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Leading LASA in Difficult Times

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This forty-third LASA congress took place in the city of San Francisco at a critical moment in the United States—a moment marked by the erosion of democracy, the weakening of the rule of law, and the deterioration of human rights. We are living through the emergence of an unprecedented planetary project, a new pact between billionaire corporations and the State, one that intertwines authoritarianism and algorithm on a global scale. We are living through a savage tariff war, the closing of borders, and the exercise of new military technologies, renewed incursions, and imperial strategies.

Amid this crisis of the democratic system of government, LASA2025 invited us to expand our critical agendas. It called on members to do what we do best: to think, debate, write, and amplify our knowledge and understanding. This edition of our congress called on us to reimagine ways to combat the destructive onslaught of our cruel present. Reimagining means re-evaluating the complex twists of history, connecting the unconnected, naming the unnamed, re-inscribing what we lived through but forgot, and rediscovering what was there but we did not see. Reimagining means turning toward the future with a gaze that does not ignore the past or the problems gone by that still need our attention. Reimagining is transforming.

On a personal note, this year marks my twentieth in the United States, a complex and contradictory country where I have nonetheless always felt welcome, a country that has shown that we can coexist in spite of, or, better yet, because of our differences. Although the present moment may contradict my optimistic tone, I remain convinced that coexistence will prevail over the machines of destruction and hatred that detonate every day in America.

This year also marks my twentieth as a LASA member, and it is an honor to celebrate this milestone as its president. Over the last two years, as vice-president and then president of this influential association, I have come to understand its complexities, its power, and its relevance. I have also seen its limitations up close, the many obstacles it faces, and the long road ahead to a more equitable and plural association that responds to the steep demands of our times. I have especially come to realize that what truly sustains LASA is the collective, voluntary, and relational work of its many members. LASA thrives on the energies of researchers who are not content to work alone but who seek a community that aspires to a better world. LASA is about connecting with each other and then connecting even more.

For that reason, I want to express my profound gratitude to the co-chairs of this edition. My colleagues Paola Cortes-Rocca (CONICET/Universidad Nacional de las Artes), Cecilia Fajardo-Hill (Arizona State University), and Emily A. Maguire (Northwestern University) worked hard to make this congress a vital and innovative experience. Together, we sought to reimagine the LASA congress.

We wanted this edition to be novel and daring, an instance of what we have long wanted to experience. We wanted to show that academia is more alive than ever. And we especially wanted to rethink the ways that diverse disciplines engage in dialog. We focused on three fundamental gestures: interdisciplinarity, transdisciplinarity, and indiscipline. We disciplined ourselves to meet every week for almost two years to design a powerful congress in a moment defined by artificial intelligence, high technology, and the rise of new authoritarianisms. From four different time zones, we reviewed political shifts, tides of protest and celebration, aesthetic events in shared and foreign territories, and lives in motion. Together, we arrived at these days, which we shared together in San Francisco.

LASA2025 was a complex and diverse congress that addressed urgent and novel themes: the difficult frictions between activism and academia; the new technologies of censorship that compromise academic freedom; the coloniality of power and survival strategies; intersectionality to envision the limits of belonging; and the transfeminist movements of the Global South. The 11 presidential panels featured representatives from all disciplinary areas active in LASA: the Social Sciences, the Humanities, the Natural Sciences, and the Arts. Complementing this central program were seven sessions that included a panel on academic freedom and gender; seminars on legal strategies to defend democracy; roundtables on the relationships between failed states and criminal policy; and even discussions led by scholars of transpacific studies. Between workshops, plenaries, book launches, roundtables, pre-congress panels, and many other programs, this edition featured some 1000 sessions.

New for LASA2025 were initiatives that sought to disrupt the disciplinary structure of our field. We inaugurated the Experimental Room, a space for interdisciplinary workshops and conversations. We call these conversations *Acuerpamientos*, and we hope that these embodiments facilitated interaction between disciplinary perspectives that do not commonly dialogue. We had the same hope for the informal chatter and exchange that this space was meant to encourage. This contact zone was meant to foster unexpected collaborations and trace new articulations and permutations of knowledge, objects, and creative perspectives in the face of the challenges of the present moment. These challenges require us to rethink how we communicate our work and make it intelligible. I hope that future LASA congresses feature these spaces.

Past LASA congresses have accounted for the diverse ways of recording belonging. Many have focused on what was made invisible by Latin America's invention: from the historic congress led by President Mara Viveros Vigoya, *Améfrica Ladina: Linking Worlds and Knowledges, Weaving Hopes*, which used Afro-Brazilian intellectual Lélia Gonzalez's expression to make explicit the presence of Afro-indigenous and mestizo populations in our America; to *Latin America and the Caribbean: Thinking, Representing and Fighting for Rights*, led by President Margarita López Maya—the first in-person congress after the COVID-19 pandemic—where a conjunction ensured that a robust Caribbean presence was felt.

For LASA2025, my colleagues and I quickly agreed that a rigid demarcation of the region would ignore the bonds between Latin America's diverse traditions and the portable countries, immense diasporas, and relocations that defy territorial and maritime contours. The x in Latinx not only challenged the cartography of colonial logics; it also summoned those outside its borders who erected and plotted our region from places beyond its spatial boundary. An intersection itself, the letter x underscores the continuities and ruptures inherent in our most complex certainties.

To invoke Latinx America is therefore to build bridges to mend the broken relationships between Latin America and the Latinx communities of the United States; between the knowledge from here and from there; between the many languages, traditions, politics, and aesthetics that unite and separate us. The extraordinary city of San Francisco, home to a large and vibrant Latinx community, compelled us to highlight the connections that run through lands and waters and in the survival of ancestral cultures. This congress proposes the exploration of new grammars of the x—as the title of one presidential panel states—to account for intersections, for indigenous and native knowledge, and for novel ways of conceiving the body and the intersections of its markers.

For LASA2025, we strengthened and amplified the congress's parallel programs. More than a dozen filmmakers participated in the Film Festival, which screened around 70 films. And for the first time, our film festival had an official opening, on May 22nd at 6 pm at SFMOMA, just a few steps away. *REAS*, by renowned Argentine director Lola Arias, opened the festival. This is also the first edition that included a Book Fair instead of a Book Exhibit, a change that intended to give space to books and the publishing industry. I hope to continue to guide and support this initiative after my term as president concludes.

This edition also included unprecedented presentations by writers, artists, academics, and activists. The Colombian long-duration performance artist María José Arjona and the writer and artist Enrique Enríquez took our discussion of the body beyond the human. We had a special session with the feminist collective LASTESIS; a film program led by filmmaker, curator, and scholar Jesse Lerner (Pitzer College); and a recipe writing workshop led by our colleague Vanesa Miseres (University of Notre Dame). The co-chairs' message provides further details about the programming of this forty-third edition.

It has been my great honor to serve as President of LASA, and I am indebted to the members for their trust and support. This role has entailed significant responsibility. Difficult times have required me, the leadership, the secretariat, and the LASA membership to be deliberate and courageous. Under my presidency, our association has spoken out about unjust circumstances in and beyond our continent. Over the past two years, I have promoted and strengthened the Academic Freedom and Human Rights Commission, and I opened our institution to the most diverse opinions and positions to defend plurality as a non-negotiable democratic value.

Within LASA, I am proud to have promoted policies to make LASA more just and inclusive. I have contributed to strengthening the 41 sections—the lifeblood of our association—to decentralize LASA and focus attention on perspectives, regions, periods, and interests other than those highlighted at our annual congresses. As president, I formalized the representation of sections on the Executive Council. This is a victory for the sections but also the entire association. The dynamism of the sections pushes LASA to keep evolving and rethinking certainties and limits.

During my presidency, I launched the LGBTQIA+ Travel Fund to support travel to the congress for LGBTQIA+ members anywhere in the world. Like the travel scholarships already in place, this program makes our association more inclusive. On a similar note, I am proud to be the first gay president of LASA. We are stronger and better when we recognize our diverse origins, languages, knowledge, genders, and other markers. I hope that I have contributed to the public visibility of sexualities, identities, and genders that our fields of study can sometimes make invisible.

Likewise, I have supported the use of innovative technologies to promote dialogue. LASA has relaunched the journal *LASA Forum* as a central editorial project. Its format promotes exchange and interdisciplinarity, and its archive makes every article of every prior issue available and accessible. *LASA Forum* will continue to publish high-quality original works on Latin America, the Caribbean, and their diasporas. This time, I invited Cecilia Fajardo-Hill to co-edit the special issue *Borderlands 2.0: Las nuevas fronteras* with me. Drawing inspiration from the groundbreaking work of Chicana theorist and writer Gloria Anzaldúa, we called upon scholars, artists, and practitioners to explore the evolving configurations of borderlands. Their cutting-edge contributions reflect a shared inter- and transdisciplinary commitment to rethinking the violent nature of borders and uncovering the emancipatory potential of life at the intersections of language, gender, race, class, ethnicity, and embodiment. These essays and interventions speak to the urgency of our moment, as exclusionary political projects attempt to erase the fluidity and complexity of lived experiences across the Americas.

I have also championed the work of those of us in the Humanities and the Arts, with the goal of making our contributions more visible within the field of Latin American studies. We comprise a significant portion of LASA's membership, and this association has been our home for almost sixty years. With this edition, we want to underscore that, like our colleagues in the Social and

Natural Sciences, we are a legitimate historical and critical discipline, albeit one whose work is consistently attacked in times of authoritarian logics.

Given the difficulties of the present moment, I believe that the most productive, creative, and sustainable way forward is for LASA to work with other associations and academic institutions. One successful model is the LASA Bogotá congress, led by President Jo-Marie Burt, in partnership with the prestigious Pontificia Universidad Javeriana. As I have said on numerous occasions, LASA cannot employ the logic of tourism, content to seek favorable venues for its massive meetings; it must propose and foster strategic partnerships with academic centers, universities, museums, and other spaces that value academic freedom and allow for deeper exchanges than those that can take place at an annual congress. LASA2025 therefore sought to connect with San Francisco's cultural centers and Latinx and migrant communities. In this way, LASA could be an enduring experience that bears witness to the richness of the city that welcomes us.

LASA's future requires our commitment to the educational institutions where we work— institutions attacked and defamed in the current climate, to facilitate the transformations that we need and crave. I therefore want to take this opportunity to thank my educational institution for its financial and logistical assistance. Princeton University generously supported many of this edition's innovations and the academic work that grounds it.

My sincere gratitude to my colleagues Jo-Marie Burt, Max Cameron, and Margarita López Maya, who have taught me so much over the past two years, and to my colleagues on the LASA Executive Council for their unfailing support and openness. Their commitment to our association has made me a better president. I also want to acknowledge LASA's Executive Director, Milagros Pereira Rojas, and our amazing team: Manuel Román Lacayo, Head of Operations; Lazaros Amanatidis, Director of Systems and Software Development; John Meyers, Systems Analyst; Ghisselle Blanco, Coordinator of Sections, Awards, and Congress Logistics; Vanessa Chaves and Laura Portilla Rojas, Communications Coordinators; Erin Gray and Julieta Mortati, Coordinators of LASA Press and LASA Forum; and Anna Ruscalleda, Coordinator of LASA2025 and translator, who provided important logistical assistance for the presidential and special guest panels. I also thank Mirna Kolbowski and Sharon Moose, LASA's Director of Finance and Accountant, respectively; Jason Dancisin, Graphic Designer; Deborah Cancel-Roman, Administrative Assistant; Mildred Cabrera, Vice President and Director of Operations at MaestroMeetings; Sandra Budd, Carola Molinares-Risch, Bill DeWalt, and Sylvia Keller, from the Latin American Cultural Center; and Claudia Ferman, from the LASA Film Festival.

Finally, I want to thank everyone who contributed to LASA2025, the coordinators of awards and program tracks, committee chairs, collaborators, and volunteers who have given what I value most: time, creativity, and knowledge. My colleagues and friends were exceedingly generous. And finally, I thank my family, Nathalie Bouzaglo and Luis Guzmán, for their infinite support and patience.

Poner el cuerpo en Latinx América was a celebration of critical thought in difficult times and of a vibrant association that continues to shape my academic work and public identity. Much remains to be done, of course, and I commit to building a better future and a long life for our LASA.