



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA  
Department of French, Hispanic & Italian Studies



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# Hopscotch!

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## Latin American Literature in Translation

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Latin American Literature in Translation

*Fever Dream*: Samanta  
Schweblin on the Force of the  
Hyperobject

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Latin American Literature in Translation

*Fever Dream: Samanta  
Schweblin on the Force of the  
Hyperobject*

with Jon Beasley-Murray

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When does a game stop being a game?  
When does the fun end?

“It’s the boy who’s talking, murmuring into my ear. [. . .] / Worms in the body? / [. . .] The sheets are rough, they bunch up under my body. I can’t move, but I’m talking.” (1)

“We have to find the exact moment when the worms came into being.” (2)



The whole story is plagued by uncertainty and anxiety, and fears that long precede Amanda and Nina's arrival at what turns out to be a far from idyllic rural retreat.



“They are strange children. [. . .]  
Deformed children. They don’t have  
eyelashes, or eyebrows. Their skin is  
pink, very pink, and scaly too.” (158)



“Around here there aren’t many children  
who are born right.” (157)



“They can’t control their arms anymore, or they can’t control their own heads, or they have such thin skin that if they squeeze their markers too much their fingers end up bleeding.” (122)



Unseen danger lurks all around them,  
but nobody wants to think too hard  
about its cause.



Schweblin's novel puts the reader in the worried mother's frame of mind—or frame of body, as the book's effect is as much visceral or corporeal as it is intellectual or mental.



“I picked up ‘Fever Dream’ in the wee hours, and a low, sick thrill took hold of me as I read it. I was checking the locks in my apartment by page thirty. By the time I finished the book, I couldn’t bring myself to look out the windows.” (Jia Tolentino)




**“The poison was always there.” (169)**



Schweblin would have us head out, return to the game, to play with new forms of assemblage that bring life, not death.





# **THE CHEMISTRY OF ANXIETY**



“I did a lot of research, and I contacted scientists. Of course, none of this is seen in the novel because the novel is told from the perspective of someone who does not understand the dangers they are witnessing.” (Samanta Schweblin)



“The soybean is king in Argentina. The country grew 20 million hectares of soybeans in 2015 and the crop remains the country’s main export—valued higher than Argentina’s cereal, automotive and petrochemical exports. . . .



. . . Today, 60 percent of the world's soy biodiesel, and more than 40 percent of global soybean oil and soy meal production, originates in Argentina.”  
(CropLife International)



Sixty per cent of the country's arable land is devoted to the crop's cultivation, usually on a massive scale that has led to widespread deforestation, especially in the northern provinces, site of the Gran Chaco, otherwise rich in biodiversity and home to many of Argentina's Indigenous peoples.



Soy, almost entirely produced for export, also displaces family farms, tending towards a monoculture operated at industrial scale by relatively few firms while impoverished small farmers and laborers leave the countryside for the cities.

Practically all the soy sown in Argentina—  
and elsewhere in South America—is  
transgenic, or genetically modified.



Argentina is the heaviest user of glyphosate per capita in the world—spraying more than twice as much per acre than farmers in the United States. In the early 2010s, the country's use of herbicide rose exponentially.

In 2015, the World Health Organization's International Agency for Research on Cancer declared that glyphosate, which has been detected in the water, soil, and sediment of soy-growing regions, was "probably carcinogenic to humans."



In 2020, facing thousands of lawsuits, Bayer agreed, without admitting liability, to pay \$10 billion “to settle tens of thousands of current and potential U.S. claims that its weedkiller Roundup causes cancer.”

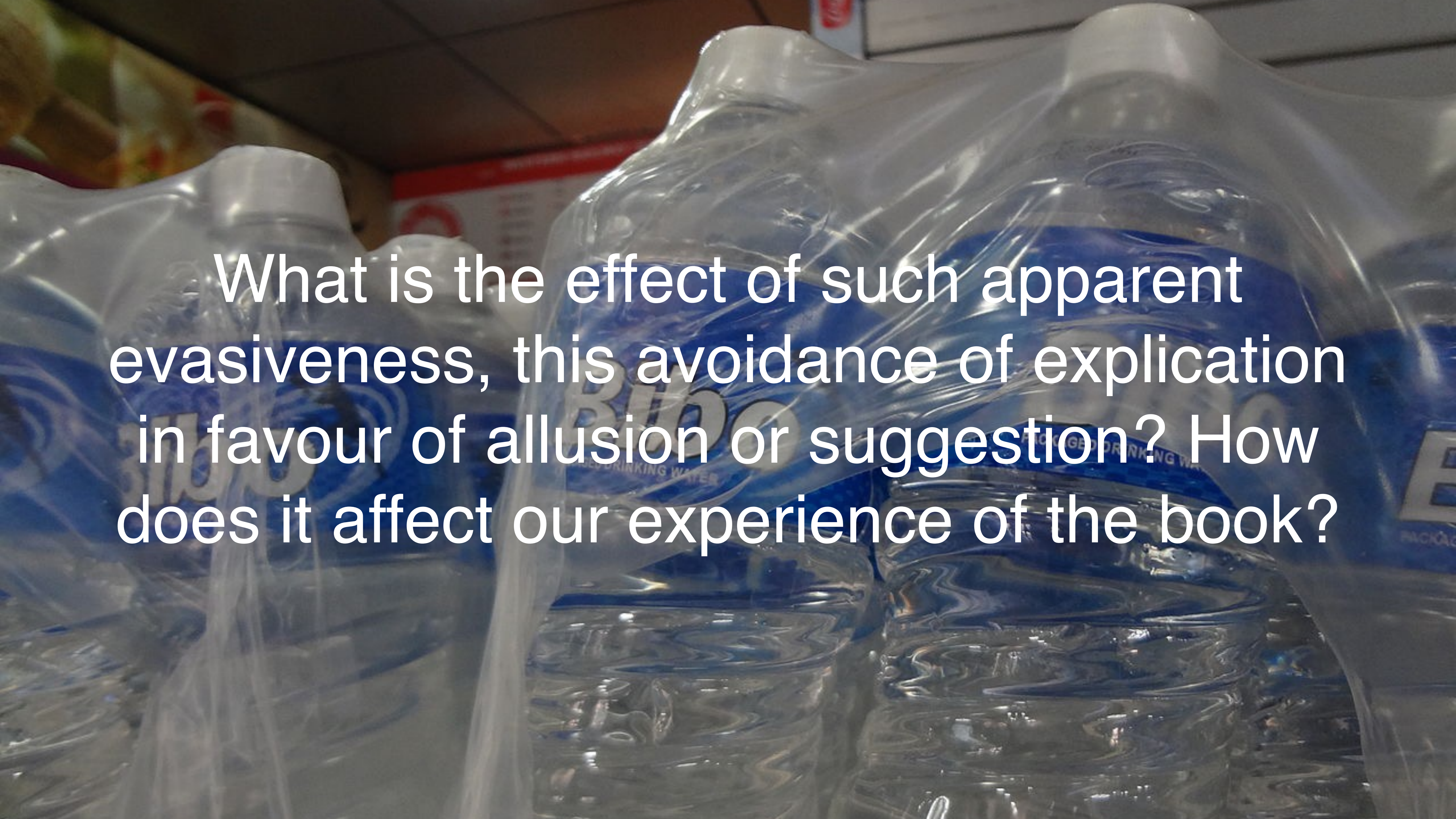
“The soy fields stretch out to either side of us. It’s all very green, a perfumed green.” (93)



As the narrative ends, all we are left with  
is uncertainty, suspicion, and  
a generalized sense of doom.

What is the effect of such apparent evasiveness, this avoidance of explication in favour of allusion or suggestion? How does it affect our experience of the book?





What is the effect of such apparent evasiveness, this avoidance of explication in favour of allusion or suggestion? How does it affect our experience of the book?



“I’m going to die in a few hours.  
That’s going to happen, isn’t it?” (5)



“We have to find the exact moment when  
the worms came into being. [. . .]  
Because it’s important. It’s very  
important for us all.” (2)

David is struggling to process her testimony in time, so as to figure out how the environment, the social structure, the plants and what is added to them, and people's choices to speak or keep silence have all coincided in an assemblage of human and non-human actors that have collectively poisoned an entire generation.



“He sounds like he’s on a treasure hunt, or playing the sort of prolonged imaginary game little kids invent, the ones where no adult can comprehend the rules. This is important, he says, or this is unimportant, and Amanda, sick as she is, plays along.” (Lily Meyer)

“You’ve already told me four times how you got here” (110); “You still haven’t realized. You still need to understand” (131).



“You’ve already told me four times how you got here” (110); “You still haven’t realized. You still need to understand” (131).

“I’m starting to think you’re not going to understand, that going forward with this story doesn’t make any sense. [. . .] It’s not worth it anymore.” (140)



# **THE SHADOW OF THE HYPEROBJECT**



We are groping around, trying  
to make sense of things.

We are groping around, trying  
to make sense of things.

How much of this is a “fever dream,” a  
hallucination that will disappear  
once the fever breaks?



This is a novel that seeks not to explain or to convince, but to conjure up an affect, to make us doubt our own senses, perhaps even to make us believe we may have worms within us from some un-noticed contact with foreign bodies that are almost imperceptible, with “something small and invisible that has ruined everything” (160).

**We are all complicit, all contaminated  
(and contaminating others).**

**We are all complicit, all contaminated  
(and contaminating others).**

**When will we realize?**



“*Hyperobjects* [are. . .] things that are massively distributed in time and space relative to humans. A hyperobject could be a black hole. A hyperobject could be the Lago Agrio oil field in Ecuador, or the Florida Everglades [. . .] Styrofoam or plastic bags, or the sum of all the whirring machinery of capitalism.” (Timothy Morton)

Hyperobjects cannot be taken in or comprehended from any single perspective: there is no privileged site from which they can be clearly visualized; they cannot be directly seen, and there is always more of them elsewhere. They stretch too far in the distance for us to see where they begin and where they end.

**“We can only see pieces of hyperobjects  
at a time.” (Timothy Morton)**



As with a game we have started that gets out of hand, it can feel that all we can do is look on as events unfold when confronted with the seemingly irresistible force of a hyperobject in motion once a tipping point has been passed.

Perhaps, however, they can be detained or brought down by other hyperobjects, too: by social movements or class struggle, or even by the networks constructed through literature.

*Fever Dream* is also about  
parental responsibility.



**“Sooner or later something bad  
is going to happen.” (56)**

“I call it the ‘rescue distance’: that’s what I’ve named the variable distance separating me from my daughter, and I spend half the day calculating it, though I always risk more than I should.” (19)

“I’m sitting ten inches away from my daughter, David. There is no rescue distance.” (85)




The outside may be contaminated,  
the environment may be toxic, but  
staying cooped up will neither  
change that nor protect us.

“His favorite thing was to be outside.  
He was crazy about the playground,  
even when he was tiny.” (10)

Perhaps it is only by opening up, looking outwards and making new connections, that there is hope to mobilize an assemblage that could displace or even replace the mass industry of export monoculture and its toxic by-products.





# MUSIC

Fósforo,  
“Cochabamba”



# PRODUCTION

[jon.beasley-murray@ubc.ca](mailto:jon.beasley-murray@ubc.ca)

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# HISPANIC STUDIES







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*¡Don't leave it to mañana!*

