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Un lugar sin límites: Post-Apocalyptic, Hopepunk Memories in Elisa de Gortari's *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás*

Un lugar sin límites: Recuerdos postapocalípticos y *hopepunk* en *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás* de Elisa de Gortari

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Abstract. An asteroid strike, a connectome father, and contagious memories. These are but some of the fantastical elements found in Elisa de Gortari's 2024 *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás*. In a post-apocalyptic, steampunkish world, many of humanity's technological advancements have been erased. Accompanied by her stepson Indiana, Grijalva is a reporter investigating a strange disease plaguing migrant children. Thus, like other speculative fiction from Latin America, Gortari's novel is both dystopic and ecocritical: more significantly, it also offers a rigorous exploration of humanity's limits. This article argues that Gortari's novel can best be characterized as an example of hopepunk, literary neologism coined by Alexandra Rowland to describe fiction's indefatigable ability to confront our contemporary dystopian reality.

Keywords: Mexican studies, Elisa de Gortari, apocalypse, memory, Hopepunk.

Resumen. Una lluvia de meteoros, un padre que es conectoma y una enfermedad que nos contagia con los recuerdos de los demás. Son éstos algunos de los rasgos fantásticos que se encuentran en *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás*, novela de 2024 de Elisa de Gortari. La autora describe un mundo postapocalíptico y retrofuturista en que varios avances tecnológicos se han eliminado. Una reportera llamada Grijalva, acompañada por su hijastro Indiana, investiga una extraña enfermedad que afecta a los niños migrantes. Como otras obras especulativas de América Latina, la novela de Gortari es a la vez distópica y ecocrítica: además ofrece una rigurosa exploración de los límites de la humanidad. En este artículo, argumento que la novela de Gortari debería considerarse un ejemplo de *hopepunk*, un neologismo literario de Alexandra Rowland para describir la incansable capacidad de literatura para oponerse a la realidad actual.

Palabras clave: Estudios mexicanos, Elisa de Gortari, Apocalipsis, Memoria, *Hopepunnk*.

SPECULATING ABOUT POST-APOCALYPTIC MEXICO

Although more often recognized globally for its magical realist literary production, Latin America enjoys a significant tradition of science fiction and speculative fiction that continues to the present day.[1] Just last year, Emily Hart, writing for the *New York Times*, noted the genre's continuing salience – even resurgence – in contemporary times: «The avalanche of original science fiction is timely, arriving as many readers and writers in Latin America feel choked by the folksy tropes of magical realism and desensitized by realist depictions of the region's struggles with violence».[2]

Furthermore, and as Iván Rodrigo Mendizábal suggestively proposes, an «evident feature of Latin American science fiction (sf) is its political nature» ("The Political Dimension," p. 197).

Amid a certain exhaustion with magical realism, both science fiction and speculative fiction have gained in political significance in Latin America. Kendrick Foster concurs, pinpointing a «broad trend in Latin American sci-fi: a divergence from European and American sci-fi's emphasis on science's power to change the world for the better» (2020). More specifically, Kendrick Foster details how «Mexican sci-fi has primarily focused on its political relationship with the United States» (2020).

With the 2024 novel dealt with here, Mexican author Elisa de Gortari's *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás*, I shall illustrate that Foster's proposal rings true: Gortari's work, with its speculative fiction and science fiction elements, is deeply interested in literature's ability to confront our distinctly contemporary and dystopian reality.[3]

Gortari's novel, replete with fantastical features like a cataclysmic asteroid shower and a deceased father who enjoys an afterlife as a connectome, is part of a long line of Latin American and especially Mexican fiction dealing with apocalyptic events and post-apocalyptic societies. Given the numerous world-historical, cataclysmic events that the region has experienced – European colonialism, U.S. interventionism, neoliberal shock treatments, and military dictatorships – perhaps it is only normal that literary works dealing with apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic scenarios are abundant.[4] In the case of Mexico, a beautiful, progressive country that is nevertheless besieged by serious problems (ecological crises, government corruption, violence, migrant encampments), defining what literature is truly post-apocalyptic and what art is realist has not always been obvious:

> Nonetheless, because of the dystopic nature of present-day Mexican reality, it is hermeneutically easy to identify in this type of fiction all the trappings of the modern post-apocalyptic genre as they have evolved in the popular imaginary: there is in Mexico a visible post-apocalyptic scenario and one can find hordes of people, homeless or not, carrying their lives almost as do the living dead (Guerra Félix and Osuna Osuna, 2022, pp. 23).

Scholars have noted the apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic character of pertinent works by Mexican authors as well as authors who write about Mexico – Roberto Bolaño's *2666*, Rodrigo Fresán's *Mantra*, Guillermo Sheridan's *El dedo de oro*, Hugo Hiriat's *La destrucción de todas las cosas*, Bernardo Fernández's *Escenarios para el fin del mundo*, Carlos Fuentes's *Terra Nostra*, Yuri Herrera's *La transmigración de los cuerpos*, Cristina Rivera Garza's *Verde Shanghai*, among others. Indeed, we would be remiss if we did not mention the significance of the nation's sprawling capital, Mexico City, a place the public intellectual Carlos Monsiváis frequently depicted in apocalyptic terms in order to portray the surreal character of the metropolis. Monsiváis referred to the city as "post-apocalyptic" in the 1990s to capture its rapid, disorganized development, before leaning into the neologism "apocalipstick" to capture how climate change and untethered capitalism transformed the city in the early 2000s: «La ciudad de México día a día se precipita a su final y, también a diario, se reconstituye con la energía de las multitudes convencidas de que no hay ningún lugar a dónde ir» (Monsiváis, 2009, p. 54). Elisa de Gortari's *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás* speaks to Mexico's present day and the contemporary social issues the nation faces: a speculative work, the novel asks readers to offer hope in order to face society's nagging, downright apocalyptic problems.

Ingeniously narrated in second-person singular and largely directed toward Gortari's protagonist, the reporter, Grijalva, *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás* recounts the protagonist's investigation of a preternatural disease affecting children in the small town of Tamarindo, Veracruz, located on Mexico's Gulf coast. The background of Gortari's protagonist is notably non-

[1] See the study from Andrea Bell and Yolanda Molina-Gavilán, along with that of Kurlat Ares, Rachel Haywood Ferreira, Silvia Gabriela, and Ezequiel de Rosso. For the Mexican context, see the volume by Miguel Ángel Fernández Delgado, Stephen C. Tobin, as well as that by Elizabeth Ginway.

[2] See https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/10/books/latin-american-science-fiction.html?searchResultPosition=2

[3] See P.L. Thomas's volume for speculative fictions vis-à-vis science fiction.

[4] See the scholarship by Cristina Mondragón, Lois Parkinson Zamora, Gabriela Mercado Narváez, J.G. Larochelle, Julia A. Kushigian, Samuel Manickam, Miguel López-Lozano, among others.

normative: she has an adopted son named Indiana and, over the course of the story, comes out as a lesbian. Most intriguing, her father, Emilio, with whom she's lost contact with, was most recently a connectome – a brain's neural connection, sans a physical body – living in a virtual world produced by computer processors under the Sonora Desert near Gila Bend, Arizona. The author, Gortari, personally spent time there while working as a reporter covering the humanitarian crisis surrounding migrant children (Soto, 2021; Leon).[5] The novel ends with Grijalva ostensibly rescuing the infected children via the procurement of lithium, which she has fantastically mined from underwater car batteries. In the concluding pages of Gortari's work, Indiana successfully and joyfully reconnects with his grandfather and Grijalva's father, Emilio, via text messages.

Given the novel's recent publication, Gortari's work has not been subjected to scholarly study. However, in order to finish the novel, she won a prestigious scholarship from the UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México); the finalized text includes snippet recommendations from renowned authors such as Jorge Volpi, David Miklos, and Alaíde Ventura. Furthermore, she has already gained accolades for her previous work: a novel titled *Los suburbios* was published in 2015. This was followed by a volume of short stories, *Himnos*, in 2017 and finally, a book of poems called *Código Konami* in 2022. Gortari also has bylines in prestigious journals such as *Letras Libres*, *Proceso*, *Vice*, and *Luvina*. Each of these previous works was published under the name Eduardo de Gortari, before she began her gender transition. In interviews, Gortari routinely laments the fetishization of the trans community and focuses conversation not upon her own identity but rather, on her work. During conversations surrounding *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás*, Gortari recounts that the novel was written during her transition, which she celebrates as necessary, even while characterizing the experience as "catastrophic" (Malik, 2024).[6] In other forums, Gortari reiterates the ambiguity of the moment, when she found herself wavering between hope and despair: «la situación marcó un tono mucho más sombrío y triste del que debería haber sido» (Herrera Montejano, 2024). Indeed, this mediation on optimism amid anguish is what I pinpoint here as the defining characteristic of the brilliant work.

Until now, the sole scholarly intervention on Gortari's work focuses on the author's poetry from 2005 and 2008. There, Irving Juárez Gómez convincingly argues that Gortari's work can be examined vis-à-vis cultural theorist Svetlana Boym's (2001) concept of nostalgia and psychologist D.W. Winnicott's object relations theory. For Juárez Gómez, Gortari's nostalgic engagement with everyday, outdated objects constitutes a «resistance to the obsolescence of technological objects, because of the ontological security they provided in his infancy» (Juárez Gómez, 2019, p. 32).

Undoubtedly, Gortari's more recent *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás*, too, proposes that memories – and especially, engaging in antiquated knowledges (technologies, know-how, routine tasks) – may constitute a means of confronting traumatic world-historical events. Like other recent apocalyptic fiction, Gortari's novel proposes that local knowledge, everyday interventions, and strong emotional ties can, in fact, provide solace even during catastrophic scenarios, as seen in the following quote: «Yet the local can serve as refuge from global problems and threats, as well as serving to set them in a manageable framework of analysis and step-by-step process» (Palmer, 2021, p. 318). Nevertheless, given that Gortari has written a full novel in a speculative tone, interpretation of her work should also be extended.

In what follows here, I read *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás* as hopepunk, an ambiguous genre written in a speculative vein that focuses on how kindness serves to «disrupt the quietism of despair» (Rowland, 2017a; 2017b; 2019). First theorized by fantasy author Alexandra Rowland and covered recently in the *BBC*, hopepunk leans on speculative fictions to forefront psychological resilience in politically threatening times (Robson, 2022). Margaret Atwood's *A Handmaid's Tale,* George R.R. Martin's *Game of Thrones,* and J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series* have all been designated as part of the genre's corpus. Of related genres, Latin America has also seen significant examples of *solarpunk* literature, which also explores themes of community resilience.[7] Gortari's optimism is a bit more tempered: unlike the solarpunk genre, there is no harmonious denouement between nature and technology in *Todo lo que amamos.*

Gortari's novel, as speculative fiction, is backdropped with a post-apocalyptic, brutal reality, even as it forwards alternative, immensely hopeful possibilities – an optimism that some have suggested is a hallmark of the genre (Tomin and Collis). Intriguingly, the future post-apocalyptic world that Gortari depicts is characterized by many of contemporary Mexico's social mals: ecological meltdown, a migrant crisis, and corruption. Amazingly, the novel yet advances memories and collectivism as a source of hope.

[5] See Liliana Soto for the ongoing issues in Gila. See Gerardo León's article for Gortari's experience as a reporter.

[6] See 3:40 of "Plática con Elisa de Gortari" https://www.youtube.com/live/WYqsIHsIhgg?si=MDt_ZAZF3wk_ym8A

[7] See the book by Phoebe Wagner, and Brontë Christopher Wieland (e ds.); also that of Gerson Lodi-Ribeiro.

THE END IS THE BEGINNING

Gortari's novel begins when the world as we know it has already ended. Set at some time in the future, both the world's geography and its climate have drastically changed after an asteroid strike, referred to by characters simply as *el Choque* – the "Collision." Strangely, the Mexico City metro, having been flooded, now houses canoes referred to as *trajineras*, the ancient word for *canoes* that the Aztecs had originally employed. With the *Choque*, «el lago de Texcoco renació» thereby retracing the capital city's geography as well as that of all of Mexico (Gortari, 2024, p. 153). Now «la Ciudad de México estaba coronada en el norte por el Castillo de Chapultepec, que se alzaba en la punta de una península. Desde ahí, la ciudad se extendía en una media luna que llegaba hasta Xochimilco e Iztapalapa» (Gortari, 2024 p. 153).

The city of Veracruz, once located on Mexico's Gulf Coast, has been destroyed, and its ruins are underwater. Gortari thus alludes to our present day, when Veracuz is slowly being swallowed by the ocean and climate change; the *Choque* has seemingly finished the job: «Veracruz empezó a sumergirse mucho antes de que yo naciera, en una invasión milimétrica pero inexorable que se prolongó por lustros, hasta que alguien propuso levantar una barrera entre la ciudad y el golfo de México» (Gortari, 2024, pp. 27, 28).

The earth's regions located around the equator become preternaturally frigid and shadowy; during the time of narration, it is explained the half the earth «iniciará una tregua con las nevadas, y será el hemisferio sur el que padezca la sombra de los anillos que recrudece el invierno, proyectada entre el trópico y el ecuador» (Gortari, 2024, p. 44). Amid the world's changed climate, even the Colombian city of Cali is said to get snow.

Thus, within the logic of Gortari's text, while humanity had previously developed virtual worlds, neuralink technologies, and hologram computer displays, much of our progress is set back after a various asteroids fall into the Gulf of Mexico. Gortari's characters encounter a steampunkish and anachronistic mixture of technologies, devices, and skills. The internet exists in some sense, even as whole musical recordings and means of transportation have been lost to the asteroid strike – again, an event referred to throughout the novel and by its characters simply as, *el Choque*. Compact discs are unplayable and cars undriveable, although trains still run. It is explained that «[t]ras el Choque, el mundo retrocedió, no cabe duda. ¿Pero cuánto? A veces parece que han vuelto hasta el principio. A veces, parece, también, que es imposible caminar de nuevo hacia adelante (Gortari, p. 25).

With the catastrophe, the ocean has risen in parts of the globe, and rings composed of rocky debris – much like Saturn's – encircle the earth, creating different sunlight patterns: while some territories are cloaked in darkness, others experience twenty-four hours of daylight. Some inhabitants of the earth see our planet's new rings while others, closer to the equator, describe significant shadows, described simply as «una línea negra» (Gortari, 2024, p. 26). The earth's new, Saturn-like rings have both literally and metaphorically created new climatological imbalances as well as new socioeconomic injustices. The aporias of today's borders are, in sum, enhanced and reified with the earth's new rings.

As proposed by scholars of antiquity, Saturn has, across time, embodied the concept of boundaries, defining the distinction between self and other. It manifests in the physical realm through structures that enclose and separate spaces, as well as in the temporal realm by delineating the past, present, and future. Furthermore, metaphorically understood, Saturn is imagined as governing the rules that guide our interactions, establishing the lines between acceptable and unacceptable behavior, and offering a framework for navigating social dynamics (Obert, 2019).[8] Saturn's symbology is pertinent to Gortari's novel. Here, the *Choque* and the rings surrounding the earth underscore the development of new social hierarchies – boundaries that aggrandize the inequities that characterize our contemporary times. The rings are yet another, very literal representation of the barriers, divisions, limits, and unfairness that defines the world that Gortari crafts. The earth's rings create borders, serving to underscore the ongoing injustices as experienced by the planet's inhabitants – some, more privileged than others.

Indeed, if we were to draw on François Hartog's ideas, one might argue that *Todo lo que amamos y lo que dejamos atrás* exemplifies a form of presentism, suggesting that regardless of our efforts to envision the future or dwell on the past, we remain inevitably confined to the present moment.[9] Gortari's novel is dystopian, post-apocalyptic even as, in a real way, it describes our present day.

Telling, too, is Gortari's discussion of construction corruption and government waste – two nagging problem for Mexico (Hinojosa and Meyer, 2019). As Grijalva explains to Indiana, «[h]ace muchos años, antes de que yo naciera, la gente votó por un criminal que prometió construir mil puentes…cualquiera con memoria podía

[8] See both the internet article "Boundaries Abound" as well as the volume by Charles Obert.

[9] See Hartog's *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time.*

reconocer el origen fraudulento de estos puentes» (Gortari, 2024, pp. 27, 28).

Also intriguing is the novel's reference to the diverse ecological problems that the port city of Veracruz is currently facing: specifically, the coral reef off the shore of Veracruz is endangered even as the city itself is sinking (García, 2023; Sanchez and Quintanilla, 2024).[10] Gortari's narrator recounts: «Veracruz empezó a sumergirse mucho antes de que yo naciera, en una invasión milimétrica pero inexorable que se prolongó por lustros, hasta que alguien propuso levantar una barrera entre la ciudad y el golfo de México» (Gortari, 2024, p. 27).

These are but some of the presentist concerns that Gortari includes in a novel that is otherwise set in the future. The foremost issue affecting Mexico that Gortari takes up provides the novel's primary plotline, and provides an inroad to see the novel's remarkable optimism – that is, the work's hopepunk character: How to save migrant children from weaponized borders? How to evince a healthy relationship with memory, labor, and new technologies even as entire populations are divided by new barriers?

BORDER CHILDREN

Two distinct research projects are described in the novel – one recounted, having taken place in the past – and one during the course of present narration. First, Grijalva relates how, as a college student, she worked with a professor on a project to rescue the musical archive of an unknown Vercruzan composer from the 1960s, Luis Montané.[11] In a futuristic world where, Gortari explains, even musical composition is enhanced by composers wearing a machine referred to as a «Nvidia helmet» (Gortari, 2024, p. 23), Grijalva and her professor aim to revive the human spirit of composition and «sacar a Montané del olvido» (Gortari, 2024, p. 30). The second research project is as follows: during the novel's present-tense narration, Grijalva, working as a newspaper reporter for the suggestively-named (and downright optimistic) *El Renacimiento* ('the rebirth') is sent to report on an encampment of children in the small Veracruzan town of Tamarindo. There, the children, many of whom have travelled from faraway, southern regions below the earth's rings looking for work, have fallen ill due to a mysterious disease which leaves them believing themselves other people. They suffer due to the memories of others: «Todos estos niños enfermaron con recuerdos. Recuerdos de otros, recuerdos de gente muerta. Son cosas que sucedieron. Los niños se hunden hasta fallecer en dolores que no les pertenecen, viven memorias ajenas y reencarnan las desgracias, el trabajo, el crimen, los adioses» (Gortari, 2024 p. 133).

The sick youth are plagued by a constellation of factors, but their memories consistently deal with practices of labor and technology. What are the possibilities of feeling human amid quickly changing technologies? When Grijalva meets them:

> Eila decía ser un viejo programador al que no querían dejar entrar a México porque no podía trabajar con sus manos. Esnéider había sido conductor hasta que los coches autónomos lo reemplazaron. Javier vivía bajo la tierra, obligado a trabajar en una mina. Katia llegó a la costa después de ser aventada al cielo por una tromba, no la dejaron entrar a México en la frontera con Chiapas (Gortari, 2024, p. 188).

Especially striking if we consider the surge of Central American children migrating through Mexico in recent years en route to the United States, Gortari's story seems less speculative than all-too-real (Abi-Habib, 2021) . Just as the earth's rings have created new borders and new inequalities, so too do society's most vulnerable find themselves facing ills that we know well in contemporary times; only now, the situation has worsened. Among the ailing children, most are migrants who, within the post-apocalyptic society Gortari describes, are referred to as «lejeros» (Gortari, p. 50). This designation is used, according to the narrator, to label those who, «aun dentro, permanecía afuera» (Gortari, 2024, p. 138). These «lejeros» are numerous, constituting a veritable migrant crisis: upon visiting a schoolhouse, it is explained to Grijalva that «detrás de cada puerta hay un niño así» (Gortari, 2024, pp. 46, 47). In their encampments, they face remarkably contemporary problems dealing with border control and documentation. One particular child is not allowed into the Veracruz town of Córdoba: «no lo aceptarían, y si lo aceptaran, lo dejarían morir. No tiene papeles» (Gortari, p. 42).

They have been told by soldiers where they can and cannot enter (Gortari, p. 149). Moreover, within the children's temporary housing, «es raro que alguien aquí hable español» (Gortari, 2024, p. 241). In sum, no matter how far into the future *Todo lo que amamos y dejamos atrás* takes readers, the heinous borders dividing society remain. The point is underscored during an interview with one of the *lejeros*, who explain how the Choque changed very little for society's most vulnerable: «Hay

[10] See the article by Gabriela Sánchez and Víctor Quintanilla for coral reefs; Jair García's article for sinking.

[11] Luis Montané is a fictional character, although Gortari proposes that he was the brother of Lalo Montané, a real-life singer of *boleros* – Caribbean rhythmed ballads – from Veracruz during the twentieth century.

muchas vidas que siguieron exactamente igual…El día del Choque se acabó el mundo de ustedes. No el nuestro» (Gortari, 2024, p. 244).

Suggestively, Gortari's novel is replete with metaphors regarding divisions, borders, and the inequalities that separate us; some of these tropes are large-scale (apocalyptic asteroid showers) while others are made manifest in small ways (descriptions of domestic spheres). Ultimately, the text seems to query us: Where does humanity begin and where does it end? How do the objects and technological devices in our lives enhance or detract from our humanness? To what extent are the limits we create for ourselves authentic, necessary, and fruitful?

Thus, while transcribing some of Montané's musical composition, Grijalva complains that «[l]as divisiones, sin embargo, no eran claras» (Gortari, 2024, pp. 36, 37). Still interested in the structure of Montané's musical piece, Grijalva describes the composition: «se dividía en una forma binaria común, donde las dos partes podrían haber interactuado como el verso y el coro de una canción popular» (Gortari, 2024, pp. 36, 37).

Gortari's protagonista even remembers her grandmother, while listening to radio, as organizing her home with barriers: «dedicaba el resto de la mañana a escuchar la radio mientras almorzaba, barría o repasaba algún volumen del librero que dividía la sala del comedor como una pared falsa» (Gortari, 2024, p. 144). To what extent are borders real? How can technology help us to know our limits as a species? Is there any hope in the human and moreover, the humane power of memory?

In this same vein, Gortari's narrator describes Grijalva's father, Emilio, as coming from «una era donde las personas podían definirse según su relación con las máquinas.» (2024, p. 137). Grijalva evokes her ambivalent attitude toward technology – whether technology expands our humanity or limits it – while explaining her experience with a Luddite organization in college:

> Cuando iba en la universidad me metí a un grupo ludita. Pasaba mucho tiempo en Internet, no tenía muchas amistades y estaba enojada, emperradísima; hasta cierto punto era natural que terminara con ellos. Sentía que el mundo se lo estaban quedando las máquinas. Todo lo reemplazaban: las amistades, el sexo, el trabajo (Gortari, p. 180).

Yet, technology is not all that it promises. Grijalva's father who, upon dying gave himself to living as a connectome in a virtual world called Gila Bend, was promised «" el lugar sin límites"[…] donde no puedes matar pero tampoco morir» (Gortari, 2024, p. 167).

The narrator and seemingly, Emilio both recognize that «Gila Bend no es, por lo tanto, el lugar sin límites, pero sí el lugar sin consecuencias» (Gortari, 2024, p. 167).

Even there, one finds different ways of maintaining barriers and defining self and other: «Desde que llegas a Gila Bend te advierten que hay dos tipos de usuarios: los nostálgicos que se aferran a las rudimentarias limitaciones del meatspace y los que se trasladan con el pensamiento» (Gortari, 2024, p. 167).

Ultimately, Gortari's protagonist suggests that beyond the reach of computers, technology, and cyborgs, there may remain the hopefulness of being human. As she recounts her experience as a budding musician: «me sabía poseedora de un talento que las computadoras y los robots no podían replicar: aunque nunca me convirtiera en la sucesora de Víkingur Ólafsson, seguía siendo una intérprete superior a cualquier máquina concebida» (Gortari, 2024, p. 190).

In interviews, Gortari herself leans into the hope of old technologies, ancient know-hows, and mystical knowledge. The author explicitly mentions nixtamalization, the traditional process by which corn is soaked and cooked in an alkaline solution, usually limewater, to enhance its nutritional value, flavor, and usability in food preparation. For her, this ancient technology constituted a «gran expresión» of Aztec life that «implica mucha imaginación» (Arranda Luna, 2024, 22:13).

CONCLUSIONS: NOTHING TO FEAR, NOTHING TO DOUBT

Hopepunk is a new, amorphous genre that continues to evolve. Yet, perhaps given the extraordinary times we are living in, along with the popularity of the genre, it is more than reasonable that we classify Gortari's brilliant novel as such. With this final section, by examining the concluding sections of *Todo lo que amamos y dejamos atrás*, I aim to definitively situate the work as hopepunk. In particular, Gortari's work, especially with its denouement, fulfills the central tenets of hopepunk: the speculative novel expresses (tempered) hope against dystopian, even apocalyptic challenges, largely by promoting compassionate teamwork.

According to various scholars, the inchoate and popular genre has originated during (approximately) the last decade, which witnesses novel threats to democracy and wellbeing around the world, and renewed calls for social justice. First, we remember the surprising results of the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, which saw the wealthy star of a reality television show catapulted to the White House. In March of 2020, the world's economy as well as its health were upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. Finally, the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 ignited the largest racial justice protests in the United States

since the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s (Romano, 2021). Hopepunk is a «speculative fiction and expressive countercultural art movement that weaponizes hope in bleak times» (Passara Crilly, 2023, p. vii).

The genre is punk in that it resists imperialist, colonialist narrative and ideals. Similarly, the genre is "hopeful" in its advocacy for radical acts of collective empathy, even though it «does not take an overly optimistic view of the world. It is not to be confused with utopian fiction which imagines "perfect" or idyllic worlds» (Passara Crilly, 2023, p. 5).

Ultimately, Gortari's work, like that of Margaret Atwood, J. K. Rowling, and others, «restores a bit of your faith in humanity [...] maybe all is not yet lost» (Rowland, 2017a).

Indeed, as Gortari herself optimistically proposes in a *Newsweek* interview: «No existe, actualmente, ninguna amenaza fuera de la humanidad que pueda destruirnos. Es algo que no podíamos decir hace 100 años. Hoy en día podemos desviar un meteorito, podemos vencer un virus y podemos resolver el hambre. Entonces, yo creo que vamos bien» (Sánchez Bolaño, 2024).

Indubitably, Gortari's novel is an exercise in optimism. Perhaps, the novel suggests, even our most archaic technological devices may help us in the future. Perhaps we can free ourselves by looking beyond our memories. Perhaps we can heal the world in small ways via caring, collective actions. Indeed, the novel concludes with these themes fully on display.

Within the logic of Gortari's novel, memory – more specifically, an individual's ability to remember – is represented both as a type of illness but also, a means of manifesting one's humanity. Thus, perhaps the overarching message of the novel is one needs to have a healthy, flexible, or otherwise liberated relationship to one's past and the past of others. What is it to be human, after all, than being able to learn from the past, approach the future with hope, even while leaving behind traumas? On one hand, Grijalva laments that «el problema de esta ciudad [...] todos olvidan muy pronto» (Gortari, 2024, p. 29).

On the other hand, just before the apocalyptically dangerous asteroid strike, Grijalva's connectome father, Emilio, asks that the virtual world Gila Bend be disconnected, thus separating the world from memories: «De todo. Datos, electricidad: cualquier vínculo con el exterior, hay que romperlo» (Gortari, 2024, p. 139).

More intriguing is the memory plague that attacks the migrant children who have travelled from afar: «[e]stas memorias ajenas invaden su mente, la infectan, se repiten en bucle y terminan por borrar la consciencia y los reflejos más elementales del huésped, que se apaga lentamente hasta morir» (Gortari, 2024, p. 187).

With the novel's end, Grijalva and her stepson Indiana realize how to cure the migrant children's disease: «el litio detiene la infección, sí...También se usa para la bipolaridad» (Gortari, p. 231).

With the fantastical finale of the novel, Grijalva and crew realize that the only place left in the post-apocalyptic world to find a significant amount of lithium is under the sea – specifically, in the ruins of Veracuz City:

> "¿A dónde hay que ir por el litio?" , pregunta.
> "Al mar. Varios metros abajo, en este mismo edificio."
> "¿Pues de dónde lo sacan?" , pregunta Horario.
> "De los coches, la mayoría de las veces."
> [...] "La carcasa de la batería de un coche. Aquí la abrimos, extraemos el metal y lo procesamos hasta conseguir carbonato de litio"» (Gortari, 2024, pp. 231, 232).

Gortari, Indiana, and a few loyal friends along with a bevy of migrant children set sail for Veracruz, in hopes of mining the «cajas negras» of underwater cars, like buried treasure at the bottom of the ocean, full of lithium and thus, hope. This, too, seems an ingeniously overdetermined symbol – pointing in various directions at once. After all, «cajas negras» are usually thought of in relation to an airplane's recording device. These sunken boxes full of lithium, however, hold the ability to liberate the migrant children from the alien memories that plague them. It will allow them to forget.

The journey that Grijalva and her colleagues take reads like a steampunk fever dream. Fantastical childhood cinema like *The Goonies*, *Peter Pan*, or *Pirates of the Caribbean* seem possible touchstones: «En el bote van doce niños, todos enfermos, todos de Tamarindo. Antes de amanecer, Lionel hizo tronar las campanas de la iglesia y recorrió hasta la última calle anunciando el inminente arribo de los soldados» (Gortari, 2024, p. 190).

When Grijalva and crew reach the underwater city of Veracruz, the protagonist dons the atmospheric diving suit – seemingly, a relic of the past – because she is «la única que entra en el traje metálico que parece salido de *Diez mil lenguas de viaje submarino*» (Gortari, 2024, p. 272).

As described in previous parts in the novel, the protagonist comes up against "limits" – borders, barriers, obstacles – here as well:

> Por un momento, la caja negra se despega de tu pecho y se proyecta unos centímetros hacia el frente antes de volver a tus brazos con la contundencia de una bala de cañón. Consigues mirar hacia abajo y distingues el obstáculo: una alga parda hunde sus dientes en el traje a la altura del tobillo: una anguila (Gortari, 2024, pp. 272, 273).

In the next pages, Indiana, now the narrator, apostrophically describes Grijalva surfacing:[12] «[t]e abrazas a la caja negra, volteas hacia el resplandor y esperas encontrarte con mi mirada en la superficie.» (Gortari, 2024, p. 288).

With this, Grijalva's mission is complete; ostensibly, the children will be cured, and will begin residing, fugitives, in caves: «En tres días de viaje no encuentro un alma que sospeche la verdad, que las cuevas tienen nuevos habitantes, que los niños se refugian en una isla más allá del horizonte.» (Gortari, 2024, p. 287).

Hope is the order of the day. These final pages see Indiana assume a protagonist's role; his voice becomes that of the narrator. Somewhat like other epic journeys (say, Homer's *Odyssey*), Gortari's text also includes a homecoming of sorts – this one, stretching across virtual worlds. He meets his grandfather, Grijalva's father, who responds from his virtual world as a connectome:

> Ante una pantalla negra, escribo. Tecleo lo que hubieras escrito tú. Pregunto por un nombre, pongo "hola". Escribo lo que hubieras escrito tú. "¿Quién eres?", dice el mensaje en la pantalla. "Soy tu nieto", escribo y las luces de las torres titilan como si fantasmas eléctricos me espiaran desde su interior. Indiana (Gortari, 2024, p. 289).

One final point about hope in Gortari's work. Grijalva speaks about one particular song during the entirety of the book: Radiohead's tune *Pyramid Song*, the second track from the British band's 2001 album *Amnesiac*. The song is built upon a complex rhythmic structure – a theme with obvious parallels to the other artistic and investigative conundrums narrated in Gortari's work (Toy, 2023). What are the "barriers" or "limits" dictating a song's rhythmic structure? The song's lyrics allude to a journey to the bottom of the ocean (like Grijalva's), which seemingly doubles as a philosophical, spiritual, and emotional journey to discover oneself:

> I jumped in the river and what did I see? / Black-eyed angels swam with me / A moon full of stars and astral cars / And all the figures I used to see / All my lovers were there with me / All my past and futures / And we all went to heaven in a little row boat (Radiohead, 2001).[13]

Like the hopepunkish message of *Todo lo que amamos y dejamos atrás*, Radiohead's song, ends on an optimist if bittersweet, perhaps world weary note: «There was nothing to fear, nothing to doubt» (Radiohead, 2001). Gortari explicitly alludes to the song, titling his final chapter, simply, *Pyramid Song*; the chapter is composed merely by Gortari's Spanish translation of the lyrics: «No había nada que temer. Nada que dudar» (Gortari, 2024, p. 291).

U.S.-Mexico relations continue to transform and vulnerable youth continue to be cast into danger – especially along the borderlands. Gortari herself has, in a drastically different way, experienced an immense metamorphosis during the writing of the novel. By the same token, technology is also changing at a remarkable pace – as is the earth's climate. Even among these incredible phenomena, Gortari's novel tasks us to take stock of what we love and what we have left behind. Her work challenges us, with a punk attitude, with rebel sneers, and in our non-normative ways, to embrace hope.

[12] In interviews, Gortari notes that she wanted to write a novel that ends in the second person. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RS6IWq4mB2c&t=12s

[13] For lyrics, see: https://songmeanings.com/songs/view/33351/

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