these things. This kind of novel dramatizes global networks at the level of local experience through narratives of migration and personal tragedy, while at the same time staging international contact and reimagining catastrophes of planetary dimensions. In this way, the Local-Global Novel globalizes local perspective and localizes global perspective.

The Local-Global Novel resists the teleological narrative of globalization as a linear

process by sketching improvised communities of individuals from around the world whose lives are still inherently local, rejecting the notion of some world-state as the end goal of global social organization. The Local-Global Novel asks us to see the integration of the world, however, it does so differently from globalization itself, that is to say, without the smoothing out of, or homogenizing, the contours of locality. This integration does not enact a diffusion of consumer culture, as is often the critical view of globalization, but rather constructs a network of simultaneity between diverse local experiences. The Local-Global Novel recognizes, and makes reference to, the hegemony of a global consumer culture, but its world-creating project starts at home, highlighting the effects of such global culture on local experience, not by staging a deracinated global order. The Local-Global Novel repositions locality as it erects new global networks through its narratives.

The Local-Global Novel responds to ideas about globalization that conceive it as a relatively new phenomenon that homogenizes previously secure, delineated home-states. The Local-Global narrative does not dispose with, or destroy, the sense of home, but rather reconfigures or restructures it. These narratives highlight global availability without occupying foreign localities in a move that would seem to mirror colonization, but rather by presenting those localities as fully-fledged subjects that dialogue with other fully-fledged localities. Mike Featherstone (1995) writes “the drawing of a boundary around a particular space is a relational act which depends upon the figuration of significant other localities within which one seeks to situate it”. This relativity is enhanced in the Local-Global novel through its arrangement of geographies. Popular imagination is quite capable of conceiving of the whole globe as a locality. One need only look at images of Earth from space seen as an isolated entity, or ideas of our collective humanity, the sacredness of mankind (FEATHERSTONE, 1995). This imagined unity, ideological in scope, promotes a false sense of concreteness that is mitigated in the Local-Global Novel through the juxtaposition of diverse individual, local narratives.

The local is leveraged here not to be cast in opposition with the global but to recognize it as the global’s natural and necessary complement. The Local-Global Novel examines the interpenetration of the local and the global, of the universal and the particular. By parceling out terms like local and global, we will continue to operate under the sign of the negative, of an absence versus a presence. By linking the two, however, our approach can be one that is applied under a positive aegis, acknowledging a multiplicity of presents.

Adam Kirsch, author of *The Global Novel: Writing the World in the 21st Century*, suggests that any novel that addresses the experience of human beings in the twenty-first century is implicitly global. Yet, he also makes clear that this kind of global novel has not surpassed the regional or national novel; it is not a genre apart, but rather a mode of interpretation. It is, he writes:

faithful to the way the global is actually lived – not through the abolition of place, but as a theme by which place is mediated. Life lived *here* is experienced in its profound and often unsettling connections with life lived elsewhere, and everywhere. The local gains dignity, and significance, insofar as it can be seen as part of a worldwide phenomenon (KIRSCH, 2016).

It is worth noting that the majority of the authors Kirsch adopts for his fleshing out of the global novel seem plucked from the bookshelf of traditional contemporary world literature: Orhan Pamuk, Haruki Murakami, Roberto Bolaño, Margaret Atwood, Elena Ferrante and others. And while they demonstrate a multilingual, multi-territorial variety, they are authors that occupy World Literature's center as it currently stands. In other words, their novels may be considered global precisely because they are globally successful. The definitions he supplies for what a global novel can be are broad and elastic, suggesting that anything written in the twenty-first century that deigns to look beyond its national of origin could be a global novel. By adding the local modifier to my own terminology of the global novel, I am looking at a specific iteration of literature's global consciousness that binds local experience to planetary networks, that disrupts the familiar circuits of transnational cultural exchange, and that criticizes in implicit and explicit ways globalization's false promise of a worldwide standardization, graphing points of contact that posit the local as its x axis.

In his book *The Cosmopolitan Novel*, which examines twenty-first century British fiction, Bertold Schoene (2009) writes that cosmopolitan narration “assembles as many as possible of the countless segments of our being-in-common into a momentarily composite picture of the world”, and “proceeds without erasing the essential incongruousness or singularity of these individual segments, which are left intact, even though they remain subject to continual reassignment”. The cosmopolitan novel, per Schoene, emphasizes world-creation over rendition, in which political and economic realities are scrutinized and re-imagined. Schoene argues that this world re-imagining is different from the national re-imagining of post-colonial fiction.

Both Schoene and Kirsch acknowledge the impossibilities of a kind of fiction that is devoid of local experience. The cosmopolitan novel demonstrates that “there is no world that does not commence at home, taking shape from one's own singular emergence in the interplay with others”, Schoene (2009) contends. Later he writes, acknowledging the dialectical relationship between the local and the global:

the local is never simply globality's recipient, but a participant and integral part of it, as well as, occasionally, its sparring partner, implicated in the world even at the moment of most passionately trying to evade it. Neither is globality, in turn, ever a simple container of an endless diversity of multifarious world cultures (SCHOENE, 2009).

Kirsch (2016) recognizes the global as a mediating interpretative mode for the local, and in discussion of the Elena Ferrante phenomenon, he writes:

individual lives... take place at the intersection of the local and the global, are the product of their dialectic. Just as it is impossible to live an immediately global existence, untethered to language or place, so it is impossible to live an entirely local existence, uninfluenced by history, politics, and economics.

The Local-Global Novel tackles these twin impossibilities in its reimagining of communities composed of transterritorial individuals.

Schoene's *cosmopolitan novel* is perhaps a closer approximation to my own Local-Global Novel than Kirsch's loosely defined *global novel*. The Local-Global Novel achieves its dialectic not only through content but through form. Narratives are emplotted through the formal structuring of diverse localities, resulting in an organization marked by simultaneity. Schoene's cosmopolitan representation conveys this synchronicity, just as the Local-Global Novel does, through juxtaposition. Juxtaposition assumes linkage is imagined, as in Anderson's example of the newspaper, resulting in a composite sketching of community. A text's composite quality is as essential to the *cosmopolitan novel* as it is to the Local-Global Novel. Schoene (2009) writes:

[e]posidic yet cohesive, compositeness forges narrative assemblage out of a seemingly desultory dispersion of plot and characterisation. Cosmopolitan representation resorts to the montage technique of contemporary cinema, effecting rapid shifts in focus and perspective with the aim of cramming as many story lines and clashing imageries as possible into one and the same *mise en scène*.

The local-global is not so much a function of plot, common of the Global Novel, in which characters have experiences abroad and are tasked with confronting the particularities of here and there through travel, but rather the Local-Global Novel organizes these particularities in its narrative form, juxtaposing here and there, sampling and collating<sup>2</sup> its subjects and their respective geographies, in such a way that imitates the connectivity of contemporary life. The reader experiences distinct spaces not by accompanying the protagonist on a transnational journey, but by means of a dynamic reading process that situates diverse localities, and therefore narratives, side-by-side on the page, much the way one might engage with information on the internet, for example. Form in these novels functions as the hyphen between their eponymous modifiers. This hyphen describes their manner of representation, as Anderson or Tomlinson would say, for in these novels the globe's diverse localities are compounded in narrative, are made composite.

The Local-Global novel does not attempt to depict the entire world at once, but rather a narrative of world-shaped networks in a particular time and space. That the world does not quite fit into a book is acknowledged by Hector Hoyos in his latest book *Beyond Bolaño: The*

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2 I borrow this turn of phrase from Rebecca Walkowitz's (2015) *Born Translated*: "Sampling allows literary works to make very large-scale claims using relatively small-scale data... Collating implies reciprocity: that each part is geographically, linguistically, or ethically comparable, and that the novel has generated a plausible system or container for those parts".



*Latin American Global Novel*. Despite this impossibility, Hoyos (2015) writes, “some works of literature have an effect on how we see the world and on how we conceive of their place within the world. Such narratives... *matter* beyond their immediate national contexts”. Hoyos also makes the important distinction between the world depicted literarily and the actual real world, pointing out how the novel can inform globality. “As it turns out”, he writes, “we imagine the global as we imagine everything else: through metaphor, narrative, image and related means” (HOYOS, 2015). By positioning this brand of Brazilian fiction as simultaneously local and global, the novel might then be seen as “always-already global”, a condition not traditionally bestowed upon cultural products of Latin America, as Hoyos argues. Hoyos’s approach to the global novel is not dissimilar from my own with the Local-Global Novel. “To conceptualize certain Latin American novels as global”, Hoyos (2015) writes:

seeks to preserve, not resolve, tensions between particularism and generalization, vernacular and widely understood linguistic practices, high prestige and low-prestige denominations, cultural essentialism and relativism, ‘parochial’ and ‘world-class’ aesthetic values, and locally embedded and abstractly detached art forms.

Where Hoyos seeks to demonstrate a “novelistic form that is both global and Latin American, that belongs within a regional and world paradigm”, I attempt to tighten the aperture from regional, or even national, to that of a single city cast against the shadows of the globe.

### **The Local-Global Novel: Michel Laub**

Michel Laub is one of the foremost names in contemporary Brazilian letters. Born in Porto Alegre in 1973, Laub was included in Granta’s 2013 list of the Best Young Brazilian Writers and his works have been nominated for the Jabuti prize in both the novel category and the book published abroad category. Transnationality is characteristic of Laub’s fiction. His featured Granta story, “*Animais*”, stages movements from Germany to Rio Grande do Sul, São Paulo and Sierra Leone. Between 2011 and 2016, Laub published a trilogy of novels that examine personal trauma alongside global catastrophes. *O diário da queda* (2011) examines the reverberations of the Holocaust in three generations of a Brazilian family. *A maçã envenenada* (2013), paints a portrait of the early 90s, juxtaposing the American grunge scene led by Kurt Cobain with the genocide in Rwanda. Laub’s most recent novel, *O tribunal da quinta-feira* (2016), reflects on the dialectical tension between local and global in the digital realm. Questions of what is public and what is private are writ large through the platform of the Internet, while the narrative also engages with the global implications of the AIDS epidemic.

Laub’s novels call our attention to the ways in which people attach themselves to tragedies without having actually experienced them. The narrator of *Diário da queda* will feel the impact of the Holocaust on his domestic and social lives; brief passages in *A maçã envenenada* will suggest how fans bound themselves to the tragedy of Kurt Cobain’s suicide; and, in a reverse

move, anonymous commentators will feel they can opine on the private conversations between two friends in *O tribunal da quinta-feira*.

Laub's novels reposition, namely, São Paulo and Porto Alegre as the center of these literary networks that extend outwards to such localities as Auschwitz, Aberdeen, WA, Mataba, Rwanda, London, San Francisco, and beyond, such that these diverse geographic regions are organized conterminously. Writing of Kazuo Ishiguro's novels, Rebecca Walkowitz (2007) asserts, "[a]s narratives, they organize local anecdotes into global networks and then consider the ethical consequences of that process". As Laub's novels organize personal traumas and global catastrophes they too ask us to consider the ethical implications of such contermination.

### **Diário da queda**

*Diário da queda* is the first novel in Laub's trilogy. It was translated as *The Diary of the Fall* by Margaret Jull Costa in 2014, three years after its original publication<sup>3</sup>. The unnamed narrator-protagonist of the novel is the grandson of a Holocaust survivor. The narrative spans most of the narrator's childhood and adult life, juxtaposing his grandfather's legacy of displacement as both an immigrant in Porto Alegre and as a survivor of Auschwitz with an incident at a classmate's thirteenth birthday party. In his youth, the narrator attends a posh Jewish school in which there is one non-Jewish student, João. In an effort to help his son fit in, João's father throws his son a thirteenth birthday party. At the party, João is hoisted up in a chair supported by a group of his classmates that includes Laub's narrator. On the thirteenth upward heave, João's classmates let the chair fall to the floor. João suffers a cracked rib and must wear a brace for the rest of the semester. In Laub's novel, this accident is coupled with a series of notebooks penned by the narrator's grandfather, as well as his own father's battle with Alzheimer's and another number of banal coming-of-age moments that tether his intimate life in Porto Alegre, and later São Paulo, to the global impact of the Holocaust.

This is a novel that begins with displacement. The opening chapter sees the narrator's grandfather arriving in Brazil after the Second World War. He is a subject that has been doubly displaced, first held prisoner at Auschwitz, later freighted to the New World. We understand through this displacement, then, how catastrophes of global proportions place bodies into circulation. Despite his two generations removed from the Holocaust, it is the metric by which the narrator makes sense of his own life. Displacement is so ingrained in his community that it affects their commercial and legal lives, for his father advises him to pursue a profession that could be held anywhere, to not depend on a language that is not spoken anywhere else, to not depend on rules that might not apply anywhere else.

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<sup>3</sup> There are both US and UK editions of the translation in hardcover, paperback, and eBook formats. The novel has also been translated into French, German, Dutch, Spanish, Italian and Swedish, all within two years of its original publications. As of 2013, the novel was in its third re-printing with Companhia das Letras.

However, the Holocaust and its aftermath do not merely stage the migration of bodies in this novel, but its global history also has a profound impact on the narrator's personal history. The narrator's entire life orbits around the fact that his grandfather survived Auschwitz – the tricycle his father gifts him at three years old, which he loads with miscellaneous household items and pretends he is a traveling salesman, is haunted by the memory of his grandfather's arrival in Brazil at which time he performed a similar function as that imagined in the boy's make-believe. It is not only the grandfather's migration that shades the narrator's childhood memories, but also the motivation for migration (the Holocaust), as the recollection of the bicycle is immediately followed by mention of the grandfather's arm, tattooed at Auschwitz. Even the narrator's first sexual experiences seem to be just one step removed from the memory of Auschwitz. The pornographic films he would watch with his friends at the afternoon's double feature are tainted by the expression "meio século depois de Auschwitz". His first trip to a brothel is again accompanied by this refrain. It appears that there is not a single memory of his childhood or adolescence untouched by the Holocaust despite his having been born decades after the fact.

The narrator not only connects his grandfather's experience at Auschwitz with the personal tragedies he suffers in his life, but he also equates that experience with the personal tragedies suffered by those around him. A key example is that of João's mother, who suffered from an illness during João's youth and eventually died. The narrator concedes that to speak of his grandfather and João's mother is to call upon on the cultural references he has accumulated throughout his lifetime: films, photographs, documents, the first time he read Primo Levi's *If This is a Man*. For the narrator, the notes with drawings of Hitler that he received at his secular school – he transfers with João a year following the fall at the party – are inseparable from the notes he sent to João, bitter at his friend's new-found popularity, with drawings of his mother's corpse. So it is that to draw Auschwitz, as represented in the images of Hitler, becomes the same act of violence that it is to draw the corpse of João's mother. Consequently the story of his grandfather's experience at Auschwitz is inextricably tied to the story of João's mother's illness.

While we accompany the inner turmoil of a man trying to sift through personal and collective catastrophe, we are also reminded of the globalized world that this man lives in half a century after Auschwitz: a world in which his parents travel internationally, where his father spends the afternoon in electronic stores and his mother fills suitcases with clothing and presents for friends and family in Brazil. Coming of age at the end of the twentieth century, our narrator navigates between emblems of a capitalist consumer culture (trips to Disneyland, the latest video game console) and his family's legacy as immigrant and Holocaust survivor. So that while we are looking at how the machinations of the global past impact the personal present, we are also looking at the scope of the global present, neoliberal globalization's circulation of commodities.

This contemporaneity, posed against the tragedies of the past, is underscored by passing mentions of the Internet and digital communication. Technology, as presented in the text, serves as a tool that informs our knowledge of the both personal and collective tragedy. Through the internet, the narrator's father discovers the symptoms and effects of his illness. But the internet is also the place where one might find conspiracy theories that suggest the Holocaust was a hoax, the narrator explains. For these characters, the world-opening possibilities of the Internet are eclipsed by their personal traumas and their sense of identity as defined by religious affiliation or migration is called into question.

The novel is organized by non-chronological, fragmentary chapters that jump between the narrator's grandfather's notebooks, his relationship with João, and his relationship with his father. These fragments are organized into eleven sections and appear as overlapping concentric circles: "Algumas coisas que sei sobre o meu avô", "Algumas coisas que sei sobre o meu pai", "Algumas coisas que sei sobre mim", "Notas (1)", "Mais algumas coisas que sei sobre o meu avô", "Mais algumas coisas que sei sobre o meu pai", "Mais algumas coisas que sei sobre mim", "Notas (2)", "Notas (3)", "A queda", e "O diário". With each new section, the chapter numbers start over again.

The first round of "notas" separates things that are known about the grandfather, the father, and the narrator himself from more things that are known about them, while the second and third round of "notas" separate the sections about the grandfather, the father, and the narrator from the remaining two sections. The "notas" are not divided into fragments as the other sections are and read almost as stand-alone entries. "Notas (1)" details the narrator's relationship with his father – things his father taught him: how to ride a bicycle, how to read and write, how a sewing machine works (the family ran a garment business), the significance of the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. Then the narrative rapidly shifts to a description of the Jewish school the narrator attended, outfitted with eight-foot walls to protect against bombing attempts. The narrative then dilates once more to discuss João, his wrinkled clothing, the tiled floor of the party hall where his thirteenth birthday was held, the taxi they took when the party was over. Then the reader is provided with insight into how the friendship between João and the narrator develops after the accident, how the narrator admits responsibility in the principal's office. We shift once more to a fight between the narrator and his father which leads to a discussion of the father's Alzheimer's diagnosis, which ultimately reveals the narrator's own struggle with alcoholism.

"Notas (2)" and "Notas (3)" are much more concise in their offerings. In "Nota (2)", the narrator outlines theories propagated by Holocaust deniers. These theories are meaningless to the narrator's father for whom Auschwitz is not a place or a historical fact or an ethical discussion, but rather a concept in which one does or does not believe, depending on their willingness to do so. "Nota (3)" itemizes what the narrator has and has not inherited from his father. He has not inherited his name, his hair, his nose, his ability to calculate large sums in his head, his morning routine of bread and cheese and talk radio. He has inherited his eye color,

his reading habits, his stubbornness. These traits lead us back to the father's Alzheimer's and the secrets shared and not shared between father and son. In a way, the "notas" function as montages that summarize certain events of the larger narrative. They are high-speed close-ups of the novel's darting transits through memory, time, and space.

"A queda" develops the narrator's struggle with alcoholism, how his father deals with his Alzheimer's diagnosis – by drafting a record of his memories, reproduced in the text just as the entries from the grandfather's notebooks – and his grandfather's suicide, which the narrator suggests might be justified by his experience at Auschwitz. Indeed, he explains, suicide is the fate of so many Holocaust survivors: Primo Levi and a number of others in Mexico, Switzerland, Canada, South Africa and Israel, a fraternity of men forgotten by time that symbolize the global repercussions of the Holocaust. In this section we learn about the narrator's marital problems and his trips back and forth between São Paulo, where he presently lives and works as a writer, and Porto Alegre to visit his ailing father. The information documented in the section is not new to the narrative, but rather revisited. In this rambling, repetitive re-telling, the narrator tries to make sense of the relationship or connections between Auschwitz, his grandfather's suicide, his father's Alzheimer's, his friendship with João, his alcoholism, and his failed marriages.

These same incidents are elaborated on in the section "O diário". The day in which the narrator stops speaking to João serves as a rite of passage that everyone must suffer through, just as his grandfather stood at the gates of Auschwitz, just as his father discovered his own father slumped dead over his desk. Auschwitz, he writes, was for his grandfather, what the discovery of his suicide was for his father, which for the narrator was the same as the last note he received from João with a drawing of Hitler. In writing about his life from the age of fourteen, the narrator asserts, he is forced to correspond cause and effect among events. The novel's fragments and sections that shift and double back in time through memory and the reproduction of journal entries effectively create a network, joining together place, individuals, and experiences, establishing points of contact between Auschwitz, Porto Alegre 1945, Porto Alegre in the 1980s, and contemporary São Paulo.

The local-global dialectic of this novel is, in fact, reinforced through the generational traumas passed down from grandfather (Holocaust survivor, immigrant), to father (first generation Brazilian, son of an immigrant), and son (born in the second half of the twentieth century, coming of age alongside globalization). The novel's locality is confined not only to the Jewish community in Porto Alegre, but to that of a single family, while its globality can be located in the legacy of the Holocaust, and how these three generations are bound to it. In the novel's final section, we discover that the narrative is directed to the narrator's unborn son, thus adding to the collection of notebooks that the novel stages as a tool for grappling with trauma.

The appearance of the grandfather's notebook entries creates a temporal shift in the narrative, a device that might be called characteristic of Laub's fiction. As we move

between his vignettes, we are taken to Auschwitz, late twentieth-century Porto Alegre, early twenty-first century São Paulo, and post-war Brazil seen through the eyes of an immigrant. Time is manipulated, etching a network between the experience of the Auschwitz survivor, the immigrant, the son of the immigrant, the *goy* in the Jewish private school, the *kike* in the secular school, the Alzheimer's patient, the son of the Alzheimer's patient, the recovering alcoholic leaving his third wife. We span three generations of tragedy and loss, personal and collective, in the attempt to answer the questions: how should a man be? What should he be judged for? One of the novel's constant questions asks us to consider how one's first-hand experience of a global catastrophe influences who they are and how they might be judged. Should the narrator's grandfather forever be seen as an Auschwitz survivor or might he be allowed to be viewed as a husband and father like any other? Is he permitted a local life or is he forever haunted by his displacement?

At first glance, it is not apparent in what language the grandfather's notebooks are written. Only pages after their first appearance in the narrative does the reader learn that the narrator is reading the notebooks in translation. The narrator confirms that after his grandfather's death, his father sent the notebooks to be translated for he needed a register of the memories recorded within them and it appeared he was the only person interested in reading them. The translations are then reproduced for the narrative constructed by Laub's narrator, thus multiplying their reading audiences: (1) son and grandson of their author, (2) the narrator's son to whom the narrative is destined, and (3) the empirical reader of Laub's novel.

The grandfather's notebooks appear as almost personal dictionaries, vignette-length definitions of words that correspond to memories, or rather how the grandfather wanted to remember these events. They serve as a way for the grandfather to describe the world around him, or rather the way the world should be. This idyllic world is first described in the grandfather's native tongue through the arrangement of specific words that correspond to specific memories that are then redressed in saccharine fashion. In this way, the grandfather's original notebooks also function as a translation. They gloss over tragic experience as they seek new definitions for their chosen terms, contributing to the world-making or cartographical project of the novel. They offer a view of the local setting of the text – the grandfather's arrival in Brazil, the boarding house he lives in when he first arrives in Porto Alegre, the hospital where his son is born – through a language that is foreign to that setting, which is then enlarged vis-a-vis translation into English, and finally dissected by way of their reproduction in the narrative.

The discovery of his grandfather's notebooks allows the narrator to engage with the memory of the Holocaust on a personal level. It is no longer an experience mediated through the story of a stranger, Primo Levi, a story the whole world has access to given its literary success. However, it is an experience that will never be personal for the narrator and thus he concludes this passage about the notebooks by stating that if he had to speak of something that was truly his, he would start with story of his classmate who fell at a party. By placing

Auschwitz and João's fall on the same page, the narrative once again tightens the bond between personal trauma and collective tragedy.

The novel's final section, "O diário", introduces us to the refrain 'the impracticality of human experience in any time and in any place.' According to the narrator, Auschwitz is the greatest tragedy of the twentieth century and thus the greatest tragedy of all time. There is not a single continent untainted by tragedy during the twentieth century, yet the Holocaust seems to be the accumulation of all of these tragedies. The world Laub posits in this novel is a cartographical network linked by tragedy. His geographical inventory of twentieth-century catastrophes, catalogued at the end of the novel, lists a quarter of the world's nations in alphabetical order, placing Honduras next to Hungary, Mexico next to Myanmar. The narrative's guiding thread relies on this very interconnectedness: not just the relationship between distinct geographies and catastrophes of global proportions but also the interdependencies the narrative creates between grandfather's experience at Auschwitz, his father's experience as the son of an immigrant and suicide, the narrator's own relationship with João, and later his failed romantic relationships. In this way, these connections are temporal (past/present) as well as spatial (local/global), for the two are intertwined in the text's mnemonic process. The narrator only escapes 'the impracticality of human experience in any time and in any place' by looking towards the future – escaping the introspective spiral of his forbears – by directing the narrative to his unborn son.

### *A maçã envenenada*

Laub's second novel, *A maçã envenenada*<sup>4</sup>, opens in Aberdeen, Washington, the site of Kurt Cobain's suicide. The reader enters into the narrative, written in English, through the United States. In this first cartographical move, the narrative rejects the traditional relationship between language and geography while also binding geographical spaces – Brazil and the Pacific Northwest – not traditionally tied in the popular imagination. Yet this cartographical etching is elliptic – the English-language is set in North America, while Kurt Cobain is read through a particular Brazilian lens, for as the narrator describes he will forever be the man who got up on stage at the Morumbi Stadium in São Paulo. As Rebecca Walkowitz (2015) describes of the *Born-Translated Novel*, Laub's *A maçã envenenada* enacts an effacement of origin. Stated more plainly, the novel begins in several places at once. There are four different beginnings: (1) Kurt Cobain's suicide; (2) the narrator's first encounter with Valéria, his girlfriend; (3) perhaps Rwanda; (4) a post office in a 'faraway city'.

The story of the narrator's military service with the Brazilian National Guard (CPOR),

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<sup>4</sup> *A maçã envenenada* has been translated into English by Daniel Hahn. It was published by Random House UK in 2017 with the title *A Poison Apple* and was named one of the Financial Times Best Books of 2017. The translation was nominated for the Jabuti Prize in the best book published abroad category. The novel was also translated into French in 2016.

which he is completing in Porto Alegre at the time of the novel's opening, is a story that starts with the arrival of Nirvana in Brazil<sup>5</sup>, he claims. But then it appears that geography oscillates back to a particularly Brazilian landscape (as particular as it can be despite the fact that the novel makes rare mention of Brazilian musicians or the socio-political climate of the time); it is actually a story that begins the night the narrator meets Valéria. The novel thus far has presented us with two encounters that are responsible for its genesis: an encounter of global dimensions between an American rock group and their Brazilian fans and an intimate encounter between two lovers.

A few short chapters later, the geography of the narrative dilates once more, dropping the reader into a place, as yet, unnamed but rather described by its topography, flora, fauna, signs of what life must be like there. It is only in the following chapter that the reader understands that this place must be Rwanda, and we are introduced to Immaculée Ilibagiza<sup>6</sup>, an engineering student in Mataba, Rwanda in April of 1994. In an odd cartographical transit between fragments the novel arranges Immaculée's narrative in 1994 alongside the narrator's personal narrative in Brazil in 1993 and London in 1994, where he spends a brief sabbatical following Valéria's suicide, as well as Kurt Cobain's suicide in 1994. The text also realizes this encounter between geographies in the present: in 2013, Immaculée is a writer, traveling the world giving lectures. She has been in São Paulo recently, the narrator tells us.

Not only does the narrative suggest relationships between geographies not likely to be tied together in the imagination, but it also disturbs geographical links traditionally held to be quiet tight. For example, where the connection between Brazil and Kurt Cobain is emphasized, Nirvana is a rarity in London, which is strange considering the linguistic ties between the US and England. The simultaneity of here/there persists, however, represented through mention of suicides in Seattle, Australia, and Turkey in the days following Kurt Cobain's funeral. The news of these incidents is announced through modes of communication such as the radio; while in London the narrator tunes into a station out of Seattle. The simultaneity of time and space that is generated by the novel's cartographical positioning – mediated through popular forms of communication: the radio, newspapers, pop music, pop literature – is contrasted by the diversity, “different times, opposite worlds” as the narrator puts it, that describes the day before meeting Valéria and the day following the Nirvana show, which is when he discovers that Valéria has committed suicide. In this way, international interconnectedness is attenuated by a kind of domestic disconnect that is still conditioned by international terms, for in the mind of the narrator the day of Valéria's death will always be the day of the Nirvana concert.

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5 It is worth mentioning that the narrator does not end up attending the show at Morumbi, but feels tied to it all the same by virtue of the events in his personal life that will follow it. This solidarity, or collectivity, is depicted on the cover to the Companhia da Letras edition: a panoramic image of engaged concert-goers.

6 Immaculée Ilibagiza is an author and motivational speaker, best known for her 2007 book *Left to Tell: Discovering God Amidst the Rwandan Holocaust*



At any moment the narrative's geography might change. It is not particularly fixed or tethered to a particular place; it is, in fact, uncertain. One of the novel's early fragments establishing the narrative's setting suggests a city that is not one's own, but that seems so familiar. The reader will come to discover that this place is São Paulo, visited by Valéria attending the Nirvana show at Morumbi, going to the post office to mail the postcard the narrator will receive two months after her death. By juxtaposing these diverse geographical spaces the narrative serves as a distinct cartographical unit, a time-space of its own invention: Rwanda and London, 1994 and 1993, Kurt Cobain and the CPOR, Unha, the narrator's best friend, and Valéria, Porto Alegre and São Paulo all serve as narrative antipodes among themselves, diametrically opposite, yet impossibly entangled. Narratively, the text stages the circulation of Nirvana in Brazil, and, formally, it places experience in Brazil alongside experience in Rwanda. In so doing, it stages place as part of a network and not a mere container for (national) belonging.

Time and geographical space are indivisible in Laub's cartographical project. His chapters make diachronic leaps between 1993, 1994 and 2013, transits made possible through the process of memory, the way it creates a network between people, places and experience. Cimara Valim de Melo (2015) argues that this network of events that span the course of twenty years, pictured side-by-side in the narrative, allows for time to be stretched and compressed, distorted by a subjective spatial approach. Memories, though perhaps disorganized in the narrator's consciousness, Valim de Melo (2015) asserts, "travel across the cities of Porto Alegre, London, Seattle, and Mataba, establishing a range of points of contact between three continents, in a cartographical narrative".

The novel explains, or portrays, April 1994 through three distinct moments: Kurt Cobain's suicide, the genocide in Rwanda as seen through the experience of Immaculée, and the narrator's experience in London. Time is measured for the narrator between his first encounter with Valéria and the Nirvana show at the Morumbi Stadium eleven months later. Time is measured for Immaculé during the 90-day period of the Rwandan genocide. The novel also reflects on how the present speaks to the events of 1994 almost twenty years later. The London the narrator flees to no longer exists, changed by an economic boom and the 2012 Olympics, and gentrified neighborhoods. Immaculée's memoir of the war in Rwanda has been optioned for film rights and the narrator wonders if the film will premiere before or after the twentieth anniversary of Kurt Cobain's death – not the start of the genocide.

Life in London is 'uncontaminated' by Brazilian experience beyond the few Brazilian acquaintances of the narrator: he does not correspond with his parents, he reads nothing in English, and only eats two or three times at a Brazilian restaurant. Yet, he records all aspects of life in the European capital in excruciating detail: finances, dates, slang words, hangouts, etc. At the same time, it would be a mistake to assume that he's fully integrated into social, legal, or linguistic life. In order to secure a student visa, the narrator matriculates in an English course, only to give it up a week later to work as a delivery boy. His stint in London

is provisional – suspended in time and space – a sort of geographical and temporal hiatus that is concretized by the “agenda” that documents his time spent there. What is not included in the journal, however, is the sense of anonymity, of becoming “an other”, that he experiences and that is also bound up with a sense of mobility. The student visa permits him entry into the country, yet the contingent relationship between language and citizenship is left unfulfilled, thus bearing a sense of displacement through which he feels, he writes, as if he belongs to “another time and another continent”. Through this bifurcated sense of belonging, the narrator suffers the loss of his geographical past while also reimagining, from a distance, what that past was or could be.

The narrative poses a series of reflections on the act of writing, authorship, translation and language, that is reified through the figure of the writer – the narrator is himself a journalist and Immaculée, a memoirist. The novel is split into three sections: “Que sorte ter encontrado você”, “Por trás da beleza”, and “A não ser que seja sobre mim”. The first and last section titles are translations (by Valéria in her postcard and “transcribed” by the narrator) of the Nirvana song *Drain You*, while the middle section comes from the narrator’s own words: “É muito difícil enxergar por trás da beleza, ainda mais na primeira manhã depois do primeiro namoro...” (LAUB, 2013). But yet again, this title “belongs” to Valéria: “Ela dizia: você consegue me enxergar por trás da beleza?” (LAUB, 2013); “O que acontece quando não se consegue enxergar por trás da beleza?” (LAUB, 2013). The title of the novel, “Poison Apple”, also comes from the same Nirvana song. Differently from *Diário da queda*, the chapter numbers continue in chronological order between the novel’s different sections.

Historical time and geographical space are organized in the novel by the intimate writings of three distinct people – Kurt Cobain’s suicide note, Immaculée’s memoir of surviving the Rwandan genocide, and Valéria’s postcard to the narrator. In a way, these three documents offer us two suicide notes, one of which is a translation of a song by the author of the other suicide note, and a story of survival, outlining, perhaps the two possible options for dealing with trauma. These subjects and their writings are historically distinct and distant from each other, yet the narrative imagines encounters between them. The latter half of the novel stages an imaginary interview in which Immaculée comments on Kurt Cobain’s suicide letter – “What do you think of the author having written this section just one day before the war started in Rwanda”<sup>7</sup>, prompts the narrator, further highlighting the interconnectedness and simultaneity of these seemingly disparate events. The following chapter wonders what would have become of Valéria if someone like Immaculée had been her idol and not someone like Kurt Cobain. The chapter then imagines an interview in which Valéria comments on Immaculée’s memoir. Would she have found Immaculée’s positive outlook naive or even cheesy? While the narrative does not supply any answers to these questions, when the narrator imagines the encounter

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7 My translation.

between Valéria and Immaculée's memoir, he is asking us to consider how our lives are shaped by a series of networks and what the consequences (good or bad) might be as a result of the alteration in those networks. How might Valéria's life been different if she had encountered the work of Immaculée instead of Kurt Cobain? Might the novel's intimate writings include two stories of survival instead of one?

The narrator asks himself what the appearance of a text, its syntax and style says about its author. Valéria's postcard contains a single quote from Nirvana's *Drain You*, eight lines of an imprecise translation, which leads the narrator to question how listeners interpret the message behind the lyrics. He wonders if they are aware of the specific context in which those verses were written: the episodes and references and inside jokes that amount to a loquacious banality which only achieves meaning when accompanied by the musical appeal to one's emotions. A famous addict singer from Aberdeen, Washington would only be a famous addict singer from Aberdeen, he contends, if, in 1993, it weren't tied to someone (ostensibly the narrator, potentially Valéria) from Porto Alegre who understood it all wrong. Kurt Cobain is elevated beyond mere mortal musician in the narrator's attempt to exorcise his demons and those of Valéria. In so doing, the narrative folds an imaginary map in such a way that it creates an immediate border between Aberdeen, Washington and Porto Alegre, that if the narrator only knew the right way to cross over he might be unburdened of his tragedy.

Pages later, the narrator reflects on Valéria's knowledge of 21nglish. He wonders where she learned the language. In judging her translation, he questions how long it might take to learn that *without* means *sem*, that the correct translation of *Drain You* would be something like *você me ensinou tudo sem precisar / da maçã envenenada*, where instead Valéria has translated the lyric as *você me ensinou tudo ao me dar / a maçã envenenada*. But is Valéria's, in fact, a mistranslation, or might she have intentionally altered Cobain's lyrics in her address to the narrator? In personalizing the proverbial sin of the poisoned apple, Valéria's mistranslation provides equal commentary on the personal relationship between herself and the narrator and the effects of global 21nglish in Brazil. The poisoned apple serves as a metaphor for their fraught relationship, while the narrator's semantic parsing speaks to the state of the 21nglish language instruction in Brazil. This sense of superimposed languages and geographies is returned to in the novel's present. A conversation between the Brazilian narrator and Immaculé is unencumbered by translation, or an interpreter, but rather communication is implicit across languages. We might assume that they communicate in 21nglish, yet this is never explicitly stated.

Translation from 21nglish into 21nglish21se reappears with the transcription of a Neil Young quote from Cobain's suicide letter, which is placed in the narrative not in 21nglish, but in 21nglish21se, as if it were the original. Yet this quote is immediately followed by the acknowledgement of translation: "A edição brasileira das memórias de Immaculée Ilibagiza tem capa cinza..." (LAUB, 2013) suggesting that the "original" book object is different not only in language but in appearance. The Local-Global Novel asks us to accept the differences

and similarities between here and there. It is on the same page as the Neil Young quote, for example, that Kurt Cobain's suicide letter is organized against Immaculée's memoir of the war in Rwanda.

It appears that the very impetus for the narrator's comparison between the lives of Immaculée and Kurt Cobain is rooted in ideas of translation. As he listens to Immaculée give a lecture at the University of São Paulo as part of a press tour for her memoir, he hears her explain that the soldiers who would free her from the small church room that was her refuge during the war would speak English and that she would need to learn the language well enough to explain to them and to the world who she was and what had happened. The church had an English dictionary and a half dozen books from England, and so Immaculée studied them, learning through trial and error the nouns, verbs, adverbs, and adjectives hidden in this unfamiliar code. It is in this moment that the narrator likens Immaculée's story to that of Kurt Cobain. Was there something to take away from the last moments of Cobain's life, the narrator wonders, the translation he too must have performed as he wrote his final note, some code that might explain why he was there on that day with that gun in his hand. Ultimately, the narrator's comparing and contrasting of Kurt Cobain and Immaculée Ilibagiza serves to cast his own life, and that of Valéria's, against these international opposites: two stories of survival, two stories of defeat.

### *O tribunal da quinta-feira*<sup>8</sup>

Differently from the other two novels in this trilogy, Laub's latest novel forgoes national localization in its opening fragment, favoring, instead, to pinpoint its temporal setting in the twenty-first century by announcing that the narrator has received a Whatsapp message. And while Laub's novel is a critique of social life in the Digital Age, it is also a primer on the history of the AIDS epidemic: its victims, how it appears in popular culture, and North American cultural attitudes and public policy. José Victor, the novel's narrator-protagonist, lives in São Paulo, works at an ad agency, and belongs to the upper class. His life is derailed when his aggrieved ex-wife, Teca, discovers the password to his email account and uncovers correspondence between José Victor and his best friend Walter, an HIV-positive homosexual, which she subsequently distributes to her friends, who then send the messages out to more people, thus leading to a viral phenomenon. The narrative that follows is José Victor's defense, for the Thursday Tribunal of the title is somewhat like the court of public opinion writ large in the Digital Age.

The narrative painstakingly documents the process through which José Victor's emails are made public. It is assumed that Teca has copied the messages before reaching out to José

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<sup>8</sup> Laub's latest novel was translated into Dutch in 2018, but it has yet to see a translation into a major language. Companhia das Letras' first re-printing features critical acclaim for Laub's previous novels from such publications as the Financial Times, Le Monde, and revista Ler (Portugal) on its back cover. However, the book presents no national evaluation of Laub's work.

Victor so that he does not have time to change his password. Next, she makes a selection of the best passages: copying and pasting message after message, reformatting the paragraphs, typeface and font size, a series of editorial choices to ensure that the sequence of messages makes sense for the reader. In the following days, Teca's friends receive the messages, which they forward to other friends. Someone uploads the messages to an anonymous site. Links and copies begin appearing on social networks. José Victor attributes the virality of his emails to a "combination of morbidity and bad luck", that the post was published at the exact right time of the day or that someone with a large number of followers became interested in the story, or the simple fact of living in an era when celebrities are not the only ones susceptible to having their personal lives exposed to the masses. He finds himself exposed in the "eternal present of the virtual space" to scrutiny and commentary from architects, publicists, economists, teachers, furniture makers, bus fare collectors, and other interested judges.

In this virtual space we find a horizontal relationship between members of diverse professional classes, but we also see an allusion to literary production – especially in the Digital Age when so many people can self-publish or launch e-books that never see paper copies – thus bearing the question, can analogue media go viral? Laub's other novels discuss literary circulation in much more explicit ways. *Diário da queda* discusses the ubiquity of Primo Levi's writings on the Holocaust, while *A maçã envenenada* stages the international movements of Immaculée Ilibagiza in promotion of her memoir. These two previous novels also engineer the circulation of personal writings – the notebooks that are translated and shared between three generations of fathers and sons in *Diário da queda* and Valéria's postcard sent from São Paulo in *A maçã envenenada*. In this vein, *O tribunal da quinta-feira* sketches the hybridity of personal and public in circulation that is characteristic of the Digital Age.

This personal/public dynamic is reiterated through the narrative's geographical movements. As the narrative transitions from chapter two to chapter three, the reader is transported from Brazil 2016 to San Francisco 1981, as the narrator dismisses the significance of one's local, contemporary political views to get at the guiding thread of his monologue – the AIDS epidemic and its political and cultural impacts in North America. The narrator recalls an interview he saw with a San Francisco resident who describes the AIDS epidemic as his generation's war in Vietnam. In the same breath, the narrator transports the reader back to Brazil (Bariri, São Paulo, 1983, more specifically) to the childhood home of his friend Walter, when Hélio Costa appeared on the TV program *Fantástico* interviewing doctors and patients at American hospitals.

This same chapter imagines what the world would look like had it not been for the AIDS epidemic (two or three generations of engineers, bankers, scientists, accountants that would still be alive, books, films, albums that would have been produced, families that wouldn't have been destroyed), while also listing international events that appeared on the television the same year the disease appeared (the assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, General Figueiredo riding a horse in Cleveland after bypass surgery, Zico scoring a goal in the Maracanã stadium).

Just a few short chapters later, the narrative places experience within the gay community in California alongside experiences of the same community in Brazil, such that these identities are no longer unique to their respective nationalities. These experiences, and the theories of identity and morality that arise from them, all relate back to our narrator, how he should be judged for the messages he exchanged with Walter. A 1986 Californian law of quarantine for AIDS sufferers and Moral Majority leader Jerry Falwell's campaign against homosexuals are mentioned side-by-side with the hospital admittance of Cláudia Magno and Sandra Bréa.

What makes the emails exchanged between José Victor and Walter so scandalous, and thus worthy of virality, is their particular brand of humor. The messages are proliferated with jokes of the poorest taste about, for example, an escaped slave caught stealing a watermelon in Alabama, 1862, or about a bearded man afraid of ovens for fear he might be mistaken for a pizza in Poland, 1944. The material for these particular jokes is not local but invokes the scars of global history: the North American slave trade and the Holocaust. In other instances the material is local, for example, Cláudia Magno and Sandra Bréa are used interchangeably to suggest unprotected sex. These jokes are not actually funny to those other than the narrator and Walter. The jokes are part of a lexicon that functions only between the two because they are clued into its code. They get lost in translation, so to speak, when they are transposed to a larger audience. Integral to the misunderstandings that occur among outside readers of Walter and José Victor's correspondence is that while the lexicon relies on signifiers that are nationally or globally recognized, their signifieds are intimate and personal; they correspond to a language with only two speakers.

Where translation smooths out difference in *O diário da queda*, the grandfather's "translations" of traumatic experience into palatable memories, for example, and in *A maçã envenenada*, in which translation can be read as a phenomenon for fostering transnational communication and a bringing together of diverse international figures, translation, though it appears less explicitly, in *O tribunal da quinta-feira* emphasizes difference. The novel's approach to translation is an approach of Englishability. The private vernacular that emerges from Walter and José Victor's shared vocabulary does not resonate even within its original national language because the cipher with which to understand it is not commonly shared. While translation augments transcultural experience in Laub's earlier novels, here it seems to quarantine the intimate lives of two individuals, irreducible as it is to collective experience and the kinship among languages.

Immediately following a paragraph defending the codified inside jokes between Walter and himself, the narrator recounts a 1988 American Supreme Court Case involving pastor Jerry Falwell and *Hustler* magazine editor Larry Flynt. Flynt ran a fake ad in his magazine claiming that Falwell had lost his virginity to his own mother. Flynt argued that the joke was so grotesque that no one could actually believe it to be true, José Victor explains, which he likens to how he himself feels delivering platitudes to the court of public opinion that flings accusations at

him for his emails with Walter. In this passage, our Brazilian narrator has identified his North American counterpart in the figure of Larry Flynt, who in turn becomes part of a fictional universe that includes not only Jerry Falwell but also Sandra Bréa and Cláudia Magno through Laub's emplotment of characters, in a geographical arrangement that thrusts José Victor's feelings about his own personal drama up against a North American scandal.

If the narrative posits Larry Flynt as José Victor's North American parallel, then it also seems to suggest that Jerry Falwell might serve as Teca's North American equivalent. She has mobilized a digital community of retirees, religious preachers, fan club members and whoever has been hiding in the shadows until the technology has appeared which permits them filterless and limitless expression to publicly condemn José Victor for his own private filterless and limitless expression. One might understand this digital community as not dissimilar from Falwell's own Moral Majority given the organization of José Victor's musings on right-wing American grandstanding and his current public scandal. This is, of course, a false equivalency, ideologically speaking, but is also demonstrative of the ways in which geographical connections are established in the novel. Much the way Kurt Cobain, Valéria, Immaculée Ilibagiza, and the narrator figure into an antipodal relationship in *A maçã envenenada*, so too do Teca, Jerry Falwell, Larry Flynt, and José Victor in the structure of this narrative.

In this vein, while the AIDS epidemic is certainly the global catastrophe this novel tackles as its counterpoint to José Victor's personal drama, it also seeks to position digital culture – or a digital culture in which we are made judge and jury, where we are able to participate in the worst of humanity (8chan and its use by alt-right internet subcultures comes to mind) – as our impending catastrophe. It looks at our cultural past as well as our cultural future. Teca's personal revenge is elevated to a political cause as José Victor's emails reach a larger audience such that he is longer viewed by this public as an individual capable of making mistakes but rather as a living symptom of historic and collective injustice. In this sense, he remarks, the four days following the release of his emails have been glorious for Teca. Here is her ex-husband, publicly exposed for his indiscretions and cowardice, and every stone thrown at him is a public declaration against what he has said. However, this indignation does not seem to apply to the indiscretion of logging into someone else's email and forwarding the messages found there, as José Victor points out. It does not take into account how leaking these emails might damage the individual lives of everyone involved.

When made public, the narrator's discovery and development of his sexual predilections become fodder for debates over morality and misogyny. They no longer exist as choices between two consenting adults. His messages to and about Dani, his young lover and subordinate at work, reveal a growing taste for BDSM, a consensual violence, as he calls it, meant as erotic symbolism, that will be transformed into unilateral violence practiced in the real world. The joke becomes fact, he writes, the character a flesh and blood person, and he himself becomes seen as someone who literally performs his own bravados. José Victor's affair with Dani is

exposed as collateral damage to his correspondence with Walter. And as José Victor admits, despite that fact that Dani belongs to a generation with different ideas about intimacy and privacy, that she grew up in the era of cyber-bullying and adult chatrooms, a sex scandal is still a sex scandal after all.

The personal/collective tragedy dialectic, doubly refracted in this novel to include the public/private dialectic, can also be seen on the scale of a single city. As the novel attempts to identify who Walter contracted AIDS from, the reader is transported from São Paulo to Rio de Janeiro, a sunny city where you drink a *caipirinha* while people are being shot or falsely arrested in the favelas, as José Victor describes it. Yet despite this, he continues, it is still possible to meet someone on the beach as you return from a swim. It is on this afternoon, while people are falling ill in the grated buildings of Barra or Zona Sul, that Walter falls irremediably in love with someone. This someone will then bind Walter forevermore to an improvised network that includes Sandra Bréa, Cláudia Magno, Cazuza, Caio Fernando Abreu, Freddie Mercury, the Castro district residents of the 1980s, Jerry Falwell and others. In this way, the Local-Global Novel asks us to confront the ripple effects of individual actions, how local experience contributes to and is contributed by global networks and communities.

Similarly to *A maçã envenenada*, *O tribunal da quinta-feira* ruminates on the 27nglish language. Where Laub's second novel addresses 27nglish as the *lingua franca* that allows for communication between the diverse geographical territories the narrative charts, his latest slyly demonstrates the language's influence on the Brazilian lexicon. Following his tirade on the current state of the Digital Age, José Victor resumes his history lesson on the AIDS epidemic, finally giving a name to the virus he has discussed for over eighty pages. As he spells out the acronym's components, he is forced to acknowledge the Brazilian adoption of AIDS over SIDA, the 27nglish27se equivalent in the Lusophone world.<sup>9</sup> The following mentions of AIDS in the book appear as this binary term, AIDS/SIDA, both 27nglish and 27nglish27se. The text is filled with other examples of 27nglish words that have infiltrated the Brazilian vernacular, especially in digital and workplace vocabulary. The term "counseling" is used to describe the meeting Dani has with human resources after her romantic link to José Victor is discovered. Other examples include "refresh" as in a webpage; "briefing" as in a meeting; "experience", "storytelling", and "big data" as resumé buzz words. English is the metalanguage for the Internet and industries in the innovation sector, but, differently from how it is dissected in *A maçã envenenada*, actual rhetorical understanding of the language is irrelevant.

Unlike Laub's previous works, this novel offers glimpses into the Brazilian economic situation of the 1990s and 2000s, shaped of course by broader globalizing forces. José Victor

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<sup>9</sup> This is also a passage in which José Victor discusses the inequalities of access to AIDS treatment. Although antiretroviral drugs appeared as early as 1996, he explains, there are still millions of people (in Africa and the Arab world, he points out) for whom this drug cocktail is merely a name printed in a foreign newspaper.



explains his entrance into the world of advertising in the early 1990s because, despite his interest in film, it was no longer a viable career path given the collection of economic reforms and inflation-stabilization plans that are associated with the Collor government, and the end of Embrafilme, a state-funded company created for the production and dissemination of Brazilian movies which was disbanded by Collor. Dani also enters the workforce at a time of crisis. With the advent of the Internet as a widely-used tool, the market began to favor online corporations over traditional advertising agencies. Clients could reach a more specific public with a smaller budget thanks to algorithms that customize our habits and choices, obtaining more efficient and quantifiable responses through such resources as pay-per-click, dispensing with the cost of traditional ad houses. In fact, the agency José Victor and Dani work for is in the process of being sold to an American company, Banfeld/McCoy.

### **New dimensions of Imagined Communities**

The Local-Global Novel is a novel of simultaneity – both representational, of course through narrative, and also, seemingly, physical through its arrangement of transterritorial narratives. Local-global simultaneity is portrayed in *Diário da queda* through the relationship the narrator contrives between his grandfather's forced imprisonment at Auschwitz and João's mother's illness, two geographically and temporally distinct moments that the narrative places in tandem. Transnational simultaneity is developed in *A maçã envenenada* through a charting of international events that took place in 1994, while national asynchronicity is represented through the narrator's failing relationship with his girlfriend and her eventual suicide. *O tribunal da quinta-feira* also offers different scales of simultaneity: on the scale of a single city; on the scale of the transnational, comparing and distinguishing between, for example, the TV interviews of the Castro residents in 1981 and the Helio Costa reporting for *Fantástico* which Walter watched in 1983; and on a virtual scale, bringing together a diverse group of people from different economic, social, and political backgrounds in the crusade against José Victor and his emails.

Provided this simultaneity among strangers, that is both spatial in its juxtaposition of territories and temporal in its juxtaposition of memory, we are able to conceive of newly shaped and defined communities. The French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy describes this simultaneous space-time as *being singular plural*. He writes, "... it is... always an instance of 'with': singulars singularly together... The togetherness of singulars is singularity 'itself.' It 'assembles' them insofar as it spaces them; they are 'linked' insofar as they are not unified" (NANCY, 2000). Communities are not the sum of individuals but rather signify "the chaotic and multiform appearance of the infranational, supranational, para-national and, moreover, the dis-location of the 'national' in general" (NANCY, 2000). The Local-Global Novel achieves plural singularity, or singular plurality, through its fragmented representation of life across the different segments of the local and the global. In so doing, this kind of novel provides provisional communities for its characters to be *singular plural*, while asking its readers to redefine what community means.

The approach to community in the Local-Global Novel is accommodating to the whole world without the pretense of assuming to contain it. The kind of community engendered here is one untethered from place or time, splintered, a momentary composition of diverse constituents. Through this community, as represented in the novel, individuals are found to be tied together beyond the national. They are not initiated into global circulation, but rather, as Schoene (2009) has argued, “they are in fact what constitutes, propels, and perpetuates this circulation... all individuality amounts to is the production of variations on one and the same theme of contemporary human existence”. In Laub’s novels, the theme of contemporary human existence is accentuated by global catastrophes of the twentieth century, variously produced in a wide range of localities that contribute to the way their Brazilian narrators are able to understand their immediate reality.

There are certain events, Tomlinson (1999) argues, such as the fallout in Chernobyl, the fall of the Berlin wall, the collapse of the communist world, the creation of the European Union, global summits on climate change, wars in Beirut, the Gulf, Somalia, or Bosnia, that “may add to the extension of the individual’s ‘phenomenal world’”. Distant events become relevant to individuals’ routine experience in such a way that significance is not self-contained within physical locality or politically-defined territories. In Laub’s novels, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, Kurt Cobain’s suicide, and the AIDS epidemic are folded into the local experience of Laub’s narrators, providing different scales of significance for local reality.

In emphasizing such significance, we must return to Canclini’s metaphors and narratives. “Metaphors and narratives”, he writes, “are forms of organization of imaginaries; they give order to dispersion of meaning in the act of imagining, a dispersion that is accentuated in a globalized world” (CANCLINI, 2014). Metaphor and narrative, then, are the Local-Global Novel’s basic tools for the representation of a simultaneous space-time, for the creation of communities of global proportions.

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