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Introduction

On behalf of the Editorial Board of *Mester*, the academic journal of the graduate students of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese at the University of California, Los Angeles, I am honored to introduce its fifty-fourth issue. *Mester* LIV invited submissions that engage with transdisciplinary and multimedia perspectives examining the historical and contemporary tensions in Latin American cities. We sought to explore how urban spaces become contested sites where violence, class and gender disputes, and socio-political struggles intersect, shaping cultural production and everyday life. These dynamics are not only historical but also intrinsically present in contemporary Latin American metropolises and urban settings, where ongoing processes of modernization, migration, and inequality continue to redefine the urban experience.

This volume opens with Andraya Yearwood's article "A Grande Contradição da América do Sul Lusófona: De quem são as verdades vividas que não estamos a contar? Uma análise comparativa de Cidade de Deus (2002), de Meirelles, e Afro-Paradise (2016), de Smith." Yearwood examines two influential cultural works —Fernando Meirelles' *Cidade de Deus* and Christen A. Smith's *Afro-Paradise*—to challenge the enduring myth of Brazil as a "racial democracy," interrogating the contradictions between Brazil's projected image as an "Afro-paradise" and the lived realities of Afro-Brazilian communities. In André Monfrini's article, "O cinema latino-americano diante da questão urbana: representações da favela no documentarismo dos anos 1950," the focus shifts to mid-twentieth-century Latin American documentary cinema. Monfrini studies how films such as *Las Callampas* (Rafael Sánchez, 1958) and *Buenos Aires* (David José Kohon, 1958) portray rapid urban transformations, revealing tensions between modernization, social inequality, and cultural identity.

The engagement with spatial configurations continues in Elisa Braga's contribution, "Configurações do espaço queer e a (re)escrita da história em vila mathusa." Braga approaches Zênite Astra's novel *vila mathusa* (2022) through the lens of queer theory, analyzing how internal and external spaces are renegotiated in relation to trans subjectivities. Drawing on Jack Halberstam's concept of queer space, Braga explores how bodily transformations operate as both literal and metaphorical displacements, questioning the interplay between corporeality and geography in contemporary Brazilian literature. The fourth article, "Antropofagias: a literária e a marginal-periférica," by Kainan Porto Alegre, revisits the anthropophagic metaphor to examine its reappropriation by contemporary marginal-peripheral literature. Kainan Porto Alegre contrasts Oswald de Andrade's Manifesto Antropófago with Ferréz's Terrorismo literário and Sérgio Vaz's Manifesto da Antropofagia Periférica, arguing that peripheral movements reinterpret and radicalize anthropophagic aesthetics to foreground racial and social inequalities.

In "Transfusión de Tinta: sobre la relación entre la fotografía, el grabado y el texto, a partir de Quebrada. Las cordilleras en andas (2006), de Guadalupe Santa Cruz," Ramiro Caces explores the intersections of image and text in Santa Cruz's hybrid work. Through a poietic analysis, Caces examines the dynamic interplay between photography, engraving, and literary discourse, illuminating how these artistic forms converge to reconstruct Chile's northern landscapes as sites marked by historical violence and ecological disruption. Finally, Vivian Arimany's article, "Vengeful Bodies: Representing Femicide in Latin American Culture," addresses gender-based violence in Latin America. Focusing on Fernanda Melchor's novel Hurricane Season and Regina José Galindo's performance installations, Arimany interrogates the ethics and aesthetics of representing femicide in literature and art.

Additionally, in a partnership provided by Pedro Cuevas (UCLA), *Mester* LIV features an editorial written by the Ecomaterialist Studies Group from Chile, coordinated by Mauricio Fernández Santibáñez. This group is also composed by Miguel González Rodríguez, Carolina Hernández Parraguez, Marta Hernández Parraguez, Mario Molina Olivares, and Diego Pérez Pezoa. The group is an



also composed by Miguel González Rodríguez, Carolina Hernández Parraguez, Marta Hernández Parraguez, Mario Molina Olivares, and Diego Pérez Pezoa. The group is an independent intellectual collective from Chile, formed to conduct research, reflection, and analysis of contemporary humanistic practices. The Study Group explores the diverse cultural, political, aesthetic, and social practices of 20th- and 21st-century life forms.

Carolina Alejandra Hernández Parraguez reconfigures the contemporary stage in her analysis of Vampyr by Manuela Infante and Petróleo by Piel de Lava, introducing the concept of paisaje transmedial to conceptualize theater as an assemblage of bodies, media, and materialities beyond anthropocentric paradigms. Expanding this decentering of the human, Diego Pérez Pezoa proposes a "no-aesthetic" grounded in Object-Oriented Ontology and non-philosophy, arguing for an expanded aesthetic framework that accommodates the imbrications of art, politics, and nonhuman agencies in the works of Samuel Ibarra and Adrián Balseca. These theoretical and performative explorations find resonance in Mauricio Fernández Santibáñez's luminous reading of Gabriela Mistral's Recados, where the Andean cordillera emerges as "materia vibrante," forging a sensory and affective relation that dissolves the boundaries between human and mountain in a fractal poetics of solidarity.

Marta Hernández Parraguez examines the hacer–material of two Latin American women artists, revealing how their practices articulate the active potency of matter amidst technological proliferation and ecological crisis. This concern with the agency of material environments is further explored in Mario Molina Olivares' analysis of Rosabetty Muñoz's *Técnicas para cegar a los peces*, where the island landscape operates as a site of critical memory, assembling voices, vegetal life, and sacred objects against the violences of neoliberal extraction. Finally, Miguel González Rodríguez interrogates the aesthetics of the Anthropocene in three Chilean documentaries—La Quebradilla, Flow, and Arica—drawing on Timothy Morton's "dark ecology" to illuminate how these films construct landscapes as relational fields entangled with extractive economies and toxic legacies. Together, these essays invite us to reconsider the material and ecological dimensions of cultural production, foregrounding their capacity to unsettle anthropocentrism and reimagine the porous boundaries between humans, objects, and environments.

Finally, in order to honor the journal's legacy, this issue also includes a special feature with a series of interviews with former Editors-in-Chief. These conversations revisit the journal's history through the personal experiences of those who have guided its editorial direction over the decades. Among those interviewed are Roberto Cantú (Emeritus Professor of Chicano Studies, California State University, Los Angeles; Editor-in-Chief of Editions 3, 4, and 5), Carmela Zanelli (Professor, Pontifical Catholic University of Peru; Editor-in-Chief of Edition 22, Volume 1), José Ramón Núñez (Vice President of Instruction, Fullerton College; Editor-in-Chief of Edition 22, Volume 2), Damian Bacich (Professor, San José State University; Editor-in-Chief of the 32nd Edition), and Isabel Gómez (Associate Professor, University of Massachusetts Boston; Editor-in-Chief of the 45th Edition). Each interview reflects on the academic and editorial challenges of their time, offering priceless perspectives on the evolution of graduate studies and the role of Mester as a platform for emerging voices.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the authors for their contributions. This volume would not have been possible without the commitment and dedication of the Editorial Board and the Faculty members of our department. I am also profoundly thankful to our Faculty Advisor, Professor Patrícia Lino, as well as to the former Chair, Professor Maarten Van Delden, and to the current Chair of the Department, Professor Jorge Marturano, for their continuous support. Finally, I extend my appreciation to advisors and staff members Gloria Tovar, Laura Cesareo, Anna Tobey, Ivanna Wence, Kristina Magpayo Nyden, Kevin Melendez, Virginia Cortez-Carmona, and Henry Hernandez.

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