

Introduction

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How do we address the idea of the literary now, at the end of the second decade in the twenty-first century? Many traditional categories need to be exploded in that they obscure or overlook significant contemporary forms of cultural production. In this volume, we look at literature and culture in general in this hinge period poised between a too-simplistic version of the past and an as-yet-unimagined future. We believe that urgent work is needed to make a transition to more adequate ways of thinking and working in our contemporary context.

The resurgence of nationalist movements and reinforced bordering throughout the globe testify to the urgent need for a harder look at the shape and impact of such sociohistorical and political processes. In this volume, we underline the ways culture work has always been situated at the intersection of identities and geographies that fundamentally complicate national or traditional area studies understandings of cultural production. Hence, the topics we have identified as central to this volume of *Transition* point to fresh, intersectional understandings of cultural practice, while keeping in mind the ongoing stakes in a struggle over material and intangible cultural and political borders that are being reinforced in formidable ways all around us.

Even more crucially, the thinkers who participate in this project are themselves at the cutting edge of this mode of questioning. Thus, scholars in this volume may be asking us to think about how authors and literary texts refuse to limit themselves within national boundaries, whether defined by presumed citizenship, cultural references, or language; how new genres and new forms of scholarship are reshaping what we can think and write; how climate change informs our understanding of landscape and identity; how the very field of cultural and literary studies itself is being reimagined as new cultural objects (Snapchat stories, digital archives, YouTube videos, weird fiction, a corporate model of organizing learning) energize our thinking.

We use as a starting point the moment of redemocratization in Latin America, which ushered in a period of intense debates about justice and

memory, as well as new economic and political forms including neoliberalism and neopopulism. Borders in the region became less pliable as the USA–Mexico and Guatemala–Mexico borders were militarized; English increasingly became a lingua franca in the continent but indigenous languages and literatures resurfaced.

Volume Organization and Chapter Summaries

We have divided our volume into five parts. The first part deals with issues of security and the relationships between politics and culture. Our chronological starting point is the 1980s and the gradual move toward redemocratization.

While in the 1960s and 1970s, in the aftermath of the Cuban Revolution, the spirit of revolution spread in Latin America, by the late 1970s every single country in South America with the exception of Venezuela, and most of the countries in Central America, were under brutal military dictatorships. When new democratic governments were installed in the 1980s hundreds of thousands of people had been killed or kidnapped and the *desaparecido* had become the visible figure of the period. Thousands of people went into exile, among them many intellectuals who continued their academic careers elsewhere (in Europe, the United States, Mexico, and Venezuela). In this first part of our volume, we focus on the new conception of the political that emerged in the region in the 1980s and that is still present in new configurations. New modes of thinking about Latin American literature emerged as a consequence of exile and censorship, including new forms of cultural studies growing out of a North–South dialogue. In these studies, a rereading of a rich historical tradition of the Latin American essay combined with specific scholarly forms from the United States academy produced new ways of thinking, teaching, and conceptualizing literature. The study of literature became the privileged site for the exploration of issues of ethics, accountability, and subalternity.

The aftermath of state violence stirred a debate on the challenges of narrating horror and loss. A generation of writers involved in revolutionary projects created works that explored the experience of those who came of age in the 1960s and 1970s, and postmemorial productions were produced by the generation born during the 1970s and 1980s. In many locations, this output has been marked by formal experimentation, new genres, and an effort to recover indigenous languages. Security and insecurity are terms that define the last forty years of Latin American cultural cartography.

In this part we also bring together perspectives as disparate as a drug dealer's commitment to their plaza, that shifting space that defines the

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range of their territory, and recent efforts to explore the potentiality of climate change literature. What these works share is their complicity in working through certain concealments of the broader culture. Unlike regionalism, where space and human culture are codependent, in these transitional and intersectional works human activity interacts with geographical parameters. Yet in both cases – whether narco literature or climate change fiction – scientific and journalistic commentary has dominated, and these realms have been notoriously recalcitrant to literature other than the apocalyptic genres. This part tries to get a sense of why these kinds of shifting and territorialized allegiances create challenges to the imagination even as they reference a crisis of culture.

A chapter by Cristina Rivera Garza inaugurates this part. Rivera Garza argues for disappropriation, a strategy characterized by using aesthetically relevant tactics to render the presence of others visible in the making of any text. Writing is rewriting with others, in community, for what is exchanged and transferred are not only recontextualized words but also constitutive experiences of world-making. If what is happening in Latin America is, as Jalal Toufic would have it, a surpassing disaster – one not only characterized by physical destruction and bodily harm but above all by the “withdrawal of tradition,” disappropriation, by centrally incorporating rewriting as one of its operations – this tradition (and its history of conflict and contestation) becomes accessible again. Through close readings of works by poets Gerardo Arana and Juana Adcock, and short-story writers Juan Cárdenas and Claudia Peño Claro, Rivera Garza explores a range of writing strategies that address the challenges posed by the capitalocene, climatic change, and, ultimately, the materially fraught connection of language and production: the use of excavation techniques through layers of found language, of disappropriative tactics to signal the communality of writing practices, of both human and nonhuman perspectives, of non-significant semiotic matter, and of deep time chronologies that transcend life–death dichotomies.

The chapters by Ana Forcinito and Jordana Blejmar study the work of memory and postmemory in a diversity of genres. In her chapter, “*Literatura de Hijos* in Post-Dictatorship South America,” Blejmar examines a growing number of cultural works – films, photographs, novels, plays, and blogs – by the so-called second or postmemory generations of the Latin American dictatorships. She claims that the issue of content (what to say about the past) is in in these narratives directly related to concerns over form (how to say it) and therefore focuses on how post-dictatorship writers revisit and, more importantly, refashion literary genres (most notably childhood fables, detective

stories, and the narratives of exile), simultaneously breathing new life into both the memory of the dictatorial years and the tools we have to write about them. Both these chapters show how cultural memories are not mere case studies to illustrate concepts and theories coined in Europe or the United States, but that they instead make an important contribution to a much-needed “decolonization” of memory and trauma studies by proposing alternative conceptual frameworks for understanding the transmission of traumatic memories across generations.

In “Mexican Narconarratives after *Narcos*,” Oswaldo Zavala studies an emerging group of writers, journalists, conceptual artists, and filmmakers who have renewed a critical approach to state violence and its implications beyond typical assumptions about organized crime. His essay proposes to map out a politicized imagination intersecting state violence and drug trafficking that deliberately leaves behind the habitual hegemonic narconarratives to articulate instead a critical understanding of the criminal networks within official power. Along with the analysis of key works by writers such as Pedro Ángel Palau and Jorge Volpi and journalists such as Dawn Paley, and the Netflix show *Narcos*, he engages current debates on state sovereignty and neoliberalism in the age of permanent national security crises.

In the second part of the volume, we turn our attention to the new genres that have emerged in Latin America. Several parallel movements changed the field of Latin American literature drastically in the 1980s and 1990s. The turn toward cultural studies and theory opened up the field to the study of productions outside the purview of what until then was considered “Literature” within departments of Spanish and Portuguese in North America, and the UK, and gave origin to new projects of cultural organization and knowledge in Latin America. The rapid dissemination of new technologies in Latin America opened up a new field for exploration in literary creation. Literature per se stopped being the center of literary studies with an increasing body of work focused on film, photography, cartoons, and performance. In terms of Josefina Ludmer, literature became postautonomous. The chapters in this part treat genres that originated in technological innovations (digital humanities, for example), as well as other genres that until recently were not considered part of the corpus of literary studies, such as children’s literature.

Under the rubric “speculative fiction,” Liliana Colanzi treats a series of works that can also be read as part of the strong tradition of the fantastic in Latin America. She is interested in illuminating how literature has portrayed the transition to democracy, neoliberal policies, and technological

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and social changes in Latin America through fictional universes. She explores how dystopias, alternative histories, cyberpunk, hackers and cyborgs, Chile's "freak power," virtual reality, internet fictions, monsters and other fantastical creatures, eco-horror, and stories from the Anthropocene represent a Latin American response to new social and political orders. In her chapter "Latin American Digital Literature," Silvana Mandolessi treats "electronic" or "digital literature" in such diverse formats as blog fiction, collaborative writing projects, Twitterature, and "ergodic literature." She claims that online works are neither radically new nor uncritical continuation of existing models. Digital forms are characterized by a constant dialogue with prior existing literary, cultural, and artistic forms. She therefore claims that hypertext fiction should be considered as "literature in transition," at the intersection of "old" and "new" technologies of writing. Her chapter seeks to answer several key questions such as to what extent Latin American digital literature, predominantly written in Spanish, challenges English as the online lingua franca and the role of digital literature in re-territorializing multiple and diasporic Latin American identities.

Alejandra Josiowicz studies Latin American and Latinx children's literature from the 1980s to 2017. Focusing on themes such as migration, exile, and bilingualism in a variety of works from Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and the USA, she shows how children's literature has questioned stereotypical ideas about race, gender, and class. The chapter underlines the ways in which children's literature has incorporated new and alternative family models, foregrounded historical and political contexts, and incorporated humor, visual elements, orality, regionalisms, and vernacular language. New technologies have helped establish new relations between different codes, offering new levels of meaning. Children's and young adult literature has opened up to explore linguistic and cultural diversity through multilingual and intersectional books. Texts discuss and reflect on the role of different ethnic, social, racial, and gender minorities, conveying pacifism and anti-authoritarianism, and have in the last two decades addressed issues of globalization and border crossing.

In her chapter on "Paraliterature," Janet Hendrickson traces a path from the literary canonization of traditional forms of paraliterature (among them, detective fiction, science fiction, and comics) to Latin American authors' recent engagement with new media and digital reading practices. She also expands the definition of paraliterature to include widely disseminated informational and regulatory texts not typically considered literary, such as advertisements, encyclopedias, and state-administered exams.

Using a theoretical framework that bridges cultural and media studies, this chapter first examines the embrace of popular categories of genre fiction by literary writers (Fuguet, Paz Soldán, Pinedo), as well as novels that narrate through the conceit of the encyclopedia or biographical dictionary (Bolaño, Fresán). Recent fiction (Bolaño, Castellanos Moya) has cited institutionalized forms of the *testimonio*, such as the police or human rights report, to question the sufficiency of such paraliterary frameworks to represent atrocity.

In the next chapter, “Performance Studies,” Analola Santana describes performance as an art of transition, a way of changing the social discourse by changing the way of producing art. She shows how Latin American artists turned to performance as a means through which to deal with the artistic constraints and hierarchical structures of classical theatre. The boom of performance art that can be seen in Latin America, especially in the 1980s and 1990s, acts as a catalyst for a questioning of the role of the artist in society and a challenge to artistic institutions, as well as a defiant political act. In his chapter, “Graphing a Hemispheric History of Latinx Comics Creation,” Frederick Luis Aldama considers a number of comics by Latinx creators across the hemispheric Americas to demonstrate how their visual-verbal narratives grow from localized experiences and identities (nationally and communally identified geographic regions) as well as polyphonically intersect and actively interact with hemispheric practices, styles, and experiences. The chapter considers the importance of historical period as well as social and political contexts in the making, distribution, and consuming of comics by and about Latinx subjects and experiences of the hemispheric Americas; the specific techniques (panel layout, perspective, coloring, bubble placement, font, and so on) used by Latinx comic-book creators to give shape to the everyday lives, unique traditions, and representations of the very varied ethnoracial make-up of Latinx subjects within specifics of times and regions; and the construction of Latinx reader-viewers as co-creators of Latinx hemispheric visual-verbal narratives.

Jill Kuhnheim explores transformations in the creation, transmission, and reception of Latin American poetics after 1980. She highlights eco-poetics as well as novel approaches to reading and writing, and transcontinental North–South readings. Authors treated include Mexican Homero Arjidyis, Brazilian Astrid Cabral, Nicaraguan Esthela Calderón-Chevez, and Mapuche Elicure Chihauilaf. She then explores new modes of interdisciplinarity in poetry such as Luis Díaz-Correa’s clickable poems, Argentine Belén Gache’s digital poems, and Uruguayans Juan Angel Italiano and Luis Bravo’s performative poetry.

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The third part of the volume, “Mobilities,” presents a series of essays that discuss new literary productions that exceed traditional ways of thinking about subjectivity and identity such as nationality. We include chapters that investigate ways to describe multiple identities or, in many cases, the anonymity of the contemporary literary subject. We explore the characteristics of a new geopolitical world order that creates unstable and precarious realities for thousands of people and how literature and art delve into this precarious state. We include texts that situate themselves in linguistic, cartographic, or geographical borders, some that explore new hybrid literary traditions and yet others that question the whole conception of identity through anonymous protagonists.

In “New Latinx/Chicanx Thought,” Ariana E. Vigil highlights recent work in Chicane/Latine literature and literary studies that has sought to move beyond and outside existing constraints and boundaries pertaining to gender, nation, and ethnicity. Memoirs such as *A Cup of Water Under My Bed* by the Cuban-Colombian writer Daisy Hernández, poetry collections such as *Cha Cha Chapina: A Chapina Poética* by Guatemalan-American Maya Chinchilla, and the collection of Afro-Latina poetry *Manteca!* edited by Melissa Castillo-Garsow are emblematic of such work. Exploring and situating these works within the larger trajectory of Chicane/Latine literature and scholarship, this chapter draws attention to these new iterations and explains their significance in relation to other intellectual, social, and political developments.

In her chapter, “The Boundless Dramas of Dancing *Mulatas*,” Honey Crawford identifies a wave of contemporary performances that turn against the boundaries of nation in favor of an allegiance to a transnational counterpublic of Black femininity. Crawford explores how camp aesthetics in these performances meet the audacity of their texts to unsettle the balance between humor and confrontation. She proposes a comparative reading of sex-radical feminist performances enacted by “*mulata*” icons of popular music and culture, analyzing the political openings that are seized when the *mulata* works her body in the name of protest. While grappling with the troubling narratives of racial and cultural mixture, she argues that these performances carry heightened stakes of inclusion and self-preservation.

Robert McKee Irwin explores the complex structures of feeling that have taken shape around national geopolitical and cultural borders in the contemporary context of mass deportations in his chapter. Taking as a starting point Gloria Anzaldúa’s well-known metaphor of the USA–Mexico borderlands as an open wound, it looks to the perspectives of

those who are being expelled from their homes through the often-brutal enforcement of laws and policies motivated by contemporary forms of nativism, nationalism, and xenophobic racism. While an emblematic case of these dynamics can be seen in the aggressive campaigns of repatriation of Mexicans and other Latin Americans from the United States, including many who have lived most of their lives in that country, a look across the hemisphere makes clear that this is not merely a North–South dynamic.

As Juan G. Sánchez Martínez reminds us in his chapter, three decades ago the phrase “contemporary indigenous literatures” was not yet used by Latin American literary historiographers and critics. “Indigenous literatures” were only mentioned in literary historiographies as cultural expressions from monolithic blocks such as Aztec, Maya, and Inca in pre-Columbian and colonial periods where tropes of extinction or acculturation/transculturation did not allow Indigenous peoples to change, exchange, and transform. Following current literary trans-Indigenous collaborations, this chapter compares this language shift in the reception of Mapuche, Quechua, Wayuu, and Maya heterogeneous voices. Furthermore, it analyzes concepts such as *Orality* (Fall/Chihuailaf), *Kotz’ib’* (González), *Hawansuyol Muryurina* (Roncalla), and the most recent *Oraliteragrophic textualities* (Rocha) and *Kabawil* (Chacón) as examples of possible frameworks to approach literature in the twenty-first century. In unsettling the colonial-heteropatriarchal system, particular attention is paid to Indigenous women writers and scholars.

This part ends with an analysis of the comparative booms in South Asia and Latin America by Roanne Kantor. Building on her previous work in which she claimed that theory and criticism from and about Latin America can enter a “World Literary” or “Global Anglophone” conversation as theory to describe the situation of South Asian literature now, she asks provocative questions such as: What new insights might emerge once the comparative framework is established? What does contemporary literary production in Latin America (and its diaspora) have to say to other regions of the Global South? Likewise, in what ways might critical trends from these other regions inflect new directions in Latin American studies? These questions force us to think about the way that the mutual gaze between Latin America and other regions of the Global South might be both reductive and liberatory for critical thought.

The fourth part of this book, “Positionalities,” highlights the work to make visible some groups that have served as iconic reference points for outsiderdom. In popular novels and films, Indigenous people, as well as queer and trans people, have measured together self-denigration with self-preservation,

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serving as buffoons or as icons of a vaguely mystical wisdom for generations of dominant culture consumers. In contrast with well-intentioned *indigenista* or simplistic gender studies models of the past, the core of this subgenre comes from the voices and perspectives of those writing from within the community. These writers illuminate their own experience while they remind us that we live in a world where they are often portrayed as stereotypes or monsters.

In the first chapter of this part, Carla Daniela Benisz and Rodrigo N. Villalba Rojas examine linguistic and literary tensions in contemporary Paraguay. They focus on the resurgence of Guaraní as a literary language following the democratization process of the Paraguayan society, which started in the 1980s. This chapter describes and analyzes the contemporary map of Paraguay based on its most representative cultural experiences, including that of the Taller Manuel Ortiz Guerrero poets, from which *tangara* poetry emerges; the poetic work of Jorge Canese; narrative in the Guaraní language, of which they choose the novel *Kalaíto Pombéro* by Tadeo Zarratea as pivot; and the frontier cartography following the narrative of Damián Cabrera. Paraguayan Guaraní literature becomes more complex with the *jopara*, which debuts as literary language with *Ramona Quebranto* (1989) by Margot Ayala, and with the display of Guaraní narrative. Finally, they treat hybridizations used by several authors attempting to reshape their literary language, such as interactions with Portuguese, enhancing a literary and cultural area in the “Triple Frontera.”

LGBTQ subjects occupy a particular “outsider” status that allows them to interrogate underlying assumptions about identity and subjectivity. Throughout Latin American history, we find numerous examples in which gender is mobilized to advance a particular configuration of national and/or regional identity – whether in the feminization of the landscape available for conquest in the sixteenth century or in the hypermasculine portrayal of the leaders of the independence movements in the nineteenth. Queer and transgender texts call such epistemic gender norms into question and highlight ongoing attachments to specific ideals of masculinity and femininity. In her contribution, Dara E. Goldman shows that LGBTQ subjects sit outside the established boundaries of society and can elucidate how and why those limits are drawn. This chapter focuses on the “New Man” in Cuba and how it has been reconfigured in twenty-first-century LGBTQ films. As these works reimagine the parameters of gender and transgender, they confront the fundamental attachment to normative gender roles as a legitimating force in Latin American cultural traditions.

In “Dissident Sexualities in Southern-Cone Literature,” Laura A. Arnés and Nora Domínguez treat a series of narratives regarding sexuality that

attained high visibility in the literary field in Latin America. The authors argue that social crisis radically transformed corporal representation, and that a scene of plural voices, exposed bodies, and dissident sexualities were amplified. They analyze a heterogeneous group of feminist textualities that insist on the end of patriarchy as essential for the revolution to upset the concept of family and marriage, the uses of bodies and their gender expressions (Perlongher, Pizarnik, Mercado, Eltit, Puig, Peri Rossi), early twenty-first-century discursive practices that circumvent homo/hetero issues and choose the first person as a narrative voice (Lemebel, Molloy, Barrandeguy, Dillon, Fogwill), and texts by younger authors that challenge the binary paradigm of knowledge and desire (Havilio, Zúñiga, Puenzo, Meruane, Trias, Paula, Naty Menstrual).

According to Guatemalan hip hop MC Rebeca Lane, “Feminism for me and for us and many women in Latin America it’s not about a book, it’s not about theory, it’s not about academics. It’s about how you feel and how you want to live your life without machismo” (Castillo-Garsow). Through a message that is infused with feminism, social justice, and national, international, and personal histories, Lane fights for greater visibility for queer women in hip hop through her collective *Somos Guerreras*, which furthers female networks among a new and younger generation of women. Building on the hip hop of Krudas Cubensi, the Black queer feminist hip hop group formed in Cuba in the 1990s, Melissa Castillo Planas traces the emergence of queer hip hop feminisms throughout Latin America. Doubly marginalized both by cultures and music genres that celebrate heteronormativity, machismo, and overtly sexualized female representations, artists like lesbian Mexican rapper Niña Dío are changing not just what it means to be a female in hip hop but also a feminist in the Americas.

Florencia Garramuño’s chapter unlocks the ethical and political challenges of our time as they are elaborated and discussed in contemporary art practices, exploring figures of the impersonal and anonymous that insist on interrogating the intensity of a life irreducible to the notion of a self. She delves into works by narrators such as Teixeira Coelho, Diamela Eltit, and Sergio Chejfec and installations by Rosângela Rennó, Gian Paolo Minelli, and Claudia Andujar. How are we to understand the new protagonism of collective and anonymous figures? What do these new figures tell us about the way we organize experience in our contemporary world? What has triggered this new concern with an impersonal yet singular life? In what sense do all these formal innovations in contemporary aesthetics open up new ways to figure and understand shared experience and living together?

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The final part of our volume is centered on Latin American literature in the global markets. Since the Boom years of the 1960s, the world has looked to Latin America for astonishing new voices that break with established Eurocentric traditions; yet Euroamerica seems to continue demanding more of the same. The culture figures addressed in this part engage with global cultures in very different ways from their grandparents of the Boom. They produce mashups and mixtapes that appropriate, reorganize, and release sample texts that are both local in feel and global in reach; they reject the pieties of magic realism and put their mark on global cultural production in far more subtle and pervasive ways.

This part begins with Graciela Montaldo's discussion of "Latin American Literature and Criticism in the Global Market." In this chapter, she considers the new functions of literary criticism. The cultural changes in the local and global scenes allowed this reconfiguration in the frame of neoliberal politics and economic crisis. Among the new conditions of the critical practice, she notes the changes in the idea of literature and the new writing practices; the demands of professionalization in the universities; the emergence of cultural studies in the Anglo-Saxon academy; the crisis of the Humanities; the paradoxical proliferation of new journals and publishing houses. This chapter explores those changes by focusing on the institutional processes. It also studies the local contexts of production of knowledge and the new forms of circulation of ideas, knowledges, and cultural practices. Finally, the chapter focuses on the dialogues that literary criticism – now transformed into cultural critique – establishes with different local cultural practices and exchanges with international theoretical thought.

In her chapter on digital culture in Brazil, Tori Holmes argues that engagement with the digital is an essential and almost unavoidable approach for understanding and analyzing many aspects of contemporary Brazil. Presenting a conceptual approach drawing from Brazilian cultural studies and internet studies, and engaging with recent work seeking to set out an agenda for doing critical digital cultural studies in the wider field of modern languages, the chapter aims to show how existing theoretical and analytical frameworks in (Brazilian) cultural studies must be combined with new sensitivities and methodologies when tackling digital culture. Use of the internet and digital technologies has become prevalent in the country, including notably in the production, circulation, and consumption of cultural works (understood broadly), in both mainstream and peripheral circuits. At the same time as preexisting cultural forms and practices have undergone a remediation or refashioning in response to the

growth of digital media, new cultural objects have emerged, many of them continuing to display the strong audiovisual orientation that critics have long identified as central to Brazilian culture.

Finally, in “Mexican Transnational Cinema in the Twenty-First Century,” Maricruz Castro Ricalde asks if it is possible to talk about a national cinema at a time when production crews and financing are integrated internationally. How do we deal with dichotomies of the national/international, domestic/foreign, interior/exterior, local/global, and other very close notions like identity, citizenship, and migration? In this chapter, Castro Ricalde discusses the impact that artists generate in their environments when they expand global imagery, and how this happens thanks to the differences and diversity that they make visible. She focuses on two contemporary cases linked to Mexican cinema and one that dialogues with them. These are *Roma* (Cuarón, 2018), Guillermo del Toro’s exhibition *En casa con mis monstruos* (*At Home with Monsters*, 2017, 2019), and *Coco* (Unkrich and Molina, 2017). She argues that the transnational perspective does not entirely explain certain phenomena of territorialization and cultural deterritorialization.

Our desire in this volume was to provide a representative cartography of Latin American literatures and cultures that would inform readers and stimulate new critical and pedagogical approaches. We write this Introduction in July 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic is still in full force in the Americas, and its long-lasting effects on cultural production, and how we incorporate literary and cultural work in our research and pedagogical projects, are unclear. Any volume focusing on very contemporary work has to be deeply aware of how time binds us; how in trying to document the present we always work from incomplete information. In our case, this temporal challenge comes up against a profound uncertainty toward the future. We close the volume now with a strange sense of completion, one we could not have anticipated in pre-coronavirus times.

Works Cited

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