INTRODUCTION: THE AESTHETIC TRADITION OF HISPANIC THOUGHT

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“Philosophy must not neglect the multifariousness of things.”
— Alfred N. Whitehead

Although the term “America” covers two continents with one broad brushstroke, there is no denying the great cultural, historical and political differences that separate the United States of America from the countries of Latin America. The philosophical tradition is no exception; the differences between the Anglo-American and the Latin American philosophical traditions are seen most acutely in the relation each has (or does not have) to art and the literary world. The Latin American philosophical tradition is steeped in Latin American literature and art; an aesthetic orientation has long shaped philosophy in the Iberian Peninsula and in Latin America. As a result, the Iberian Peninsula and the countries of Latin America have a philosophical tradition that runs parallel to, and often in tandem with, the literary and artistic traditions of Spain, Portugal and the countries that comprise Latin America. However, whereas Iberian and Latin American art and literature are well-known and amply studied, Iberian and Latin American philosophy and thought are little known outside a relatively small circle of scholars. Part of the reason for this neglect can be traced to a view of philosophy as more closely related to the natural sciences, mathematics, and logic than to anything like literature. Consequently, when a philosopher shows signs of literary ambition, it is easy to relegate her work to the field of literature. Many of the philosophers of Spain (for example, Miguel de Unamuno and José Ortega y Gasset) were talented writers too and the philosophical tradition of Latin America is filled with thinkers who were also accomplished poets (two examples amongst many more are José Martí and Octavio Paz).

Ever since Latin American philosophy became normalized, an aesthetic or literary approach to philosophical inquiry has been grounds for dismissal and exclusion. As a result, only a small portion of Iberian and Latin American thought has been studied as philoso-
phy over the past seven decades and therefore relatively little is
known about this particular philosophical tradition—a tradition that
not only encompasses a long historical span, but also consists of a
wide range of authors, texts, tendencies, approaches and languages.

The aim of the present collection is to introduce the Iberian and
Latin American aesthetic tradition to a broader philosophical audi-
ence and our purpose in these opening remarks is to provide an
overview of this tradition in order to situate the work of the philoso-
phers and philosophies discussed in the articles on this subject. The
authors of the essays on the Hispanic aesthetic tradition discuss
some of the major currents and figures in modern Hispanic aesthetic
thought and our modest goal in this introduction (since a compre-
hensive introduction to the entire Hispanic aesthetic tradition would
require a much more detailed treatment) is to provide a context for
appreciating their contributions. In putting together this collection of
essays, we were guided by the desire to raise awareness in the
philosophical community at large of the Iberian and Latin American
aesthetic tradition, which is one of the most important and original
parts of the Iberian and Latin American philosophical tradition, yet a
part that remains neglected.

A central question that thinkers of the Hispanic aesthetic tradi-
tion set out to answer is: How can one account for and organize the
plurality of experiences, languages, cultural traditions, geographies,
worldviews and histories which shape the human condition without
resorting to an overarching foundationalist principle of unity that
privileges universals over particulars? In pursuing this question, we
find some bridges between the traditions of the two Americas. In the
company of Anglo-American thinkers such as Jonathan Edwards,
Ralph Waldo Emerson, Charles Sanders Peirce, John Dewey, William
James, Richard Rorty and others, many Hispanic thinkers rely on
“aesthetic order” to organize the above-mentioned plurality. In
contrast to “logical order,” which “instantiates” a rational “abstract
pattern” that privileges universals over particulars and homogeneity
over heterogeneity, “aesthetic order” instantiates an ad hoc pattern
that privileges concrete particulars over abstract universals and that
aims to include “the maximum of intensities of immediate experi-
ce.”

Conceived this way, aesthetic thought is what José Vasconcelos
calls “organic thinking” which, instead of subsuming the partic-

1 David L. Hall, Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism (Albany:
2 Hall, Richard Rorty, 71; Alfred North Whitehead, Modes of Thought (New York:
ular under a universal, relates “the parts to its ensemble and the various ensembles to a whole which is not the sum of its parts, but a coherence of the parts.”

In this alternative philosophical paradigm, art and literature serve as models and tools for thinking, interpreting and transforming the world. In the Hispanic world, art, literature and philosophy are not typically mere objects of academic study; they also play an active social and political role in everyday life. In fact, for thinkers within the Hispanic aesthetic tradition, art and literature are first and foremost vehicles for attaining knowledge and engaging in philosophical and political thinking. Not coincidentally, Hispanic intellectuals frequently engage in literary and art criticism and theorizing; some of them also use literary and artistic creation as a means of philosophical—not just aesthetic and political but also ethical, historical and often metaphysical, epistemological and even theological—reflection. Thanks to the rich philosophical content and aesthetic qualities of their works, a number of these pensadores-escritores are not only amongst the most insightful and engaging literary and art critics and theorists of the Hispanic world, but they are also amongst the major literary philosophers of the 20th and 21st centuries. Let us now consider the main themes that shape the Hispanic aesthetic tradition.

I. General Characteristics of Hispanic Aesthetic Thought

In a seminal essay written in the mid-1940s the Spanish-Mexican philosopher José Gaos (1900–1969) argues that the most original and significant Hispanic thought has tended to be aesthetic in “form,” “content,” and “spirit.” In this essay, Pensamiento de lengua española, he outlines the main characteristics of modern Hispanic thought. First of all, he notes that Hispanic thinkers tend to write texts for the general public rather than for a purely academic audience. Gaos points out that, as a result of the broader intended readership for the work, much of Hispanic thought is found in the form of essays, newspaper and magazine articles, memoirs, novels, poems

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and plays. Hispanic philosophical texts therefore tend to be literary rather than technical in nature and Hispanic philosophical discourse tends to be more metaphorical and narrative rather than strictly argumentative and analytical. Secondly, in terms of its content, Hispanic aesthetic thought covers many areas: not just aesthetics, but also history, politics, ethics, metaphysics and religion. However, rather than approaching these subjects academically, Hispanic thinkers prefer to approach them with an aesthetic “spirit” or “attitude.” In other words, they “approach the issue of plurality of belief and actions” in a way similar to the way many leading Anglo-American thinkers have done, namely, “through aesthetic and inclusory, rather than logical and excluyosory, means.”

Not only are there bridges between the two Americas that shape the Hispanic philosophical tradition, but there are also strong ties to the European tradition, especially to the Italian and the German philosophical traditions. In order to trace the genealogy of Hispanic aesthetic thought, Gaos relies on the work of German philosopher, Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–1911). Following Dilthey’s claim that the history of Western philosophy has alternated between two “forms” of thought—one “systematic,” “methodical,” and “transcendentalist;” the other “asystematic,” “amethodical,” and “immanentist”—Gaos proposes that Hispanic aesthetic thought is part of the latter current that has been steadily growing in predominance since the 18th century. Like the Italian philosopher, Ernesto Grassi, Gaos sees the philosophy of the Renaissance humanists and that of the modern immanentist philosophers (for example, the American pragmatists and the European hermeneutic philosophers) as part of the same larger current of thought which privileges not only history and the here and now over metaphysics and the beyond, but also the poetic word and aesthetic order rather than the rational word and logical order alone. According to Gaos,

Non-metaphysical, non-systematic, and “literary” philosophies are...part of the history of philosophy. One also has to pay attention to them. [They are part of] the history of philosophy, in its non-mutilated integrity. When examining contemporary Hispanic

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5 Ibid., 68.
7 Gaos, “Pensamiento,” 48.
8 Ibid., 95.
American thought, the conclusion cannot be other than it is philosophy, without lessening its merit as literature.10

Although this claim obviously does not apply to all Hispanic philosophy and thought, it remains true for an important segment of it. Gaos wrote *Pensamiento de lengua española* when Latin American philosophy had not yet been normalized, which basically means that it had not yet been professionalized and reformed in order to conform to the standards of Western academic (that is, Continental and/or Anglo-American) philosophy. While at the time that Gaos wrote this essay there were several academic philosophers in Spain and Latin America who had already produced work of philosophical significance, including various aesthetic treatises, in his view the most representative and noteworthy Hispanic thinkers were not the academic philosophers but rather the *pensadores escritores*—the public intellectuals and writers whose thought and writings were as much philosophical as they were literary and political.

Gaos’ core canon of aesthetic thinkers consists of some of the leading Hispanic *pensadores-escritores* of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, including Andrés Bello, Domingo F. Sarmiento, Juan Montalvo, José Martí, José Enrique Rodó, Miguel de Unamuno, José Ortega y Gasset and Alfonso Reyes. In the second half of the 20th century, the aesthetic tradition of Hispanic thought, which these “thinkers-writers” helped to shape and consolidate, was enriched and diversified by figures such as Jorge Luis Borges, Victoria Ocampo, María Zambrano, Octavio Paz, Rosario Castellanos, José Carlos Mariátegui, Alejandro Carpenter, José Lezama Lima, Rosa Chacel, Carlos Fuentes, José Ángel Valente, Elena Poniatowska, Fernando Savater and many others. Several academically trained philosophers and theorists have also produced outstanding books in the field of aesthetics, including Luis Juan Guerrero’s *Estética operatoria en sus tres direcciones* (1956, 1967), Adolfo Sánchez Vázquez’s *Las ideas estéticas de Marx* (1965), Felix Schwartzmann’s *Teoría de la expresión* (1967), Valeriano Bozal’s *El lenguaje artístico* (1970), Eugenio Trías’ *Los límites del mundo* (1986) and *La edad del espíritu* (1994), Francisca Pérez Carreño’s *Los placeres del parecido* (1988), Ticio Escobar’s *La belleza de los otros* (1993), Bolívar Echeverría’s *La modernidad de lo barroco* (1998), José Luis Molinuño’s *La experiencia estética moderna* (1998), Pablo Oyarzun *La anestética del ready-made* (2000) and Mauricio Beuchot’s *Belleza y analogía* (2012).

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Since Gaos’ essay on the aesthetic dimension of Hispanic thought broke new ground, he was primarily interested in providing a context for his readers, that is, he sought to present the common characteristics found in Hispanic aesthetic thought, as well as to trace its history, genealogy and philosophical significance. For this reason he did not discuss the important differences that exist between the various thinkers of the tradition, but rather he emphasized what each thinker shared with the others. Nevertheless he would have been the first to recognize that there are significant philosophical and ideological differences between the thinkers of the Hispanic aesthetic tradition and that Hispanic aesthetic thought is plural and diverse.

As noted already, Gaos proposes that aesthetic thought belongs to the broad tendency he calls “immanentism,” which Gaos ultimately traces to the Renaissance humanist tradition; the humanist strand of Hispanic aesthetic thought is one we shall discuss below. Despite the presence of common roots and main areas of focus, it is important to recognize that the Hispanic aesthetic tradition is not a unified tradition with a common source or a single trajectory, but rather several traditions that crisscross to form a cultural grid rather than a linear historical continuum. In order to offer some interpretative orientation to the reader of the essays on Hispanic aesthetic thought included in the volume, we shall now provide an overview of two main philosophical traditions that intersect to form the aesthetic tradition of Hispanic thought: the analogical and the humanist traditions.

II. The Analogical Tradition

The analogical tradition is not only the oldest, but also one of the most representative—albeit the least appreciated—tradition in the history of Iberian and Latin American thought. In the Iberian peninsula the analogical tradition can be traced to the writings of philosophers from Al-Andalus (Moorish Iberia), for example, the Jewish philosopher and poet Ibn Gabirol (1021–1058), the Arab philosopher and novelist Ibn Tufayl (1105–1185), the Arab mystic and philosopher Ibn Arabi (1165–1240) and the Majorcan doctor illuminatus Ramon Llull (1232–ca.1315). As Mohammed ‘Abed al-

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Jabri observes, the classical mode of Arabic thought called “analogy of the unknown after the known” was widely used in Al-Andalus.12 One important characteristic of medieval Andalusian analogical thought is that it was not only communicated in treatises and commentaries, but also in dialogues, epistles, poems and tales.13 Narrative theologians call the former (more hermeneutical) kind of analogical thinking “second-order discourse,” and the latter (more literary) kind, “first-order discourse.”14

As various scholars working in the areas of medieval Iberian literatures and thought have shown, the Arabic, Jewish and Christian Iberian medieval traditions are intertwined and connected to modern Iberian literature and thought. On the one hand, Miguel Asín Palacios15, Luce López-Baralt16, Catherine Swietlicki17, and other scholars have unravelled the direct connections that exist between Islamic, Jewish and Spanish mysticisms. Mysticism relies on “metaphysical gnosis”—an analogical mode of thought that works by way of negation (via negativa)—to convey “insight into the transcendent.”18 Iberian mysticism—which is Neopythagorean and Neoplatonic in origin and character—includes texts by Ibn Gabirol, Ibn Arabi, St. John of the Cross, St. Teresa of Avila, Miguel de Molinos, María Zambrano and others.

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12 Mohammed ‘Abed Al-Jabri, Arab-Islamic Philosophy: A Contemporary Critique, (tr.) A. Abbassi (Austin: Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of Texas at Austin Press, 1999), 17, 74–81.
15 Miguel Asín Palacios, Abenmasarra y su escuela: Orígenes de la filosofía hispano-musulmana (Madrid: Imprenta Ibérica, 1914).
16 Luce López-Baralt, Islam in Spanish Literature: From the Middle Ages to the Present, (tr.) A. Hurley (San Juan: Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1992), 91–142.
18 Arthur Versluis, Magic and Mysticism: An Introduction to Western Esotericism (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 166. Hereafter referred to parenthetically in text as MM. For a discussion of the central role of analogy in mystical approaches to metaphysical knowledge, see Demetrio Licciardo De la analogía en el conocimiento de Dios por la experiencia mística (Zürich: Pas Verlag, 1965).
On the other hand, Luis Girón-Negrón has identified a “didactic tradition” that connects, for example, the writings of the Jewish philosopher Maimonides (1135–1204) and the Arab-Islamic philosopher Ibn Tufayl with don Juan Manuel’s *El Conde Lucanor* (1335), Alfonso de la Torre’s *Vision Deleytable de la Filosofía y las Artes Liberales, Metafisica y Filosofia Moral* (ca. 1440) and other works by medieval authors such as Juan de Mena, Francisco Imperial, Marqués de Santillana and Diego de San Pedro. The “didactic” strand of the analogical tradition uses “allegorical narrative” (AT 36), and “cosmological gnosis” or “via positiva”—which works by positing correspondences between the microcosm (humanity) and the macrocosm (the natural world)—to seek and communicate knowledge of ultimate reality. Allegory and “correspondences” were, of course, widely used in ancient, medieval, early modern and Romantic philosophy and literature.

Although in many parts of the Western hemisphere analogical thinking was displaced by the rationalistic *episteme* in the 18th century, in places where the Enlightenment movement did not prevail—for example, in Spain, Latin America and the Arab world—analogical thinking has continued to exert a major influence in philosophy, theology, literature and the arts.

According to the Mexican philosopher Mauricio Beuchot, there is an analogical tradition in Latin America that goes back to the Colonial period. In this tradition he includes both first-order and second-order discourse. For example, he mentions Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz’s poem *Primero Sueño*—which is a masterpiece of New World Baroque poetry—and Octavio Paz’s monograph *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o las trampas de la fe*—which is an excellent example of Latin

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American “analogical hermeneutics.”24 One of the most representative strands of the Latin American analogical tradition is New World Baroque and Neobaroque literature and thought.25

The philosophical relevance of the Baroque has often been overlooked. In her article “Exuberance by Design: New World Baroque and the Politics of Postcoloniality,” Lois P. Zamora traces the history of the Baroque in both Europe and Latin America and offers an account of the historical development of New World Baroque and Latin American Neobaroque aesthetics and aesthetic thought. As she tells us:

[...] in Spanish America, as in Europe, the Baroque aesthetic was called upon to respond to an unruly arrangement of places and peoples, and to reassert theological order by visual means. But the Baroque proved a poor instrument of colonization, because its exuberance and illusionism allowed for the inclusion of fragments that weren’t foreseen by the colonizers. The New World Baroque reacted less to the Protestant insurgency or the new sciences than to local imperatives. The dynamic spaces of imported Baroque models, rather than imposing theological order, began to accommodate America’s diverse topographies, cultures, and peoples. The New World Baroque came increasingly to prefer accumulation of visual elements (faces, figures, decorative elements) to selection, and polycentric perspectives to any single (or singular) viewpoint. (28)

The theme of multiplicity and a resistance to static, fixed forms is one that the Baroque opens and which also characterizes much of the analogical tradition in Latin America, a tradition that has room to accommodate a wide range of voices.

The Mexican philosopher Mauricio Beuchot has focussed his discussion of the Latin American analogical tradition on texts written in Latin, Spanish and Portuguese, yet he recognizes that analogical thinking made possible the “intercultural communication” between the colonizers and the indigenous populations.26 While most works of analogical thought were produced by the Iberian colonizers and their descendants, some of them were composed or compiled by indigenous poets, sages and artists—oftentimes translated and edited by Spanish missionaries. One can speak of a transculturation

24 Ibid., 102, 104, 58–68.
26 Beuchot, Hermenéutica analógica, 99.
process in this strand of Hispanic aesthetic thought. Although the classics of Indo-American analogical thought—for example, the poems of Nezahualcoyotl, the *Popul Vuh* and the *Chilam Balam*—had long been regarded as mythology rather than as philosophy by most readers, since the 1940s a growing number of scholars have been reading these and other Indo-American texts as philosophy.

With this collection of work on aesthetics, we wanted to shed light on some of the lost voices of the Latin American aesthetic tradition and, in the contribution by Mario Valdés, “Philosophical Hermeneutics and the Concept of Literary Art in Mexico,” we find a wide lens which captures not only the work of modern authors such as Octavio Paz (1914–1998) and José Emilio Pacheco (1939–), but also texts by the Aztec philosopher-poet-king, Nezahualcoyotl. Valdés proposes that there is a “Mexican Tradition of Metaphorical Thinking,” to which this broad range of figures contributed. According to Valdés, the poems of Paz and Pacheco are connected to the

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hermeneutical tradition, which includes not only the works of Martin Heidegger, Hans Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, but also those of Juan Luis Vives, Giambatista Vico, Wilhelm von Humboldt, Benedetto Croce, Miguel de Unamuno, Wolfgang Iser and many other modern and contemporary philosophers and literary theorists. As we shall see in the next section, the hermeneutical tradition also intersects with the humanist tradition.

III. The Humanist Tradition

As the Italian philosopher Ernesto Grassi (1902–1991) demonstrates in his path-breaking work, the humanist tradition gives primacy to the “poetic word” over “rational speech,” and considers both poetry and rhetoric to be more effective ways of disclosing the world than “rational thought” and “causal reasoning”. Grassi traces the humanist tradition back to Dante who, “through his poetry and rhetoric...aim[ed] at disclosing a world, the world of his own time and country, his own ‘here and now,’ a task which had never been acknowledged as the function of poetry in traditional medieval philosophy.” Amongst the leading exponents of the humanist tradition Grassi includes both Italian and Spanish authors, such as Petrarch (1304–1374), Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–1375), Coluccio Salutati (1331–1406), Leonardo Bruni (1370–1444), Juan Luis Vives (1492–1540), Baltasar Gracián (1601–1658) and especially Giambattista Vico (1668–1744). Of course, the humanist tradition did not end with Vico’s historicism, but has grown and acquired a variety of forms over the past two and a half centuries.

One of the forms that humanism attained in Hispanic America at the turn of the 20th century was *arielismo*. The historical event that triggered this cultural movement was the Spanish-American War and the subsequent rise of US imperialism in the American continent. Its champion was the Uruguayan *pensador-escritor* José Enrique

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Rodó who, in his influential essay *Ariel* (1900), offered a humanist critique of positivism, utilitarianism and economic materialism. Intellectuals from all over Hispanic America responded to Rodó’s call to adopt Shakespeare’s character Ariel as their symbol. Ariel, in Rodó’s words, represents “the noble, lofty aspect of the human spirit,” and “the superiority of reason and feeling over the base impulses of irrationality” embodied by Caliban.  

*Arielismo* and the various anti-positivist humanist movements that it inspired throughout Latin America privilege ideals over facts, beauty over utility and freedom and justice over order and progress. *Arielismo* was also a critical response to the social and geographic determinism, racism and Latinophobia that several Latin American positivists of the 19th century adopted from European intellectual currents. These Latin Americans espoused so-called “nordomania,” or Anglophilia. For example, Domingo Sarmiento (Argentina 1811–1888) and Justo Sierra (Mexico 1848–1912), with their gazes shaped by positivism, looked down upon Spain and the Hispanic and Latin cultural heritages and blamed these, the indigenous and African heritages and the mixed racial composition of Latin America, for the main problems of their respective countries. While Sarmiento aspired to make of Argentina the “United States of South America,” Sierra believed that positivist education would make of Mexicans “the Yankees of the South, capable of facing up the Yankees of the Anglo-Saxon North.” Moreover, many Latin American intellectuals shared the racist theories of Arthur de Gobineau and Edmond Demolins, amongst others, who claimed that Teutonic peoples and Anglo-Saxons are racially superior; they also adopted the geographic deterministic theories of Henry Buckle and Hippolyte Taine.

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who argued that geography and other environmental factors create social, political and economic differences.\textsuperscript{38}

For example, in \textit{Nuestra América} (1903), the Argentine Carlos Octavio Bunge (1875–1918) argues that Hispanics, Native Americans, African Americans and their combinations, are racially inferior and claimed that the main problem of Latin America is its racial composition, or \textit{mestizaje}.\textsuperscript{39} Bunge’s conception of “Nuestra América” (Our America) is at painful odds with Jose Marti’s conception of the same.

And Marti’s conception of \textit{Nuestra América} is one that grew from the soil of humanism rather than positivism.

Rodó and the \textit{arielistas} reclaimed classical humanism and viewed the Hispanic cultural heritage in a much more positive (and far less positivist) light. Although many of them were enthusiastic admirers of what Ernest Renan called the “Greek miracle,” and embraced the “Hellenomania” or “philhellenism” of many German and English Romantics\textsuperscript{40}—for example, the Dominican Pedro Henríquez Ureña (1884–1946), the Mexican Alfonso Reyes (1889–1959) and the Venezuelan Mariano Picón Salas (1901–1965)—these Latin American humanists not only reclaimed and celebrated many aspects of the Hispanic cultural heritage, but they also rejected the social determinism and the racist theories of positivists, social Darwinists and Neo-Hellenists alike.

In \textit{Hacia un nuevo humanismo} (1976), the Mexican philosopher Samuel Ramos (1887–1959) embraces several key tenets of personalist thought and embarks upon one of its most cherished projects, the development of “a new humanism”.\textsuperscript{41} According to Ramos, the ultimate goal of this new humanism is to promote “the welfare and happiness of all men, regardless of class, [by] correcting all the injustices that exist today”.\textsuperscript{42} In \textit{Hacia un nuevo humanismo} Ramos thus upholds the centrality and reality of the human person and espouses the personalist tenet that the fundamental goal of society is to foster the development and the flourishing of the personality.\textsuperscript{43} Aesthetic values are central to this project of human flourishing and

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{38} Franco, \textit{Cultura Moderna}, 58.
\bibitem{39} \textit{Ibid.}, 59.
\bibitem{40} Bernal, \textit{Black Athena}, 289.
\bibitem{41} Francisco Romero, \textit{Sobre la Filosofía en América} (Buenos Aires: Raigal, 1952), 105.
\bibitem{43} Romero, \textit{Sobre la Filosofía}, 116.
\end{thebibliography}
so it is no surprise that with Ramos we find a rich source of aesthetic thought.

In her article, “Context and Kant in the Aesthetics of José Enrique Rodó and Samuel Ramos,” Amy Oliver brings the Latin American aesthetic tradition into dialogue with the German tradition, while also emphasizing how a concern for “layers of historical context in Latin American art and aesthetics” open space for what is singularly American about the Latin American tradition. According to Oliver, Rodó and Ramos “responded very differently to Kant.” On the one hand, “Rodó suggests that man’s highest faculty is an aesthetic one, that morality is dependent in the last resort on beauty; and he assumes simultaneously that beauty is not the property of the majority but the preserve of a select minority.”

In her analysis of the role that each thinker played in the development of Latin American aesthetics, Oliver emphasizes the differences between Rodó’s and Ramos’ work, differences that come into focus most strongly in each thinker’s view of the relation between ethics and aesthetics. However, she also notes that the indigenous past is notably absent in both Rodó’s and Ramos’ work on aesthetics as both were more focussed on the European roots of the aesthetic tradition.

In his article, “Ortega’s Aesthetics: A Dialogue between Spanish Reality and European Aesthetical Currents,” Dezsö Csejtei also looks to Europe in order to situate the aesthetic work of the Spanish philosopher, José Ortega y Gasset. Ortega was a thinker who did much to shape 20th-century Latin American thought. His philosophy is connected not only to the humanist tradition, but also to the hermeneutical tradition. In addition to the Spanish Civil War, a historical event that decisively shaped Ortega y Gasset’s philosophy was the Spanish-American War—a military defeat and a major political and economic loss for Spain that was, of course, exacerbated and compounded by the end-of-the-century crisis brought about by the failed liberal revolution of 1868 and the bankrupt positivist project of the

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44 Gordon Brotherston’s Introduction to the 1967 edition of Rodó’s Ariel, quoted in Amy Oliver, 68.
last quarter of the 19th century. Like the *arielistas* in Latin America and the members of the generation of ’98 in Spain—including Unamuno—Ortega set out to undermine the influence of positivism and other impersonalistic and rationalistic forms of thought that had dominated the intellectual field in Spain in the last quarter of the 19th century.

Pedro Cerezo Galán characterizes this “end of the century crisis” as “nihilistic” in that Spanish society expressed a profound disillusionment and scepticism towards liberalism, positivism, rationalism and the variety of values, ideas, beliefs and hopes that these ideologies represented and promoted. However, contrary to the *arielistas* and the members of the Generation of ’98, who resorted to intuitivist or idealist approaches to try to find a way out of the crisis, Ortega y Gasset did so by addressing and trying to solve the life versus reason dilemma that puzzled and divided many European and American thinkers at the turn of the 20th century.

According to Csejtei, Ortega’s aesthetic thought sets out to “connect and harmonize the Spanish artistic tradition with currents in central European aesthetics.” Csejtei claims that “with the method of hermeneutics Ortega established a new and up-to-date methodology in Spain in order to interpret the treasures of Spanish arts from a European perspective.” As Csejtei argues, “Just like Velázquez’s painting was perhaps the most important cultural tie between Spain and Europe in the 17th century, similarly Ortega’s aesthetics and philosophy provide that nexus where Spanish reality and contemporary European culture could be united in a most authentic way in the 20th century.” Read in the company of some of the other contributions to this collection, we can also begin to situate Ortega’s aesthetics within the context of the Latin American aesthetic tradition. Let us now turn to some uniquely Latin American aspects of aesthetics within the humanist tradition.

Another major humanist movement that emerged in Latin America during the first few decades of the 20th century, and one which gained major significance in the sixties and seventies in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, was Socialist humanism. One of the pioneers

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of this movement in Latin America was the Peruvian José Carlos Mariátegui (1894–1930). Mariátegui occupies a unique place in Latin American intellectual and political history not only because he was one of the founders of socialism in Peru and one of the first professional literary and art critics of South America\(^{49}\), but also because he was, in the company of thinkers such as Leopoldo Zea, Paulo Freire, Adolfo Sanzchez Vazquez, Rodólo Kusch and Enrique Dussel, one of the most original Latin American socialist thinkers. Indeed, Ofelia Schutte opens her book, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought* (1993) with an analysis of Mariátegui’s socialist anthropology.

Mariátegui became politically influential in Peru in 1923 when he became the leader of the Peruvian left for a short period after Victor Haya de la Torre was sent into exile.\(^{50}\) He also became the leading socialist intellectual of Peru in 1926 when he founded *Amauta*, the first socialist magazine of Latin America, which became the major forum of Marxism, *indigenismo* and avant-gardism in Peru until his death in 1930.\(^{51}\) Mariátegui’s posthumous impact in Peru and the rest of Latin America continued and expanded as his work, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality* (1971), which was originally published in 1928, became one of the most widely studied collections of essays in the Hispanic world.

In order to understand Mariátegui’s aesthetic thought—which fuses the Romantic strands of Marxism\(^{52}\), Andean *indigenismo*\(^{53}\) and avant-gardism\(^{54}\)—it is helpful to recall the historical context in which Mariátegui forged it. The Peruvian socialist thinker gained intellectual and political pre-eminence in Peru during the dictatorship of Augusto Leguía, a populist dictator who ruled Peru between 1908 and 1912 and between 1919 and 1930. While Leguía’s economic policies in the twenties were founded on “opening the doors wide to foreign capital” and his domestic policies focussed on “a massive


\(^{54}\) Unruh, “Mariategui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 45–69.
public works program”—“including a large road-building program

carried out with forced indigenous labor”55—Leguía also “pro-
claimed a policy of ‘official indigenismo,’”56 allegedly to address the so-
called “Indian problem”—that is, the problem of extreme poverty

and grave social and political injustice from which the indigenous

populations have suffered for centuries in this continent.

Although Mariátegui’s socialist humanism cannot be properly un-
derstood without taking into account the specific social, political and

economic situation of Peru during the late 19th and the early 20th

centuries, it is also important to consider the indirect impact that the

Mexican and the Russian revolutions had on Mariátegui’s thought

and upon Latin American politics, society and culture during the

1920s.

Relevant to the ways in which Mariátegui’s views on the social

justice issues for the indigenous in Peru took shape, for example, is

the fact that in 1921, the Mexican President Álvaro Obregón created

the Secretary of Public Education—and a Department of Education

and Culture for the Indigenous Race—and that he appointed the

philosopher José Vasconcelos to run them in order to implement the

humanist ideals of post-revolutionary Mexico. Under Vasconcelos’

leadership, “over a thousand rural schools were built” and “about

two thousand libraries” were opened “stocked with books designed
to reinforce the humanist tradition of Mexico’s new [arielistas]

intelligentsia.”57. Vasconcelos’ educational project was partly modelled

after the Leninist program of education that was designed to shape a

“new man”—the classically inspired homo humanus envisioned by

the humanist Marx.58 Like Lenin’s humanistic educational project

implemented by Anatoly Lunacharsky, Vasconcelos’ project included,

for example, the publication and distribution of the Western classics

on a massive scale. At the same time, like Leguía’s “indigenista”

program implemented in 1920 by the sociologist Castro Pozo, the

Mexican President Obregón’s educational and cultural project in-

55 Benjamin Keen and Keith Haynes, A History of Latin America: Independence to


56 Klarén, Perú, 247.

57 Vicente Lombardo Toledano, “El sentido humanista de la Revolución Mexica-

na,” in Conferencias del Ateneo de la juventud, (ed.) J. Hernández Luna (Mexico

City: UNAM, 1962), 553.

58 Aníbal Ponce, Humanismo burgués y humanismo proletario: de Erasmo a

Romain Rolland: Estudio preliminar de Horacio Tarcus (Buenos Aires: Capital

intelectual, 2009).
volved Hispanicizing the indigenous population with the goal of “assimilating the Indian into the mainstream life of the nation.”

In Peru, as in Mexico and other Latin American countries, the new kind of liberal humanism promoted by arielistas and personalists—for example, Francisco García Calderón (1883–1953), Victor Andrés Belaunde (1883–1966) and Jose de la Riva-Agüero (1885–1944)—basically wanted to realize the humanist project that the Spanish missionaries had started in the 16th century and that Rodó and arielistas like García Calderón had reimagined by transforming the pan-Hispanic project of the Spanish Empire into a “pan-Latin and Pan-American ideal.” Mariátegui rejected “his generation’s utopian Americanism” and argued that to create a truly “new Peru” it was imperative, on the one hand, to abandon “the reactionary arielista notion of Spanish American Latin roots,” and, on the other hand, to adopt the “iconoclastic spirit of international vanguardism.”

To be sure, Mariátegui did not propose breaking completely with the Hispanic, Latin, or European cultural heritages nor with modern Western reason and science. He not only embraced the humanist ideal encapsulated in the Terencian motto “I am a human being, I consider nothing that is human alien to me”—to which he alluded in the preface of the first issue of Amauta when he stated that “all that is human is ours”—but he also believed that “[t]here is no salvation for Indo-America without European and Western science and thought” and especially without Marxist humanism. Like most Marxists, Mariátegui believed that a socialist education—an education in which the arts, the humanities and the sciences are taught according to Marxist principles and complemented with physical education and labour—would build a “new man.” However, unlike Marxists like the Argentine Aníbal Ponce (1898–1938) who espoused social realist aesthetics, Mariátegui espoused avant-garde aesthetics. With the critical tools of Marxist dialectics Mariátegui set out to show the “coherent, constructive, and integrative elements” of avant-garde art, literature and thought and “the substance of [their] critical potential and revolutionary spirit.”

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59 Klarén, Perú, 247.
61 Unruh, “Mariategui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 60–62.
63 quoted in Unruh, “Mariategui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 60.
64 Ponce, Humanismo burgués y, 93.
65 Unruh, “Mariategui’s Aesthetic Thought,” 50.
In his article, “Mariátegui’s Avant-garde and Surrealism as Discipline,” Omar Rivera presents Mariátegui as a disciplined surrealist and analyzes the Peruvian thinker’s work within the context of the cultural crisis that followed the First World War. According to Rivera, “Mariátegui’s avant-garde is an adaptive response to the spiritual consequences of the war that sustains the possibility of revolutionary praxis, a praxis that is a manifestation of the indivisible human spirit in its ‘plenitude and coherence.’” (104) In his article Rivera discusses the hermeneutical aspect of Mariátegui’s revolutionary praxis, showing this to be an important dimension of Socialist humanism in Latin America. Rivera’s portrait of Mariátegui reveals not only the political and aesthetic character of Mariátegui’s thought, but also its political and aesthetic implications.

In Latin America, socialist humanism is often associated with Calibanismo. As the name implies, Calibanismo, like Arielismo, was inspired by the critical reading and literary appropriation of Shakespeare’s The Tempest and its iconic characters. Some of the poets, philosophers, cultural critics, and theorists most frequently associated with Calibanismo include George Lamming, Aimé Césaire, Eduard Brathwaite, Roberto Fernández Retamar, Paget Henry, and liberation philosophers Leopoldo Zea, Arturo A. Roig and Enrique Dussel. Another Argentine philosopher who is not typically associated with Latin American socialist humanism, but who deserves being mentioned in this discussion, is Carlos Astrada (1894–1970). Although in his writings Astrada uses the word freedom instead of liberation, nevertheless in his late works he proposed to develop a socialist “existential humanism,”66 which Gerardo Oviedo describes as “an existential philosophy of Latin American liberation.”67 In contrast to Zea, who sympathized with Marxism but who was not himself a Marxist, Astrada espoused Marxism and set out to reconcile existential philosophy with Marxism during the last twenty years of his life.

Astrada’s philosophical and political commitments are related to those of another thinker from Argentina, Enrique Dussel (1934–), the foremost Latin American liberation philosopher. Although Dussel, like Astrada, worked at the beginning of his career in the areas of personalism, phenomenology and phenomenological ontol-

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ogy, his critical social and political consciousness, and his personal experience and solidarity with the poor and the oppressed, led him eventually to incorporate Marxist principles and categories into his philosophy. However, unlike Astrada, whose intellectual guide was his teacher Martin Heidegger, Dussel was influenced by his teacher Paul Ricoeur and other French personalist communitarians—for example, Jacques Maritain and Emmanuel Mounier—and subsequently, as a result of his Nazareth experience and his assimilation of the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, Paul Gauthier, Leopoldo Zea and other liberation theorists, Dussel became not only an advocate of a humanism of and for the Other—a “semitic humanism”—but he also became a strong critic of continental philosophy—including Heidegger’s—and of Eurocentrism—including Levinas’.

In developing the Levinasian notion that ethics is “first philosophy,” and adopting the critique of Eurocentrism advanced by a number of postcolonial thinkers—such as Fanon, Zea, Edward Said, and Samir Amin—Dussel and other Argentine liberation philosophers of his generation distanced themselves critically from the Eurocentric humanism and Marxist philosophy of thinkers, such as Ponce and Astrada, as well as from the aestheticist perspective of Heideggerians, such as Luis Juan Guerrero (1899–1957)—who espoused the idea that aesthetics is “prima philosophia”.

Indeed, according to another Argentine philosopher, Arturo Roig (1922–2012), the distinction between an “ethicist” and an “aestheticist” perspective is one of the fundamental distinctions between “philosophers of freedom,” such as Antonio Caso and Alejandro Korn and “philosophers of liberation,” such as Dussel and himself. This distinction, Roig claims, is also one of the fundamental reasons why contemporary Latin American thinkers have abandoned José Gaos’ model of thought, which encompasses and integrates the aesthetic, political and pedagogical dimensions of Hispanic thought and views the latter transatlantically rather than from a Latin American perspective.
However, as Alejandro Vallega shows in his article “Exordio/Exordium: For an Aesthetics of Liberation out of Latin American Experience,” ethics and aesthetics are not mutually exclusive or antagonistic domains. In fact, according to Vallega, aesthetics actually grounds Dussel’s philosophy of liberation. Vallega proposes an “aesthetics of liberation” that complements and is at the same time in critical dialogue with Dussel’s liberation philosophical system and Quijano’s theory on the “coloniality of power and knowledge.” Vallega underscores the importance of aesthetic sensibility and experience as key factors in and conditions for the realization of the liberation and de-colonizing project that Dussel and Quijano defend. As Vallega points out, the liberatory call in Latin America is “complicated by the fact of a living experience and consciousness that, for the most part, is neither purely indigenous nor purely European.” Aesthetic experience is offered by Vallega as a way to understand the unique complications of Latin America’s cultural and intellectual reality. As he tells us, “aesthetic experience is fundamental to the project of liberation at the social, political, normative, and ideological levels; both at the level of decolonization of the American mind and in terms of the possible experiences from which originary Latin American aesthetic thought may arise.” Vallega’s analysis of Julio Cortázar’s, “La noche boca arriba” adds detail to his case for the ways in which a focus on aesthetic experience opens a wider lens on the unique temporal experience present in the colonial condition of Latin America and attempts to decolonize the Latin American mind.

The six essays in this collection each serve to remind us of the important voices from the Hispanic tradition of aesthetics that we have yet to appreciate fully. A deeper understanding of that tradition’s roots in analogical and humanist thinking may help clear space for a greater appreciation of what we still have to learn from the many contributions of the thinkers highlighted in the following essays. We further hope that this collection will demonstrate the rich diversity of currents or, to speak with Whitehead, the multifariousness of the Hispanic and Latin American aesthetic tradition.

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