

# 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-first volume. *Mester* 51 welcomed submissions for articles, essays, and interviews from transdisciplinary perspectives that examine the various ways in which the body is interpreted by cultural products from any period. Contributors showed interest in analyzing how bodies are represented, what their aesthetic and/or political functions are, what spaces they occupy in the social network, and how they interact with power when building “the cultural.” We believe discussions regarding the definition, autonomy, place, and limits of bodies, both individual and social, are essential for rethinking how bodies are/were studied and (under)valued.

Additionally, we welcomed submissions for the special supplement dedicated to the relationship between bodies, discourses, and diseases. This decision pursues two objectives. First, we are interested in exploring a specific type of body: the ill body, and its circulating discourses, within and beyond cultural productions. Second, we could not overlook the prominent and somewhat ominous presence of the COVID-19 pandemic while planning this volume. More than one article pointed out the impact of the pandemic on the bodies of citizens who depend on state decisions to continue with life. It is not surprising that, on several occasions, other texts considered it pertinent to add a note about the situation of the coronavirus to their topics worked on. *Mester* 51 should be considered as a space to reflect on all the bodies in culture but also on the bodies that are experiencing hardships due to this ongoing pandemic, which directly or indirectly affects the academic work and its contributors. We are grateful for everyone’s participation in this volume.

And thus, there are bodies, bodies everywhere. According to my findings, instead of philosophically examining the body-soul duality, contemporary writers and scholars tend to tackle the material body, its effects on reality, and how it is affected by the outside world. Whether the strategy moves toward affective decolonization of the concept, or toward explaining the relationship with gender, they move away from the marvelous perception of the natural body alone because this approach does not seem to carry enough force to justify its position in academic work. In the Latin American context, masses of bodies have been the object of violence and transfiguration by political turmoil, diseases, and stereotyping—all forces culminating in the restricted body (individual and social). To consider the materiality of bodies and their political nature, Guillermina Ferrari points out that post-Cartesian visions make the concept of the body a text of culture, inseparable from identity and inalienable from human experience (11). Thus, the reader will find within this volume echoes of Michel Foucault's conceptualization of "biopolitics" or Achille Mbembe's "necropolitics," a couple of the ways to operate the relationship between the material body and its symbolic face. And since there are "bodies that matter" (following Judith Butler) when it comes to the recognition and care of their vulnerability, there are multiple and heterogeneous bodies that appear de-faced, as superfluous bodies or lives without value. The body is a series of constant negotiations between subject and context, but it is also anchored in a matter that definitively affects its performativity.

On this note, we open the general section, *Bodies in Culture*, with "Corpos de mulheres controlados e (re)construídos em *La sed*, de Paula Bonet" by Leticia Pilger da Silva. Here, disciplined bodies become liberated bodies. Pilger da Silva works on the transformation of bodies and analyzes the metaphors around corporeality. She focuses on the bodily relations between/of women to illuminate how a literary body can be configured as a "body-with-the-others," that is, an amalgamation of female voices in the voices of the characters in Bonet's book. Among other things, she posits the construction of the body as a refuge, as resistance, which allows for thinking of new ways of life for women's bodies through human (dis)assembly and the bodily potentiality of pleasure.

Following up, two articles continue examining the relationship of restrained bodies and their liberation from violence, but this time through the work of historic memory. First, Aharon Arvizu Ramírez, in “¿Cómo arrostrar el pasado? Una propuesta crítica de recuperación de la memoria histórica,” investigates contemporary cinema and literature that carry out inquiries into the Francoist past. The author studies the function of torture during the dictatorial regime and exposes the systematic framework of state violence deployed toward the civilian population. Paying attention to the social body, and the body of the victims, Arvizu Ramírez explores the discursive strategies and the mobilization of affections through which art questions the period of the Spanish transition. Second, Amelia Ino and Monica Campbell, in “Río, cuerpo, y memoria: un análisis de la representación simbólica de la violencia en tres obras culturales colombianas,” analyze Colombian cultural productions made during or after historical moments marked by violence. The authors question the relationship between political violence and the representation in culture of a geographical feature—the rivers of Colombia, where many people’s bodies were disappeared in their currents.

This relationship between culture, nation, and memory can be taken to Cabo Verde, Africa, and the genesis of a new way to write and socialize poetry: txon-poesia. Márcia Brito and Jair Pinto, in “Txon-poesia e seus contributos na ativação da cena cultural contemporânea cabo-verdiana entre 2017 e 2019,” seek the impact of poetry beyond the writer and the text itself to investigate the effect on the bodies that read poems, listen to them, and, especially, participate in them. Since the independence euphoria at the end of the 1980s in Mindelo until today, Cape Verdean poets have been reinventing themselves. Far from elitism, txon-poesia is an approach to more accessible and empathetic art—an art that listens and creates a sense of belonging and empowerment.

The last article of our general sections continues to work on literature, this time, the novel. Gabriela Molina and Emanuel Merlo, in “Un acercamiento a partir de las categorías de ‘cuerpo’ y ‘rizoma’ en los casos de *Cómo me hice monja* de César Aira y ‘Muchacha punk’ de Rodolfo Fogwill,” start with a strong set of questions: What is a body? What is the body in writing/reading? How are subjectivity and writing

articulated? The authors' objective is to offer different interpretations that transcend the signifier layer. Their questions function as a trigger to give rise to a "new text" to further explore the signified. The authors have a theoretical arsenal that allows them to break down works of fiction and focus on the interstices between reading and meaning.

The special supplement of *Mester LI, Bodies, Discourses and Diseases* starts with the narrative representations of mental illnesses in crime novels. Mariana Oggioni, in "Las enfermedades mentales en la literatura criminal. Análisis de dos casos: *La virgen en tus ojos* (2012) y *La hija del campeón* (2014) de Florencia Etcheves," assumes that this genre usually works on what is (un)acceptable, (il)legitimate, and (im)probable for each society in different periods. Oggioni analyzes the work of the Argentine author Florencia Etcheves and how the main characters react towards others who are considered mentally ill. The author of this article breaks down the social imaginaries operating in the statements of the characters. Oggioni ponders to what extent these stories contribute to re-stigmatizing mental illnesses, or if the mere fact of presenting them within the plots helps to make these cases more visible.

To tackle State responsibilities (and to hold them accountable) within the COVID-19 pandemic, we have "'Mimimi,' 'histeria,' 'gripezinha': imaginários sociodiscursivos da banalização da pandemia no Brasil em discursos presidenciais" by Maurício João Vieira Filho. The author finds in Jair Bolsonaro's statements the implementation of necropolitics that relegate the value of certain bodies to the background. Moreover, the action of the Brazilian government when facing the COVID-19 pandemic exposed more weaknesses in a power system disinterested in human rights and in solving situations of vulnerability. Vieira Filho analyzes statements referring to the defense of ineffective drugs, the neglect of the importance of vaccination, biblical narratives, the supremacy of the individual body, all conveying an agglomeration of lies around COVID-19. The final product is a regime of exclusion to mark who deserves to live and who does not.

The next two articles demand a closer look at the history of indigenous peoples affected by physical and symbolic violence. Policies of invisibility and actions of linguistic and cultural self-hatred can still be

present. In many countries, the land not only was appropriated, but minority languages also have been subordinated to the language of the hegemony. The authors assume that cultural and linguistic rights are Human Rights, and the fight for them can also bring some balance to the belief systems that have been subjugated to the dominant culture. Thus, the factors that determine linguistic power are exclusively extralinguistic.

Micaela Lorenzotti, in “‘Fuimos los ojos dentro del barrio’: reflexiones sobre una experiencia escolar *qom*-español durante las medidas sanitarias frente al COVID-19 en Santa Fe (Argentina),” ponders governmental health measures to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and how they also intensified inequalities within indigenous communities. Closing the schools led to pausing other services provided by some public institutions, such as the special monitoring of those who are underweight or malnourished. In addition, with the classrooms closed and the bodies absent, indigenous teachers assumed new responsibilities beyond teaching. Lorenzotti gathers educators’ thoughts on being a link between the inhabitants of the neighborhood, school services, and health services. Indigenous teachers put their bodies on the line, once again covering the gap between State assistance and the real needs of a multilingual community.

Cintia Carrió and Valentina Jara, in “Hablar el cuerpo: la concepción de los mundos y su huella lingüística,” analyze how Mocoví speakers express the relationship between peoples’ bodies (their own and others’), social bodies, and non-human entities. The authors show the different ways of communicating and measuring the passage of time in Mocoví language. They analyze the grammatical structures used when referring to women’s bodies, such as during pregnancy, birth, and menstruation, and when referring to the uterus. They also analyze the antithesis “illness-healing”. They offer an overview of the order of the bodies in the Mocoví culture that are recovered through language.

We close *Mester* 51 with a magnificent interview with Joaquín Doldán conducted by Verónica García Moreno and Susannah R. Drissi, “Voces en la sala de espera.” We learn about the Uruguayan author’s experience of being a dentist and becoming a multifaceted writer,

participating in different layers of the culture: narrative, television, radio, theater, and carnival. Joaquín Doldán reveals his influences from other spheres of life unrelated to writing and discusses how the amalgamation of writers, experiences, and his work with patients nourished his life as a creator of representations. He is always concerned about minimizing barriers to accessing culture. His work with the representation of people with disabilities extends to his practice as a workshop facilitator and creator of spaces to promote literature. In his works, the represented bodies always seem to want to dialogue with the reader, the spectator, or anyone with whom the work wants to relate. This and other fascinating details of his life are what the interviewers give us in the dialogue with Doldán that *Mester* publishes here.

Finally, this volume would have been challenging to finish without the hard work of many collaborators. I am very thankful to all the authors and their generous contributions to this volume. I am deeply grateful to this year's Editorial Board, comprising Ícaro Carvalho, Esther Claudio, Pedro Cuevas, Eduardo Díaz, Madison Felman-Panagotacos, Sarai Jaramillo, Cristián Mora, Verónica García Moreno, Julia González Calderón, and Cristina Vázquez, as well as to this volume's guest contributing editors, Joo Kyeong Kim (Anita) and Erin Mauffray. I would also like to thank Isaac Giménez and Barbara Galindo, past Editors-in-Chief of *Mester*, for their support throughout the process. I am very grateful to *Mester* 51's Faculty Advisor Professor Patricia Arroyo Calderon, the current Chair of the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Maarten Van Delden, and the Vice Chair for Graduate Studies, Barbara Fuchs. Lastly, I wish to express my recognition to our layout editor Nando Vivas, and to Victoria Chávez-Kruse, who proof-read parts of these volume.

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