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## The Future in Fragments: Three Critical Dystopian Works by Fernando Contreras Castro

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From the place of ground zero,  
O Lord, deliver us.  
From the rain of cobalt,  
O Lord, deliver us.  
From the rain of the strontium,  
O Lord, deliver us.

- Walter M. Miller, Jr., *A Canticle for Leibowitz*

In the preface to the 2014 edition of *Cantos de las guerras preventivas*, the Costa Rican writer Fernando Contreras Castro claims that the novel, originally published in 2006, responds to the permanent militarization of the global landscape that emerged during the post-9/11 dawn of the twenty-first century.

<sup>1</sup> Turning towards “la literatura fantástica de tendencia futurista” for his new work, Contreras Castro describes the novel as “una invitación a ponerse en la piel de las víctimas de dichas operaciones militares para el mantenimiento de la paz, tanto a la hora en sí de los ataques y bombardeos, como en el afán de reconstruir el sentido de la vida después de estos” (2014: 7). In many ways, Contreras Castro’s preface reflects what Naief Yehya has noted about the significance of the War on Terror in his recent book *Drone Visions: A Brief Cyberpunk History of Killing Machines*, in that “narratives of agony, terror, hopelessness, and excess, fundamentally structure the interaction between human nature and the significance of certain decisive technological changes” (11). The future worlds envisioned in the novel are also a response to the privatization of warfare and surveillance machines that were first put on display at the dawn of the War on Terror.<sup>2</sup>

In his preface, Contreras Castro goes on to say that an additional consideration was how to approach these themes without regenerating or reproducing the science fiction and cyberpunk models from American writers such as Philip K. Dick or William Gibson. Instead, he hoped to “mirar al futuro cercano desde las perspectivas y posibilidades de una América Latina que observa y padece las políticas depredadoras de quienes hacen la guerra” (7). In addition, Contreras Castro has added to the 2014 edition a seventh canto, written seven years later, that “responde a la necesidad de reflexionar sobre un posible nuevo orden social basado en la práctica de la solidaridad y en el rechazo rotundo de la competencia como forma de vida” (8). Taking this final note from Contreras Castro as my point of departure, in this paper I will examine a trilogy of works by the author as (critical) dystopias that present fragmented future worlds of destruction and discontent as a way of warning about the long-term consequences of global capitalism. In particular, I am interested in the ways in which writing and literature are used in these works to paradoxically place the reader at the precipice of virtually unrecognizable and hostile, yet not-too-distant futures.

The evolution of dystopian literature, which first emerged at the turn of the twentieth century, can be traced in relation to certain anxieties of distinct historical moments: the growing prominence of machines and the horrors of WWI; the rise of fascism and totalitarianism; Cold War-era fears over nuclear annihilation; and the looming threat of ecological disaster.<sup>3</sup> As Tom Moylan has rightly pointed out, “dystopia’s critical sensibility is taken up by authors who look beyond technology and the authoritarian state and turn to the especial imbrication of the economy and culture that capitalism has achieved at the cost of diminishing the complexity and potential of all humanity and the earth itself” (2000: xii). For his part, Gregory Claeys has noted that while dystopias often include an element of hope, in the twenty-first century a “less reassuring hope lies instead, commonly, in charting the fate of a few survivors of any number of kinds of catastrophe” (495). The trilogy of works by Fernando Contreras Castro analyzed in this article indeed respond to the realities of the twenty-first century. Indeed, these are bleak dystopian narratives of a post-9/11 world that also reflect concerns about climate change and the startling pace at which technology is advancing. Moreover, as is often the case with dystopian literature, each of these three works deal with history and writing. In his analysis of three dystopian novels that share similar themes of reflection on textuality, Moylan convincingly concludes that the works “teach their readers not only about the world around them but also about the open-ended ways in which texts such as the ones in front of their eyes can both elucidate that world and help to develop the critical capacity of people to know, challenge, and change those aspects of it that deny or inhibit the further emancipation of humanity” (2000: 199).

The texts discussed in this article each present fragmented visions of a dystopian world scattered across the broken landscapes of a not-distant future. *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* (2006) leads us through a series of crises that have left the region in ruins, and is narrated retrospectively from the perspective of troubadours to a dying muse. In *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida* (2013), we encounter a text that appears to be even more scattered and fragmented, devoid now of any discernible narrative thread or spatiotemporal boundaries. Finally, *Transhumano. Demasiado transhumano* (2019) bears witness to this same period of future destruction, yet from the perspective of a chronicler residing in the privileged space of a walled, private city reserved for the elite. Unlike the previous two works, which explore the aftermath of ecological destruction and perpetual warfare, Fernando Contreras Castro’s most recent novel instead focuses on the rapid acceleration of technological capabilities and transhumanism. Here, the evidence of ecological destruction and ensuing landscapes of scarcity and survival are present only tangentially. Of greater concern is the sudden obsolescence of humanity through the development of technology. The works examined in this article mark a significant shift in the author’s overall body of work, both thematically and geographically. Whereas the majority of Contreras Castro’s

novels indicate a preoccupation with history and the distinct urban spaces of Costa Rica – most notably: *Los Peor*, *Única mirando al mar*, *Cierto azul*, and *El tibio recinto de la oscuridad* – these works instead look at a bleak future and expand outward to include Central America more broadly.

The shift away from nationalistic utopian visions reflects the postwar realities of Central American fiction, as well as the globalized landscape of the twenty-first century.<sup>4</sup> As Amy Atchison and Shauna Shames have recently noted, “Many modern dystopian works feature not communist or fascist governments but ‘capitocratic’ governments, meaning rule by capitalism/market forces” (36). For their part, Rowland Hughes and Pat Wheeler have pointed out that “Rapid advances in genetic research, the growth of the internet, and fears of pandemic viruses have each provoked a variety of responses in contemporary dystopian literature and cinema” (2). The works by Fernando Contreras Castro analyzed in this article take aim at both of these issues by imagining a future world ruled by megacorporations that exploit their access to advanced technologies in order to consolidate power and maximize profits, all at the expense of humanity and the planet.

### **Cantos de las guerras preventivas**

*Cantos de las guerras preventivas* (2006) is composed of six cantos that recount distinct moments in a post-apocalyptic world over an undetermined period of time. Although there are no temporal markers to indicate how much time has passed since the initial moment of catastrophe or between the different narratives, there is a linear – albeit disjointed – forward progression in time that can be pieced together from fragments and clues from each canto. The events of the post-catastrophe future seem to move society from a stage of technological advancement and mass consumption to a primitive period of subsistence living. While seemingly indiscriminate perpetual warfare appears to be at the root of the rapidly deteriorating quality of life, it is the increasing power and influence of international megacorporations that introduce and maintain dystopian conditions in society. While the novel certainly explores the emergent issues of surveillance and security in a post-9/11 world and a postwar Central America, as illustrated in the opening paragraphs above, it also problematizes the impact of neoliberal policies in the region by imagining a future world in which corporations are all-powerful entities that exert influence over virtually every aspect of life. By shifting spaces and blurring time, the novel provides a disorienting glimpse into a wrecked future that is at once proximate and yet barely recognizable.

The sort of temporal and spatial disorientation at work throughout *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* becomes apparent from the very start with the paratextual elements that open the novel. By including verses from *Anales de Tlatelolco* at the beginning, Contreras Castro not only frames the events of the

future as part of a cycle of continuous violence and destruction, but also places it in a distinctly Mesoamerican setting. Moreover, the verses themselves serve to prefigure the testimonial nature of the six cantos, each of which is narrated from a distinct perspective:

*Y todo esto pasó con nosotros.  
Nosotros lo vimos,  
nosotros lo admiramos.  
Con esta lamentosa y triste suerte  
nos vimos angustiados. (12)*

The verses continue by describing horrifying scenes of blood and ruins, which also serve as a sort of parallel to the post-apocalyptic chaos described in some of the cantos. Immediately following the verses from *Anales de Tlatelolco* is a “Preludio a la agonía de la musa”, which further dislocates the reader in time by bringing to mind classical antiquity. The narrator explains the purpose of the visit from a long queue of traveling singers, and – by extension – the contents of the subsequent text: “te vamos a contar de otras gentes y otros tiempos, ahora que [...] tu memoria es un papiro indescifrable [...] estamos aquí para contarte al oído las historias de los cobardes que hicieron de las gentes presa de perros y pasto de aves” (13-14). The cantos, then, are a form of preserving the records of past events, which are at risk of disappearing – or being erased – from the collective memory. The future world traversed by the wandering cantors is bleak: towns razed by bombs, isolated communities scattered across the land, humans vulnerable to the threats of a hostile natural world. And yet, despite its apparent unfamiliarity, the future in *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* is not very remote: the date listed at the end of the prelude is 2034. Because the prelude presents the cantos as accounts of events from another time, it can be surmised that the narration retrospectively recounts moments from the past. That is to say, all of the tremendous upheaval and the dramatic reorganizing of society, recounted in the six cantos, takes place over the brief span of a few decades. The prelude, therefore – just as we will see with the cantos – both expands and condenses time, making the events to come seem at once both remote and imminent.

The first canto, divided into three interrelated texts, establishes the corporatocratic geopolitical landscape of a near future in which the Mega Empresa Planetaria controls virtually everything and maintains a sophisticated surveillance network that includes, among other things, a system of satellites monitoring every corner of the planet. The corporation introduces an initiative that includes the burning of all trees to prevent future forest fires, as well as the launching of the *guerras preventivas* to avoid the prospect of potential wars in the future. The ominous conclusion of Canto I essentially sets the tone for the subsequent cantos:

“Así terminó el presente y comenzó el futuro. Así fueron arrasados pueblos y ciudades y no alcanzamos a saber cómo acabaron con el futuro también” (28).

For its part, Canto II provides an account of the moment of impact from the low-intensity bombing campaign unleashed by the Mega Empresa Planetaria. The first-person plural narration serves as a collective voice that bears witness to the apocalyptic end, a carefully curated spectacle that is broadcast by hundreds of television channels. Canto II also foreshadows the discovery of an ancient world of the dead by future generations in Canto VI. The thousands of people in the underground city, while initially spared from the direct impact of the bombings, are ironically trapped alive due to the failures of technology and infrastructure that have been specifically engineered to withstand disasters and serve as a shelter. Towards the end of Canto II, the narrator offers a haunting, absurd vision of what may eventually become of the automatized underground city in a future world without humans – imagining the day when the gallery’s smart system “abriría sus puertas y una voz daría la bienvenida a nadie, y muchas voces ofrecerían doctas explicaciones e invitarían a nadie a pisar los interruptores que ponían en marcha los mecanismos del absurdo” (38).<sup>5</sup>

Unlike the first two cantos, Canto III takes place in a distinctly post-apocalyptic world after the initial waves of attacks have destroyed virtually everything in sight. Canto III is framed as the chronicles of Juan de las Cenizas, a priest from the San Crisóstomo del Atardecer cathedral, where a mass of shell-shocked survivors have sought refuge amidst the rubble and ruin. In this bleak world of perpetual darkness, time seems to have stopped; society has collapsed; objects have been stripped of their meaning; and death becomes more attractive than survival. Juan has been writing his chronicles in secrecy, while also serving as the steward of the cathedral’s 724,000 volumes of books, which are being burned to provide a meager source of heat in a desperately damp and frigid world.<sup>6</sup> The sole text spared from destruction is a Beatles songbook, which Juan is allowed to retrieve from the fire. Canto III ends with the dying priest handing over to one of the last groups joining the mass exodus into the mountains his personal notebook, “donde había transcrito y reorganizado lo poco del cancionero de los Beatles que se salvó del fuego. Les di[o] el cuaderno y les dij[o] que aquello era el Códice Bitleriano con oraciones, cantos de amor y consejos para la vida. Pronto, el origen de aquellas letras caería irremediabilmente en el olvido” (83).<sup>7</sup> And, as it becomes apparent in subsequent cantos, the songs transcribed in Juan’s notebook later become the prayers and sacred songs for future generations, who are indeed unaware of the origins of the mysterious words.

Canto IV moves away from the immediate impact and aftermath of the *guerras preventivas*, instead focusing on the rise of a new civilization centered at the undamaged Arca Mall. In a world of extreme resource scarcity, the group at Arca Mall – which comes to be known as La Ciudadela Sagrada de Pleyazulera –

leverages their continued access to running water and stockpiles of both food and other essential supplies to exert power over the surrounding areas.<sup>8</sup> In exchange for tribute payments, the Arca Mall group has agreed to raise and educate the children of the remaining survivors outside of the mall's perimeters, who would otherwise either starve – or, more likely – be sent away to die in the mines and factories of the Mega Empresa Planetaria. The education that the children receive within Arca Mall is centered around the formation of new histories, myths, and religious rituals. A key component of this monastic training are the songs of the Mshka Okanté – priests who study the sacred texts of Pleyazulera, the contents of which seem to suggest a connection with a distant and forgotten past: “El Mshka Okanté entona himnos elaborados a partir de antiguas transcripciones de las últimas palabras de otros Dioses, himnos de los que él mismo no comprende nada en absoluto, pero que son de una gran delicadeza y tan tristes que hacen llorar al mismo Mshka-Okanté” (107). Although the Codex Bitleriano is not mentioned directly in Canto IV, I argue that it is precisely this sort of ambiguous allusion that highlights both the continuities and discontinuities between disparate moments of the post-catastrophe future.

Canto V also describes the rise of a new religious sect of sorts that spreads throughout the industrial cities of the Mega Empresa Planetaria. However, it is the first of the cantos to explicitly identify the geographical setting as somewhere in Central America.<sup>9</sup> The ruins of an ancient Mayan temple become a site of pilgrimage and resistance against the corporate state, particularly as the rumor that God – mortally wounded by a precision missile attack – has taken shelter beneath the hidden ruins, reaches the industrial cities. Eventually, the site of Intemperie becomes a destination for dissidents seeking a new life of independence; it also becomes an unauthorized trading hub that spawns the growth of informal economies that exist beyond the control of the corporation. When further excavations at the site reveal ancient canals used for irrigation by the original Maya inhabitants, pilgrims begin smuggling into Intemperie “reservas de semillas celosamente guardadas y conservadas desde principios de siglo, cuando se penalizó su utilización” (123).<sup>10</sup> Threatened by the independence that Intemperie represents, the MEP eventually destroys the site entirely, leaving the once-wounded God now “mortalmente herido y desgarrado como los campesinos que cosechaban en los alrededores del observatorio, desangrado como los canales que habían vuelto a irrigar los campos” (140). The destruction of Intemperie not only ushers in a new era, but it also signals the cyclical nature of the region's violent history.<sup>11</sup>

Set in the coastal fishing community of Talamanca, the final canto of the first edition of Contreras Castro's novel takes place at an unspecified point of time in the future.<sup>12</sup> Not only does the title explicitly state that “se ignora cuántos años más tarde” that the narration occurs, but the anonymous narrator also radically condenses the past and strips history of its context by ascribing to local toponyms

new etymologies born out of a single cataclysmic event in the future past: the destruction of the Panama Canal, which marked the end of the old world and the beginning of the new (151). With no point of reference other than oral histories from post-flood generations, the narrator asserts that “Talamanca, en lengua de los antiguos quiere decir ‘el lugar donde fue desencadenado el mar’”, and that “en lengua de los antiguos [Canal de Panamá] quiere decir ‘puerta falsa’” (ibid). Here, the narrator has combined the histories of US imperialism in the early twentieth century, sixteenth century Spanish colonialism, and Costa Rica’s indigenous past.<sup>13</sup> This conflation of distinct periods of history, all subsumed under the broad category of the ancient times, has the effect of framing the future as distant and remote. This sense of the circularity of history and the temporal ambiguity throughout the six cantos leaves the distinct impression that all which has been recounted in the text – the destruction, the turmoil, and the dramatic cultural shifts in society – have perhaps unfolded over the span of several decades. That is to say, the reader must confront the possibility that such a radically different and uncertain future is perhaps not so remote.

### **Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida**

In many ways, *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida* – first published in 2013 – takes an even more radical approach in its textual subversions and fragmented visions of the future. The future worlds in *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida* are conjured in part through the economy of contrast and juxtaposition. Rather than detailed, narrative descriptions, it is instead through intertextuality and intratextuality – and indeed through the piecing together of seemingly disparate details – that the dystopian conditions and landscapes are fully realized. As Teresa Gómez Trueba has observed of recent collections of microfiction, “la disposición de los textos viene determinada por la voluntad previa de componer un conjunto organizado y no una mera reunión más o menos azarosa de microrrelatos [...] ya no se habla solo de unidad temática, sino de una nueva estructura narrativa [...] a partir del ensamblaje de unos determinados microrrelatos” (40). For his part, Lauro Zavala has noted that “A su vez, todas estas formas de minificción pueden ser consideradas como parte de la producción simbólica posmoderna, al poner en juego recursos de carácter architextual” (33). Throughout Contreras Castro’s collection of microfiction, which weaves together strands of prose, poetry, drama, philosophy, and pop culture references, the present is estranged by future reflections on a seemingly unfamiliar past. The ambiguity present in the title of this work of microfiction foregrounds the ways in which the fragmented landscapes of a definitively dystopian future will be conjured. To begin, the clear Biblical reference to the Promised Land at once evokes images of wandering, of home, of salvation, and of unparalleled abundance. Yet the title also immediately challenges those



notions, reducing the Promised Land to bits and pieces. As I will discuss below, there is also uncertainty as to whether the Promised Land refers to the world before the crisis, or whether the Promised Land is the unrealized utopian future world that had been heralded by megacorporations from the Global North, whose exploitative tactics and operations bring about extreme ecological destruction and resource scarcity in a privatized and highly securitized Global South.

*Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida* is a collection of microfiction, comprised of 103 unique and seemingly disparate titles that span a variety of themes, the majority of which offer brief and fleeting glimpses of a fractured and hostile future world. Unlike the clear textual interventions at play in both *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* and *Transhumano. Demasiado transhumano*, the titles found in *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida* lack any discernably identifiable narrator or cohesive narrative thread. Instead, it is a collective cacophony of anonymous narrators who appear to lead the reader through seemingly disparate moments of space and time, weaving together the barely recognizable debris of a future world that at once recalls the familiarity of the early twenty-first century, and yet has been all but stripped of any meaningful resemblance to the present.

As we will discuss below, there are very few temporal or spatial markers in *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida*. Indeed, time and space are largely described in relation to the lost worlds of a pre-crisis past. One of the common themes throughout this work is the constant tension between nostalgic longing and a sort of collective amnesia that tends to highlight the intergenerational differences in experiencing a world that has been reshaped by economic, ecological, and humanitarian crises. As we also see in *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* and *Transhumano. Demasiado transhumano*, the voices of witness serve as links to a past that recall the contemporary reader's own world of the early twenty-first century. At the same time, the extreme contrasts between the older and younger generations underscores the relative suddenness with which the unnamed crises have reshaped the landscape of a dystopian future. This disorienting effect of placing the reader on the precipice of a dramatically unfamiliar and hostile future is a common strategy in the critical dystopia. In addition to the spatio-temporal and narratological ambiguities in *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida*, there is also a constant disruption of form and structure that represent a fundamental questioning of traditional literary genres. On the one hand, the weaving together of seemingly disconnected *microrrelatos* itself serves as a sort of parallel to the fractured and fragmented dystopian landscapes presented in this collection. It is, as we will see throughout this section, a world of walls and drowned cities, a world in which even the most ancient celestial markers of time no longer exist.

The realities of ecological destruction in the future are made present only through myth and the oral stories passed down by the few survivors from previous generations. “Mitos de las gentes de los mares del norte” describes the sea as

covered in a thick layer of petroleum. “Luna rupestre” is one of several entries in this collection that point to the generational differences in perceiving the post-apocalyptic natural world, as it describes an old man’s longing for the sky to clear up long enough to see the moon, which now only exists in a book of photographs (227). Similarly, “Ojos de perro azul” paradoxically warns of both the immediacy of future ecological dystopias and the slow violence of climate change. The narrator questions “esa obsesión de los viejos con el color azul” – specifically for being the color of the sea, the mountains, the sky. For their part, the narrator prefers “los ojos grises del abuelo, son como el mar, como las montañas, como el cielo” (193). A similar sense of a lost past can be seen in “You may say I’m a dreamer,” as the narrative voice invites us to imagine “un cielo azul, un sol brillante, una temperatura de 28 grados, una playa nudista...ahora que no hay cielo, ni sol, ahora que la lluvia perenne no nos deja estar desnudos” (250). The use of popular song lyrics further distorts the temporal distances between past and future, as is also the case in “The piper at the gates of dawn,” in which the narrative voice explains that “Una flauta es lo más cercano a la naturaleza de los pájaros. Como ya no hay flautas, ni pájaros, el flautista imagina el ocaso, porque tampoco hay ocaso” (254).

This estrangement of the present is further emphasized in this collection through the defamiliarization of otherwise recognizable references to the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century. There is a sense of individual despair echoed in the brief entry “Como cuando parpadeaban las luces a lo lejos”: “Extraño el licor, las drogas, la música y las luces de neón. Extraño la gran ciudad, la internet y la televisión 3D, y extraño a la gente que sabía qué era todo eso.” In this direct appeal, the reader becomes aware of their own obsolescence in the future. The title “Fronteras sin medicos” (192) inverts the name of a well-known humanitarian NGO that exists in the present as a way of emphasizing an extreme alternative reality in the future. The consequences of the future failure of present efforts at curbing climate change are evident in “Protocolo de Kioto.” In this future world, both the memory of one of Japan’s largest cities and the 1997 international climate treaty that was adopted there have been erased by the effects of climate change: “Protocolo de Kioto,” así se llama la ciudad submarina que construyeron los japoneses” (250). The loss of a past world remains one of the constant elements throughout the collection of stories in *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida*.

As briefly discussed above, there are a number of generational differences that distinguish the varied ways in which people experience the fractured future. In “La marca hace la diferencia”, there is a genealogical progression of corporeality that marks the passage of time: “En los hombros de nuestros niños no se le ve la cicatriz que llevan sus padres donde, de niños, les insertaron el chip de identificación y localización por radio frecuencia, entonces obligatorio...Ni la que llevan sus abuelos donde, de niños, les aplicaron las vacunas, entonces obligatorias” (198). Similarly, there is a disconnect between the experience of the narrator of

“Orgánico certificado” and his grandfather, whose daily ritual is to take out “esa bolsita que dice ‘café orgánico certificado’, la desenvuelve, la estira y la huele un buen rato. Después la guarda cuidadosamente. A veces le corren las lágrimas” (218). Not only does this reference echo references to persistent rain and similar climatic changes in some of the other entries, “Orgánico certificado” also brings to mind Victory Coffee in Orwell’s *1984*, which adds yet another layer of interpretation to the collection. For its part, the story “George O.” underscores the fact that in spite of the apparent chaos and instability in this future world, there is still, importantly, an inescapable element of surveillance and control: “Más allá de las fronteras, las cámaras con que vigilan nuestros movimientos ya no son para su seguridad, sino para su entretenimiento” (245). Finally, in “Las nobles verdades”, the elders discuss the ways in which they teach the younger generations the “artes fundamentales: Hacer el fuego. Filtrar el agua. Acertar con la flecha. Memorizar las canciones. Consultar el Oráculo” (213). Here, the preservation of the past and the pursuit of the future are valued among the vital skills of survival.

### **Transhumano. Demasiado transhumano**

In *The Ecological Thought*, Timothy Morton argues: “Imagine the air we breathe becoming unbreathable. There will be no more environmental poetry because we will all be dead. Some ecological language appears to delight in this, even sadistically, by imagining what the world would be like without us. Some deep ecological writing anticipates a day when humans are obliterated like a toxic virus or vermin” (location no. 413). *Transhumano. Demasiado transhumano* does precisely this: the novel is presented as an anthology of chronicles written by Antonio La Puente, whose writings explore the transformation of Central America into “un gigantesco proyecto urbanístico. Dos tipos de ciudades privadas fueron los elegidos para la zona: las ciudades tipo VIP, para ‘vivir como en siglo XXII’, con todos los lujos de una ‘ciudad inteligente’, y las ‘Zonas Protegidas’, zonas de producción, maquilas, zonas agrícolas y ganaderas” (13). This division of the landscape into privileged, protected cities of consumption and spaces of production, reflects what Franco Berardi sees as the fundamental separation in contemporary global society between “the inside-the-bunker social sphere and the outside-the-bunker social sphere” – where the bunker is the site of “the function of the financial decisions that dominate and exploit the whole cycle of production and the function of cognitive labor,” and where the extra-bunker space is reserved for people whose “subsistence is based on a direct relation to the physical matter of production. This is the unprotected territory of the metropolis: industrial workers, the unemployed, migrants, refugees” (p.138).

Published in the year 2127, the book contains columns written by La Puente between the years 2023 and 2073. And while the original publication dates of the

individual columns are not included in the anthology, there is a sort of chronological sequencing evident in the themes covered within the chronicles, particularly through the progressively more advanced technologies that are presented and critiqued in each one. Perhaps just as importantly, the anthology marks the first time that the columnist's work – which “estuvo censurada para los habitantes del exterior de las ciudades privadas a lo largo de varias décadas durante el último dominio humano” – has appeared in print (ix). In that sense, then, the publication provides a degree of permanence to a record of the past that has been controlled by authorities and restricted by technology.<sup>14</sup> As a collection, *La Puente*'s chronicles bear witness to the tremendous technological, social, and biological changes that take place over the course of the twenty-first century by providing an account of major historical events, from the inauguration of the high tech private city of Lempira Siglo XXII in the year 2022 to the eventual expulsion of the last humans from private cities across the globe following the introduction of the first generations of transhumans. This ongoing oscillation between present and future, as well as the reversion of humanity back to a less technologically developed, predigital state, creates a sort of disorienting expansion and contraction of future history that serves to remind the contemporary reader of Contreras Castro's 2019 novella of the approaching crises brought about by globalization.

The world from which the private city of Lempira Siglo XXII emerges is one marked by violence, economic insecurity, and political instability. *La Puente* frames the founding of the city within the context of a series of destabilizing historical events – in particular, Hurricane Mitch (1998); the military coup in Tegucigalpa (2009); and having the world's highest murder rate (2012) – that would eventually lead to Honduras becoming “el infierno fértil que se andaba buscando para plantear una semilla nueva en el planeta” with Lempira Siglo XXII (7). Initially financed by South Korea and a number of powerful transnational corporate enterprises, the private city represents “la máxima realización de las ideologías neoliberales del último cuarto del siglo XX” (15). Built on a parcel of land in expropriated indigenous territory and purchased directly from the Honduran government, the city takes a total of ten years to build. *La Puente* suggests that the region was already priming itself for foreign investment and megaprojects thirty years before the planning of Lempira Siglo XXII. While he does not explicitly name the peace accords of 1992, it is clear that the “pacificación” and “estabilización” mentioned by *La Puente* refer to the postwar period in Central America, which was in many ways shaped by the neoliberal shift (13).<sup>15</sup> It is against this backdrop, and under the pretense of safety and security, that the city of Lempira Siglo XXII is conceived and constructed.

And although Lempira Siglo XXII is an innovative urban project designed, in part, to serve as a model for future private cities, it should be noted that it is part of a larger trend that points to the imminent and inevitable collapse of geopolitical

borders and sovereign nations. The future, as La Puente points out in his early chronicles of the city, will be dictated by access to advanced technology: “Poco a poco los antiguos estados van desapareciendo, y el mundo se dividirá por las murallas de las ciudades privadas en un interior altamente avanzado en tecnologías y modos de vida, y un extramuros donde las gentes más dispares vivan de maneras cada vez más primitivas, reducidas a reservas genéticas y manos de obra esclava” (15). Beyond the walls of Lempira Siglo XXII, the population of the former republic of Honduras is essentially divided into two main groups: employees of the private city, and the unemployed, which consists of “los desempleados que no abandonaban el país y conservaban la inútil esperanza de convertirse en empleados, y los que se sumaban a las interminables filas de los ‘sin tierra’ centroamericanos, que ya constituían una aplastante mayoría” (5). It is worth noting here that Lempira Siglo XXII represents one of two types of private cities. Developed as a “ciudad inteligente” with all sorts of luxuries and comforts, it is a city that caters to the wealthy. In contrast are the *zonas protegidas*, which include “zonas de producción, maquilas, zonas agrícolas y ganaderías” (13). This second class of private cities in many ways encapsulates the exploitative and extractivist development of Central America throughout the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

If Lempira Siglo XXII is the more luxurious and secure variety of private cities – indeed, a “VIP” city – it still manages to conceal some problematic plans for its clients, and by extension all of humanity. During the ten years of city planning, a select team from the Department of Eugenics and Genetic Engineering – named after the Spanish conquistador and governor of Guatemala, Pedro de Alvarado y Contreras – has worked on “la elaboración de las políticas de eugenesia, salud pública e higiene de la ciudad” (11). At the same time, one of the preliminary requirements for becoming a member of Lempira Siglo XXII is to have a neural interface implanted behind the ears, which enables users to connect virtually with the digital city. From the beginning, then, La Puente implicitly calls into question the motives of the megacorporations and presents the reader with a view of an uncertain future where both bodies and minds are to be closely surveilled and controlled. While La Puente’s chronicles take aim at a wide array of cultural phenomena and social issues, what remains consistent is a certain degree of apprehension towards the rapid advancement of technology and the potential consequences. As someone living within the walls of the *ciudad inteligente* – a physical city that is interlinked with a virtual network to which members must be connected – La Puente has the privilege of being present to witness technological and social developments in real-time. And despite having free reign to publish his columns within Lempira Siglo XXII and other private cities, La Puente’s work is censored for readers beyond the walls for several decades – presumably because of the questions raised and his critical approach to the operations and intentions of the Mega Empresa Planetaria (ix). Indeed, La Puente’s columns raise questions about

the ethics of scientific experiments and projects that are undertaken for the sake of profit potential and the creation of new markets. There is, more importantly, the increasingly relevant and urgent question about the future of humanity in a digital, genetically engineered world.

The first of La Puente's chronicles included in the anthology explores the possibilities and limitations of technology in the new city. Focusing on the inauguration of Lempira Siglo XXII, the columnist covers some of the early milestones that seem to point to a promising future offered by the technological advancements of a digitally-integrated city. When one of the spectators enjoying the virtual fireworks display as part of the inaugural festivities suddenly suffers a brain aneurysm, the emergency leads to a series of firsts for the city and the new technologies that support it. First, a biometrics app instantly transmits the patient's vital signs to the local hospital, which immediately sends an emergency transport vehicle in response. Meanwhile, an urgent message is delivered to a 17-year-old neurosurgeon, who performs the first successful virtual surgical intervention from a distance of several kilometers. The operation not only successfully demonstrates the practicality and effectiveness of virtual reality in an emergency medical setting, but it also serves as a sort of proof of concept for the myriad uses for the smart lenses that connect the members of Lempira Siglo XXII, all of whom have simultaneously observed the nearly three hour operation. This singular event in the inaugural moments of the city points to issues of security, surveillance, and virtual commodification that reappear throughout La Puente's chronicles. And yet behind the ostensible promise of a future world vastly improved by technology, the smart lenses and the inaugural festivities at Lempira Siglo XXII hide a darker side of reality. La Puente is sternly reminded by the city's disciplinary council that "aquí no hay ciudadanos, pese a ser esta una ciudad. Aquí solo hay clientes. La gente como usted y su familia vive aquí porque pudo pagar la membresía, eso es todo" (14). This shift from a society of citizens to a society of consumers has been taking place for some time, as Néstor García-Canclini has noted:

The relation between citizens and consumers has been altered throughout the world due to economic, technological, and cultural changes that have impeded the constitution of identities through national symbols [...] For many men and women, especially youth, the questions specific to citizenship, such as how we inform ourselves and who represents our interests, are answered more often than not through private consumption of commodities and media offerings than through the abstract rules of democracy or through participation in discredited political organizations (5)

This point is particularly relevant to the founding of – and future plans for – the private city of Lempira Siglo XXII, an urban development built exclusively for a mostly young population of applicants from families with financial means.

Connected to the city through virtual reality, its clients have little to no agency when it comes to navigating a new world that is filtered through technology. When the young neurosurgeon briefly disconnects his smart lenses during the celebratory fireworks display, the city's virtual facade immediately vanishes: "había oscuridad y silencio donde un segundo antes había habido el más estremecedor espectáculo de fuegos artificiales desde la escena de los hobbits manipulando las pólvoras de Gandalf en el inolvidable clásico del rudimentario cine de principios de siglo" (4). Members of Lempira Siglo XXII and other private cities are lulled into accepting an altered version of reality, while at the same time being influenced by content controlled by megacorporations. Similarly, while Lempira Siglo XXII appears, at least from within, to be a city illuminated from all sides by a spectacular fireworks display, seen from beyond its walls, "la ciudad privada se veía como un oscuro ajedrez de sombras y silencio" (ibid). And although La Puente's chronicles focus on issues and current events taking place within the walls of the city, he is also unwavering in his insistence on reminding readers of the existence of a world beyond its borders, suggesting that "el mundo era eso que no tenía acceso a Lempira Siglo XXII" (5). This dichotomy is one that resurges towards the end of the novel, when the last humans, including La Puente, are expelled from the private cities. The social, economic, and political disparities between the walled city and the outside world is a theme that Contreras Castro explores in earlier works, such as *Única mirando al mar* (1993), *Cantos de las guerras preventivas* (2006), and *Fragmentos de la Tierra Prometida* (2013), and I would argue that it reflects a certain apprehension about the future implications of the ongoing consolidation of power among megacorporations, particularly in relation to citizenship.

While La Puente's chronicles document the innovative technological advancements at the core of numerous ongoing projects, they also express a certain degree of anxiety regarding the growing influence exerted by megacorporations. As John P. Clark has recently observed,

Today, we're faced with the dominance of late capitalist pseudo-topias and pseudo-utopias, spaces that fake place and fake goodness. They are the spaces of economic, bureaucratic, and technocratic domination. They are the spaces in which the imitation of life replaces life, and a simulacrum of society devours community. They are the spaces in which nihilism, the loss of faith in life and community, is internalized so completely that those who rebel against the ruling version of utopia can only do so through a reactive nihilism (287)

Indeed, while Lempira Siglo XXII and the numerous private cities around the planet that are modeled after it promise their members security and a better world vastly improved by technology, the true intentions of the powerful corporations gradually

come into focus. On the subject of the Silla de Dios, an enormous throne being built in the desert for God's return on Judgment Day, La Puente considers it to be a "proyecto perverso, con fines hegemónicos y comerciales" that invites every sort of investment – including taxes, tithes, and donations (33). Moreover, the media's concocted stories about crusades and holy wars waged over the throne, as well as reports of terrorist attacks, are designed to "enardecer las masas y provocar el deseo de cada devoto de colaborar en favor del trono que ocupará su Dios", with the ultimate goal being "el aniquilamiento de las fronteras geopolíticas del mundo y la consolidación de la Mega Empresa Planetaria" (34). Similarly, in his coverage of the global campaign to elect a suitable candidate from a pool of pre-selected deceased women to be medically resurrected from the dead, La Puente criticizes the commodification of corpses by corporations "en vallas publicitarias, en anuncios comerciales en todos los medios, y agregando los rostros de las chicas al lado de los logotipos de las etiquetas de sus productos" (46). The contest, as La Puente observes, threatens to devalue human life and trivialize death, but it also raises critical questions about consent and the commercialization of private information after death. The end goal of the global competition is twofold. On the one hand, the emotion and drama surrounding the contest "es el medio buscado por sus viles organizadores para el fin último de comprometer al inadvertido consumidor en una guerra mediática que, como resultado positivo, redundará en ganancias millonarias para las firmas patrocinadoras" (49). On the other hand, the competition serves as a proof of concept for the previously theoretical idea of reversing the natural cycle of life. Once resurrection has been demonstrated successfully, La Puente warns, it will become a private service available only to the wealthy, "con lo cual se deja a la muerte reducida a uno más de los padecimientos de clase, como ocurre con las enfermedades cuya cura, en vez de democratizarse, se vende a precios impagables para los sectores desfavorecidos" (51). Both of these projects push the boundaries of technology while capitalizing on the emotions of members in order to drive media traffic and to maximize profits.

In La Puente's chronicles that explore issues related to the further integration of the biological with the technological, the future trajectory of Lempira Siglo XXII and other private cities comes into perspective. Each new campaign and technological innovation is informed – at least to some degree – by previous projects and discoveries. And while technology promises to deliver exciting, new possibilities to members that had previously only existed in the realm of science fiction, as La Puente observes on several occasions, these chronicles raise questions about the implications of both surveillance and the commercialization of the body. Given that the implanting of a microchip is one of the conditions for membership in Lempira Siglo XXII and other private cities, it is not surprising that corporations continue to explore and exploit ways of further integrating technology with human consciousness. La Puente supports the Programa Borges, which consists of a "libro



incorporado, o interiorizado” that transmits “al cerebro humano el contenido puro y puntual de un texto literario” (35). The technology, which has been in the testing phase for three decades and remains mostly classified, allows its users to become “el autor definitivo y soberano de la obra que lea” (39). Rather than passive readers who simply absorb information, as was the intended outcome, the inner-book instead produces active creators, as each subject experiences something uniquely different from the original text and from other subjects exposed to the same material. What makes the Programa Borges a threat to the newly established social order is its inability to be standardized and controlled, a point that highlights the Mega Empresa Planetaria’s ongoing objective of one day being able to control, manipulate, and monitor the minds of its members by taking advantage of the embedded neural chips.

Unlike the Programa Borges, which feeds information into the user’s smart lenses and deposits vast volumes of hyper-compressed information into the brain, the “Imperativo de la verdad” is a procedure designed to facilitate in the interrogation of suspects by prompting the forced recall of a specific memory, using a device the width of a human hair that is attached to the brain. The procedure, which has yet to be proven successful, operates under the fallacious assumption that memory is a faithful reproduction of past events. While the procedure highlights the tenuous nature of testimonies, accusations, and sworn oaths, La Puente speculates that perhaps it “solo sirve de base y fundamento positivo a la vieja sospecha de que son las leyes las que crean al infractor” (58). La Puente concludes his column by noting that the project suffers from the very same deficiencies as its unreliable predecessors – the truth serum and the lie detector (61). Nevertheless, despite its documented ineffectiveness, the enterprise is ready to finalize the device’s rollout and begin implementing the procedure as soon as possible. La Puente’s chronicle hints at the inevitable misuse of the technology in the misappropriation of justice. With each new device or experiment, it seems, there arise greater opportunities for controlling the minds of members and collecting an enormous pool of data.

The issues of surveillance, security, and citizenship become even more urgent with the launching of Cerebro 2030, a massive prison complex orbiting the planet. Although it is ostensibly constructed with the intention of making cities safer and lowering the crime rate, La Puente decries the idea of “la justicia en manos de una megacorporación que no debe explicaciones a nadie”, particularly in light of the topics covered in his earlier chronicles (63). If the Imperativo de la verdad recalls, to some degree, the application of mind-reading capabilities and law enforcement activities reminiscent of *Minority Report*, the enormous penitentiary brings to mind the sort of body-mind harvesting seen in *The Matrix* trilogy. Prisoners are condemned to a permanent dream state, as their bodies are “alimentado y cuidado por un sistema de entubamiento gástrico, conexión

intravenosa, electroestimulación muscular y, finalmente, cada cerebro es monitoreado desde el procesador central por una interfaz encefálica” (66). Financed by both politicians and corporations, the 52-story prison has taken 16 years and a total of 1.2 million workers to construct, and is now entirely maintained by robots and monitored remotely by humans on Earth. At the center of the colossal circular structure is an enormous database powered by the most advanced processor available, which is critical for supporting the corporation’s ambitious project of building “una verdadera **gramática de los sueños** con miras a su total comprensión, en una primera etapa, para llegar posteriormente a su manipulación y dominio” (66, emphasis in the original). The project requires not only adequate processing power to store the endless streams of data, but also a steady supply of human subjects from which to extract data.

This demand for more inmates can only be achieved by streamlining the judicial process and broadening the definition of punishable crimes, which results in not only adults being incarcerated, but also children and newborns. To justify such a clear violation of human rights, the Corporación Cerebro comes up with new classifications, such as “criminales por defecto”, and exploits statistics to identify appropriate target populations from which to select its juvenile test subjects. As a result, “Miles de niños, provenientes en su mayoría de regiones pobres, conflictivas, o superpobladas del planeta, arriban a Cerebro 2030 y son introducidos a sus ‘féretros’, víctimas de juicios sumarios, condenados a salir del mundo de la vigilia e ingresar al sueño forzado como sujetos experimentales” (69). The project, moreover, is one that will require many generations to complete, which in turn necessitates that the public accept the increasingly aggressive approaches to law enforcement and strict sentencing guidelines for even the most insignificant or imagined infraction. Thus, the general population is suddenly turned into a pool of potential test subjects for the prison: “todo ciudadano es susceptible, sin excepción, de calificar como criminal e ir a parar a ese gigantesco cementerio donde los muertos flotan vivos alrededor del planeta” (73). La Puente laments that humanity has not learned any lessons from historical events such as the Holocaust or Abu Ghraib, preferring instead to buy into the promise of technology as a suitable solution for perceived societal problems. The goal of Cerebro 2030 is not to make society more secure or to reform criminals, but instead “lo que se sigue condenando es la pobreza, y que el objetivo sigue siendo el control cada vez más minucioso de las poblaciones” (ibid). This last point is particularly relevant considering that is unclear who will access and act upon the data generated from the perpetually dreaming inmates. Regardless, as Justin Joques has noted of complex systems of computation, “these systems aggregate code written across the globe and parts manufactured outside the purview of their owners into complex networks that belie attempts to control them” (5). As artificial intelligence continues to become more advanced, humanity’s control over data will become increasingly tenuous.<sup>16</sup>

Moreover, corporate control over the human body and mind via technological devices and systems of surveillance has potentially far-reaching implications for the future of humanity.

The commercialization of technologies ostensibly designed for altruistic purposes continues to be the focus of La Puente's attention in the column "Cinco segundos y cuarto bien valen 'su peso' en oro", which discusses the development of a liquid chip of virtually infinite storage capacity. While the chip offers a number of promising benefits, such as "ubicación inequívoca de los sujetos, biometría infalible, alerta instantánea ante la aparición de la más insignificante 'anomalía' en el organismo", the true purpose of the chip is in fact to copy "cuantas cadenas sinápticas fuera posible, con el fin de 'cartografiar' una sensación" (75). And while the project ultimately falls short in its objectives of replicating sensory experiences between subjects, the development of a database of synaptic maps takes humanity one step closer to being reproducible and synthesizable. It is precisely this shift that La Puente covers in his final two columns, which chronicle the introduction of transhumans, which are intended to be the link between a human past and a posthuman future.<sup>17</sup> The public unveiling of the first generation of transhumans takes place on March 3, 2070 – nearly half a century after La Puente's initial chronicles about the inauguration of Lempira Siglo XXII. The city, along with hundreds of other private cities around the planet, is presenting this first cohort of 1,200 transhuman children – who are born genderless and with skin tones not found among human populations – as "el máximo logro de la ingeniería genética alcanzado hasta la fecha" (85). Given that genetic engineering was part of the original planning process of Lempira Siglo XXII even before its inauguration, it can be inferred that the plans for developing transhumans were present from the very beginning, and that all of the projects and experiments over the years have been leading up to this: "son el resultado de más de cien años de experimentos y son el sueño realizado de la antigua ciencia ficción" (88). While the peculiar and exceptional transhuman children are initially met with awe and curiosity, their arrival also poses a direct threat to the future of humanity. The writing, it seems, has long been on the wall: "entendimos por qué se cernían sobre nosotros aquellas gigantescas cúpulas sintéticas: en diez años no habrá bajo las cúpulas un solo ser humano, la presión atmosférica se elevará a un nivel insoportable para nuestros débiles cuerpos" (87). The city, ostensibly built for the security of its paying members, will gradually become inaccessible to all humans, who have come to rely on chips and other devices to interact with the virtual interface built into the private cities. The transhumans, in contrast, "pueden interactuar con la realidad virtual de manera incomprensible para nosotros, sin prótesis, sin interfaces" (88). It is perhaps unsurprising, then, that humans will become increasingly dependent on transhumans as they suddenly find themselves to be "una especie en extinción"

(ibid). With the birth of transhumans, humans have been cast out of the future, relegated to their new role as the providers of genetic material.

By the final column in the anthology, it is unclear how many humans actually remain on the planet. La Puente never explains what became of the “millones de personas” who had been excluded from the VIP private cities in the 2020s, noting only that “las reservas genéticas est[á]n pobladas por miles de seres humanos” destined to serve as the gene pool for transhumans (91). The countless children and adults who have been rounded up and sent to the prison complex in space would account for some of the reduction in the population of humans on the planet, as would the aftermath of the false flag attack that destroys the Panama Canal in 2037, which “fue el inicio de una serie de bombardeos a varias ciudades latinoamericanas cuyos pueblos no renunciaban aún la idea de república soberana” (90). La Puente writes this final series twenty years after the introduction of the first transhumans, and five years after the last humans are evacuated from the now uninhabitable private cities. Humans have now been rendered utterly obsolete by transhumans, who continue to develop new technology for their own use and cut humans off from accessing virtual reality and other technologies that they had previously enjoyed in the private cities. Instead of a high tech future world, the surviving humans are returned “a las formas de vida de finales del siglo xx, sin las pesadillas de la época” (95). And yet, far from living in miserable conditions, the remaining humans are well taken care of, as they continue to serve as the raw materials for transhumans. Deprived of access to the high tech devices and virtual reality found in the private cities, the surviving humans do have access to books and other relics of history: “las bibliotecas, monumentos y museos de las antiguas ciudades” become their pilgrimage sites (97). Despite their apparent free reign, however, the future for humans has become increasingly uncertain.

The end of La Puente’s chronicle finds humans comfortable, and yet both oblivious and mere steps away from obsolescence. They are under constant surveillance, with even the most mundane details of everyday life being tracked and recorded. And while the transhumans have acquired virtually everything they could take from humans, including genetic material and the sum of all human knowledge, “no cesan de observarnos, de analizar los datos que tienen de nosotros... como si de alguna manera, desearan algo que aún poseemos y de lo que no hubieran podido apropiarse” (98). And yet, as La Puente points out, it would be an error to assume that transhumans are a continuation, or an evolution of humanity. Unfortunately for the remaining humans, the transhumans owe them nothing: it was machines that made transhumans possible, and supercomputers which designed their genetic code and functionality. And despite the fact that they are allowing humans to live in comfortable conditions, there is simply not enough known about the transhumans to be able to determine whether their intentions are innocent or sinister – a quandary that only grows more puzzling with time. La Puente makes an

important point about future relations between human and transhumans: “cuando muera el último humano portador de inteligentes, el mundo de los transhumanos será invisible para los sobrevivientes. No se volverá a saber de ellos” (100). That world is already one that is impossible for humans to comprehend: transhumans are able to perceive other planes of reality without the aid of technology; their surveillance devices and systems are increasingly imperceptible to humans; and the walls of the private cities begin to blend into the landscape. The transhumans, in other words, have rendered humans obsolete and themselves practically invisible.

La Puente concludes by speculating about the nature of the future relationship between humans and transhumans. Will they let humanity die out once they no longer need human DNA? Will they continue to intervene in human affairs, or will they forget about humanity altogether? Will humans continue to provide vital genetic information, or will transhumans figure out how to take the next evolutionary leap to posthumanism, abandoning their need for organic bodies? La Puente predicts that transhumans “¡Serán mitología! Nuestras crónicas, o lo que de ellas sobreviva, hablarán de seres magníficos con habilidades extraordinarias que sacaron a la humanidad de la edad oscura de las guerras y la destrucción, que limpiaron nuestros estanques, que mataron a los monstruos que nos acosaban, que limpiaron el aire y sanearon la Tierra” (102). La Puente’s columns appear to be documenting both the final chapter in the history of a disappearing human race and the rapid evolution of a now invisible transhuman species. And yet the chronicles have been posthumously anthologized for the human reader by some form of nonhuman entity, which leaves a glimmer of hope for the future.

### **The future familiar**

This dystopian trilogy by Fernando Contreras Castro imagines near-future worlds in which the combined effects of corporatization, climate change, and advanced technology bring humans to the brink of extinction – indeed, of being written out of the future history of a planet in peril. While these works do not explicitly ask us to take action, it is clear that they are drawn from the real conditions of the present, and invite readers to reflect on the future consequences of actions and conditions in the present. As Amy Atchison and Shauna Shames rightly remind us, dystopian fiction “magnifies contemporary patterns or trends to warn us about what could result from them in the future” (36). Adam Stock similarly observes that modern dystopian fiction “often projects action forwards into the future in order to look back at the present, self reflexively emphasizing the question how did we get here?” (1). And yet, when we examine actual existing conditions of the present, it becomes clear that the future dystopian worlds in Contreras Castro’s works are not unimaginable or beyond the realm of possibility. The post-9/11 global landscape has become one of security, surveillance, and a

constant state of war. The idea that artificial intelligence can soon destroy humanity is no longer the subject of science fiction. We are now entering an era in which the deep-fakes from five years ago seem so primitive, as AI can now, among other things, create frighteningly realistic images and videos from a written prompt. Our every movements are tracked and recorded, and we willfully sign away our rights to privacy for the sake of the newest app. Corporations now have ownership of the DNA data of millions of people across the planet, and gene editing technologies such as CRISPR – despite the promising applications in the medical field – pose serious questions about what sort of genetic manipulations will be performed in the future. And finally, the devastating effects of climate change are being felt with alarming frequency across the globe. The futures described in the works of Fernando Contreras Castro are no longer futures of fiction, but are instead increasingly reflections of our present reality. As critical dystopias, these works do not condemn us to an unavoidable fate, but instead offer reflections on how to change course.

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<sup>1</sup> The commentary here regarding Contreras Castro's preface comes from the 2014 edition of the novel. However, the textual analysis and page numbers cited throughout the rest of this article refer to the 2006 edition.

<sup>2</sup> As Yehya points out, the War on Terror offered a test trial for the use of Predator drones equipped with Hellfire missiles, and indeed that "the drone emerges as an armed, all-seeing, eye in the sky that never blinks, nor tires, nor becomes distracted" (17).

<sup>3</sup> See Gregory Claeys' (2016) discussion of the "post-totalitarian dystopia" for a more comprehensive overview.

<sup>4</sup> For more on postwar Central American literature, please see Arias (2009).

<sup>5</sup> In my view, this hypothetical rendering of the future also predicts a posthuman world more broadly, as the narrator imagines wildlife eventually becoming accustomed to the sounds and repetitive schedule of the automated underground world (38).

<sup>6</sup> At the conclusion of the chapter, the remaining survivors abandon Juan alone amidst the rubble of the cathedral, where he awaits his eventual death. There, amidst the mud and the rain, Juan observes swarms of termites as they devour the church's organ. He remains there, moreover, "para ver cómo las termitas babeaban mirando el rollo de hojas de mi crónica, preservada de sus fauces en una garrafa de vidrio de la que alguna vez bebí el vino" (82).

<sup>7</sup> The Codex Bitleriano, which appears between Canto III and Canto IV, is divided into several different groups. The "Himnos a los dioses" include, among other songs: "Himno al Dios Sin Lugar" ("Nowhere Man"); "Himno a la Diosa Madre" ("Let It Be"); "Himno al Dios Marino Octopus" ("Octopus's Garden"). The "Himnos al sol" include verses from songs such as "I'll Follow the Sun"

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and “Good Day Sunshine”. Additional Beatles lyrics are included in the Codex, appearing under the categories “Canciones amorosas”, “Fragmentos”, and “Consejos a los más jóvenes”. All of the lyrics in the Codex are written in Spanish.

<sup>8</sup> The name of the mall here is significant, as it evokes the Biblical story of the flood, but also frames the mall as a sort of sanctuary designed to ensure the survival of humanity in a post-catastrophe future. As further evidence of the both sudden and gradual separation from the past, the name Arca Mall is eventually dropped altogether, and the site becomes known as “La Ciudadela Sagrada de Pleyazulera,” which also happens to be the name of the nature reserve that appears in the novel *Transhumano. Demasiado transhumano* (2019).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, the title of Canto V: “‘Intemperie’, refugio de disidentes oculto en algún lugar de la selva entre Puebla y Panamá” (111).

<sup>10</sup> The planting of illegal seeds and the return to traditional agricultural methods in *Intemperie* contrasts greatly from “las zonas oficiales, donde las semillas daban una sola cosecha y las plantas resistían el embate de cualquier plaga” (134).

<sup>11</sup> The image here brings to mind the passage from *Anales de Tlatelolco* that appears at the beginning of the novel:

*“Gusanos pululan por calles y plazas,  
y en las paredes están salpicados los sesos.  
Rojas están las aguas, están como teñidas  
y cuando las bebimos,  
fue como si bebiéramos agua de salitre”* (12).

<sup>12</sup> A later edition of the novel includes a seventh canto, which has not been included in the present analysis.

<sup>13</sup> While the region was home to the Cacicazgo of Talamanca, which included the Costa Rican indigenous groups of the Bribris and Cabécares, the name Talamanca was imposed by the Spanish colonizers (Solórzano Fonseca and Quirós Vargas 176). However, the original toponym of Talamanca dates back to at least the ninth century CE in Spain.

<sup>14</sup> It is worth noting here Justin Joque’s discussion of cyberwar, wherein “the whole structure of knowing and observing is opened as a site of direct military intervention. It is not only a question of interpretation and selective archives. The entire archive and our ability to comprehend the archive may be attacked at any moment” (7).

<sup>15</sup> As Misha Kokotovic has convincingly argued, “The parties of the former guerrillas have had little success in slowing the implementation by Central American governments of the free market, neoliberal economic and social policies promoted by the United States in Latin America and throughout the world. [...] Though intended to bring about socialism, the revolutionary wars of the 1970s and 1980s may instead have facilitated the hegemony of transnational free-market capitalism in Central America” (17).

<sup>16</sup> See Delbert, Caroline. “There’s a Damn Good Chance AI Will Destroy Humanity, Researchers Say in a New Study”, *Popular Mechanics*, 14 October 2022.

<sup>17</sup> The evolution of transhumans in Contreras Castro’s novel can be understood in relation to Max More’s definition of transhumanism as a movement that “recognizes and anticipates the radical alterations in the conditions of our existence resulting from various sciences and technologies such as neuroscience and neuropharmacology, nanotechnology, artificial intelligence, space habitation, and so on” (6).

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