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From “Latinidad” to “Latinid@des”: Imagining the Twenty-First Century

Now the United States’ largest collective minority, the country’s heterogeneous Latin@ population increased from 35.3 million (12.5 percent) in 2000 to 55.4 million (17.4 percent) in 2014 (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011; Colby and Ortman 2015). The figures – attributable to Latin@ population growth and immigration from the Spanish-speaking Americas – were paralleled by sizeable migrant intakes from other parts of the hemisphere, Asia and Africa. Numerous commentators interpret these demographic patterns as heralding two interrelated phenomena. First, they may be signaling the United States’ evolution into a postracial age, exemplified by the election of the biracial President Barack Obama in 2008. Second, they may be signposting the irreversible “unwhitening” of the United States due to transnational migration patterns – which are also transforming immigrant receiver states across the “developed” world – and attendant ethno-racial transformations. In turn, these phenomena are often read by demographers, and institutions like the U.S. Census Bureau, as evidence of a twenty-first century in which the United States will have a Latin@ majority. Such speculations, moreover, are haunted by the epoch-changing temporal shift in global power and influence posed to the United States by the so-called “Asian century” and the emergence of powerhouse states across the “developing” world.

Albeit a blunt summation, these scenarios indicate why fundamental processes of transnational and transcultural change underwrite the remit of this chapter. Numerous literary and cultural critics have also argued that the United States’ changing demographic contours – which coincide with an increasingly penetrative digitized communication age – modulate how Latin@ literary texts are being conceived, produced, received, and critiqued in the United States and across the world. In this chapter, accordingly, I focus on the literary consolidation and/or publishing debut in the early twenty-first century of selected Latin@ writers who appear to be responding to and/or emerging from such globally relevant changes. Their ranks, to select a few authors from many, include Maya Chinchilla, Roberto José

Tejada, Rodrigo Toscano, José Rivera, Edwin Torres, Justin Torres, Salvador Plascencia, Giannina Braschi, Oscar Casares, Nina Marie Martínez, and Susana Chávez-Silverman. Despite the continuing importance of literary production under Chican@, Puerto Rican, Cuban American, and other specific Latin@ rubrics, it is arguable that the aesthetic strategies of many twenty-first-century writers are generating new post-identitarian and transnational, often globally referential and informed, narratives. No unitary notion of the nation, (racialized, ethnicized, gendered, sexualized) identity, language, literary genre, or technological medium can encompass with any adequacy the work of such Latin@ cultural producers (Aldama 127–47). A baseline for this chapter, then, is that while many Latin@ writers may not disavow their Latin@ identities, their texts may be indicating to readers that such identities can no longer be conceived of as having ethno-national centers from which to measure Latin@ authenticity.

In this chapter I proceed with an overview of key critical positions that assist in recognizing new Latin@ literary aesthetics and in tracking how their authors challenge essentialist understandings of Latinid@d as the framework for interpreting their texts. Those critical positions underwrite my argument that while the authors' approaches may resist straightforward categorizations and neat comparisons, diverse aesthetic approaches are evident in literary representations of latinid@d in the twenty-first century. The authors may downplay, problematize, or sidestep specific Latin@ identity positions. Many authors deploy sophisticated genre disturbances, metafictional tropes, and experimental narratological approaches; this therefore delineates them from forebears whose cultural political aesthetic and references were anchored compellingly in ethno-nationalist readings of Latin@ marginalization – informed by Chican@ and Puerto Rican historical experiences – by virtue of the United States' imperial history. Many writers may deploy non-translational approaches to and intentional "misuses" of English, Spanish, and other languages. This has always been the case in Latin@ writing, but such linguistic choices are increasingly accompanied and bolstered by cosmopolitan, international typologies, references, and settings that either exceed homeliness in the United States, or imply a rejection of what an orthodox creative Latin@ text is, should be, and ought to contain in terms of its cultural references, settings, and context.¹ In short, numerous Latin@ writers are contributing to the emergence of new post-identitarian latinid@d that reflect the constant flux of transculturations and their potential to modulate the United States' twenty-first-century future.

Such aesthetic approaches, I argue, impel some conceptual adaptation on the part of readers and critics, as signaled in this chapter by the orthographic move from *latinidad* to latinid@d, which shifts the conventional placing of

“@” after “Latin.” The move illustrates how *latinid@d* is being transformed in the digitized twenty-first century, and will continue to evolve in relation to as yet unforeseen techno-futures. The “@” recognizes that, like writers across the globe, Latin@ authors are using and gaining creative and fan base traction from digital and other platforms for their work, alongside traditional print media. The orthographic shift thus accepts that the technologies of literary production also influence how Latin@ writings are formulated and presented, read, and received.² In this context, moreover, *latinid@d* should be understood in its plural form of *latinid@des*, which emerge in and as multiple transcultural and transnational identifications, and attendant aesthetic practices.³ That said, this orthographic move is risky, as Claudia Milian argues in the epilogue – subtitled, simply, “@” – to her 2009 study *Latinizing America*: “Slashes and *at* signs are far from trivial. These symbols communicate a genealogical trajectory of the field – an intellectual history. They should be treated as spaces of inquiry, possibility, and reconfiguration. The @, above all, is a Latin router, haltingly enunciating yet transporting us to a panoply of fragmented Latined lives” (158).

How, then, might we begin to read new literary aesthetics of *latinid@des* and the ways they embody consistently evolving transculturations that are local, transnational, and modulated by the contemporary digital information age? Possible responses are being signaled by scholars who have assessed Latin@ literature in relation to an historical moment that no longer invariably places faith in ethno-national centers. Here I am indebted to Marta Caminero-Santangelo’s nuanced assessment in *On Latinidad: U.S. Literature and the Construction of Ethnicity* (2007) of critical approaches to what *latinidad* might signify, and for whom. I am especially compelled by her notion of *latinid@d* as an “elastic” set of phenomena harboring numerous potential Latin@ identifications, none of which may be in conceptual alignment or agreement (29). As she argues, with identity elasticity comes “[t]he possibility that no *one* understanding of the term [Latin@] might be sufficient to explain people’s *various* identifications with it” (29, - italics in the original), to which I would add the possibility of Latin@ disidentification, and even the term’s evaporation, when mediated in literary productions.

Caminero-Santangelo’s articulation of Latin@ elasticity is helpful in understanding alternative approaches, including that of Claudia Milian, who places Latin@ and *latinidad* in dialogic relation to her preferred rivals, “Latin” and “Latineity.” For Milian, the latter terms reflect how the migration north into the United States of “Latin” is symptomatic of unexpected shifts in “cultural signification” (1). That is, in the United States, “Latin” rubs up against Latin American *and* Latin@ *and* Latino/a or Latina/o, in the

process giving rise to complex, but as yet not fully explored or understood, racialized configurations that are also involving African Americans and diverse Caribbean, Central American, and South American communities, including many indigenous peoples (1). For Milian, these terminological frictions demand our attention as transcultural signposts, as a "multiphasic something that is letting us know that whatever might be ascribable to blackness, Latinoness, and Latinaness is being dissolved" inside U.S. borders and beyond them (3). Evoking Caminero-Santangelo's notion of Latin@ elasticity, Milian's Latineity implies "copiousness." This operates "as a set of new possibilities in the referents and sources for Latinness, as a new understanding from which different types of Latinoness and Latinaness are redirected and picked up" (4). Indeed, Milian identifies new Latin-based identifications "that do not solely depend on a definite, firm color and national origin or that, in some cases, are even specific to the United States" (5). Further, she argues, those identifications "demand a distance from U.S. Latino and Latina authenticity and the ontological grammar of Latinidad" (6) when understood as singular or weighted by the historical experiences of particular communities.

These arguments are pertinent in relation to the emergence – first online and in live performance venues in California, then in print – of writers such as the Oakland-based Maya Chinchilla, a self-defined Central American/Guatemalan/*Chapina* queer poet, performer, and blogger. Chinchilla is the author of *The Cha Cha Files: A Chapina Poética* (2014), a collection of poems, stories, memoir fragments, and snapshots, and coeditor of *Desde el EpiCentro: An Anthology of US Central American Poetry* (2007). Both texts' titles, in effect, make specific aesthetic gestures – *chapina* poetics; the literal insertion of Central American Americans into the purported Latin@ literary centre, as captured orthographically in "EpiCentro" – to new latinid@des.⁴ Writers from other communities are also contributing to this evolution. The story collection, *Vida*, from 2010, by the Colombian American Patricia Engel, for example, comprises interlinked stories featuring the character Sabina that move between New Jersey and Miami. The stories insert Colombianos into long-standing U.S. national and Latin@ literary archives about so-called "illegal immigrants" and/or immigrant hardship, archives that have been richly populated by Mexican and Puerto Rican historical experiences and representations.

Such elasticities and identitarian copiousness are by no means phenomena of the current century only. They are signposted in earlier cultural productions. One example derives from a scene in the "The Mission," a 1998 play by the Californian performance ensemble Culture Clash. The scene explores the tensions in San Francisco's Mission District and the literary ambitions of

a character, Herbert, who is overwhelmed by the demands of the customers in the *taquería* that employs him. As an escape from his malaise he imagines himself in “Heaven,” a reverie that prompts the following musing: “I said to myself, ‘I’m an American.’ And, in that same precious instant, I asked, ‘What is an American?’ I don’t know. I don’t remember. The population of Heaven is young, brown, and does not speak English. I have found very few ‘Americans’ here” (Montoya et al. 31). In this scene Culture Clash arguably provided post-Chican@ insights into the United States’ twenty-first-century demographic future. European Americans are a minority in the face of an amorphously “browning” population. The United States’ sense of itself as a nation, it is implied, now rests on complex relations between multiple ethno-racialized sectors. And the term Latin@ – understood as an indicator of a pan-ethnic group and identitarian stance in much of the critical literature in Latin@ Studies’ – here seems to collapse in its “browned” relationship with other non-Latin@ communities.

Paralleling the above critical calls for a reflexive, flexible approach to *latinidades* is the “post-Sixties” generation – a creative temporal bridge of sorts – identified by Raphael Dalleo and Elena Machado Sáez in *The Latinola Canon and the Emergence of Post-sixties Literature* (2007). For these critics, the post-Sixties generation of Latin@ writers emerged in the 1990s and differed from predecessors whose work was more often than not framed by civil rights enterprises, ambitions, and associated cultural politics. Moreover, the emergent writers were impelled to operate in a new publishing realm driven by market forces that completely transformed the authorial relationship to previous aesthetic and representational practices when understood within ethnic or nationalistic group limits and aspirations. This accords with Frederick Luis Aldama’s recognition that since the 1990s Latin@ writers have been occupying a global publishing stage that affords many a genuinely international readership (148–52). This privileged global platform is often underestimated in U.S.-based readings of Latin@ literature in relation to particular ethno-national prisms of Latin@ identity and belonging that may not sit comfortably with broader transnational and cosmopolitan purviews.

A third critical approach, which again attends to identitarian elasticity as mediated through creative texts, derives from Ramón Saldívar’s arguments in his 2013 essay, “The Second Elevation of the Novel: Race, Form, and the Postrace Aesthetic in Contemporary Narrative.” Here Saldívar outlines four modes of “postrace aesthetics” in contemporary U.S. narrative, while also noting the capacities of some authors and texts to span and epitomize more than one mode (4). For example, Saldívar identifies Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and other outputs as exemplifying

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all but the second mode. First, postrace aesthetics refers to narratives that are in "critical dialogue with the aesthetics of postmodernism," as evident, for example, in knowing uses of metafictional devices to reveal the narrative's constructedness, and the ironic playing with the purported disjunction between the fictional realm and the real (4). Second, postrace aesthetics are characterized by a willingness to play with generic traditions, conventions, and boundaries, and with such purported cultural binaries as high and low. Third, postrace aesthetics are typified by what Saldívar calls "speculative realism," which he describes as "a way of getting at the revisions of realism and fantasy into speculative forms that are seeming to shape the invention of new narrative modes in contemporary fiction" (3). Alongside Junot Díaz, Saldívar locates Yxta Maya Murray and her novel *The Conquest* (2002) in this category. And finally, Saldívar regards a postrace aesthetics as emphasizing the (again, elastic) "thematics of race in twenty-first century America" (5), as opposed to signaling a jettisoning of "race" altogether in narrative production.

Illustrating the critical complexities of assigning fixed or centered "Latin@" identities to authors and texts in the current postrace realm identified by Saldívar is the cult novel *Atomik Aztex* from 2005, by the Los Angeleno writer Sesshu Foster. As its opening lines indicate, the text is at once playful and confrontational, and already preparing readers to have their preconceptions toyed with: "I am Zenzontli, Keeper of the House of Darkness of the Aztex and I am getting fucked in the head and I think I like it. Okay sometimes I'm not sure. But my so-called visions are better than aspirin and cheaper" (1). The novel features parallel worlds, one ruled by Aztecs who long ago defeated the European invaders, the others involving Zenzontli being transported to such settings as the Battle of Stalingrad or a dystopian dream-induced vision of U.S. capitalist contemporaneity focused on a meat-packing factory in East Los Angeles. *Atomik Aztex* is named by Ramón Saldívar as a "minority" narrative – he does not define the novel further in relation to authorial ethnicity – that typifies the genre-blurring features of "postrace aesthetics" with its blending of speculative futurism and dirty realism. In Saldívar's formulation, the novel epitomizes how the "mixing of genres includes not just the canonic paradigms of classical, neoclassical, romantic, realist, and modernist origin, but also their outcast, lowbrow, vernacular, not to say kitschy varieties of what has come to be known as genre fiction, including the fantasy, sci-fi, gothic, noir, and erotic speculative writings of the postwar era" (4). It is of note, then, that within Latin@ studies *Atomik Aztex* has been described by at least one critic as "able to not just represent but formally mediate and rework the material forms with which it engages on its own formal terms and as a result of its own formal, Latino/a

tradition" (Nilges 148). For his part Foster might beg to differ: "When people first meet me, they ask, 'Who are you? What's your background?' I have a white Dad and Nisei [second-generation Japanese American] mom and grew up in a Chicano barrio. I grew up with Asians, Chicanos and people with mixed heritage – but I've always had to simplify for people who come from outside that experience" ("Excerpts"). Foster is not a Latin@ author. Yet his upbringing in East Los Angeles, coupled with the novel's cultural and geospatial referents, and its uses of Chican@ and Mexican slang, as Nilges appreciates, mean that *Atomik Aztex* can be read otherwise. That possibility informs receptions of Foster's novel in some Latin@ constituencies; Aldama, for example, also discusses this novel in relation to "new Latino/a forms" (140–41).⁶ But the possibility also confronts those constituencies with other receptions that could reject assumptions and faith in a Latin@ identity and a Latin@ literary tradition.

If the elastic inclusion of Foster in a "Latin@ tradition" is a critical and conceptual possibility, there is an obverse. The work of numerous Latin@ writers may defy and/or challenge the notion that there is such a thing as a "Latin@ tradition" and its presumed identity basis.⁷ A case in point is *We the Animals* (2011), the debut novel from Justin Torres, a Brooklyn-raised writer with a Puerto Rican father and an Italian-Irish mother. Legible in relation to Saldívar's fourth mode of postrace aesthetics in its approach to race and ethnicity, *We the Animals* is an autobiographically modulated story of three brothers in a chaotic, at times violent, Puerto Rican and Anglo-American household in a white working-class town in upstate New York. Latinid@d does not emerge as a central narratorial concern in the novel. To their father the brothers are "mutts," his way of defining them ethnically as neither Anglo-American nor Puerto Rican. The novel does not pay further attention to such identitarian complexities aside from representing the brothers as a small grouping of ethnic "difference" that insulates itself from the surrounding "white" majority.

Other challenges to purported identity centers are evident in the work of the poet, performer, and playwright Rodrigo Toscano – author of such well-received texts as *Partisans* (1999), *The Disparities* (2002), *Platform* (2002), *To Leveling Swerve* (2004), *Collapsible Poetics Theater* (2007), and *Deck of Deeds* (2012). As Manuel Brito describes him, Toscano is a Chican@ writer raised in California, now resident of New York, with a career-long commitment to "progressive politics" that is global in gaze and application (51). At the same time, Toscano's experimental writing approach moves beyond understandings of Chican@ identity derived from the 1960s and 1970s Chicano Movement and associated symbolism, such as Aztlán. The transnational coordinates and transgressive metafictional properties

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of Toscano's aesthetic praxis are evident in his collection of some seventy short narratives, *Deck of Deeds* (2012), whose overarching frame derives from the Mexican card game *lotería*. In a 2013 interview with another noted Latin@ writer, Roberto José Tejada, Toscano says of this book that its inbuilt generic and narrative digressions are epitomized by the recurring "trope of the hotel room," a site inhabited by "trans-capital actors" and a setting for transgressive "exchanges": "Whether it's exchange values across the continents, or the exchange of body fluids. Or alien body fluids. Or alien beings swapping their identities with other alien beings. And by alien beings I don't mean extraterrestrials, I mean social alien beings" ("Rodrigo Toscano"). According to Tejada, moreover, those "social alien beings" are also portrayed by Toscano as bilingually "affable everyday personalities" who are "perplexed by the dynamics of technological, social, and economic change" of the twenty-first century ("Rodrigo Toscano").

That characterization of affable yet perplexed personalities could also be applied to the characters populating many other early twenty-first-century Latin@ literary works. As a result, those works appear to confirm the viability of the knowingly metafictional and genre-disturbing aspects of the post-race aesthetic identified by Ramón Saldivar. The Mexican-born Salvador Plascencia's 2005 novel, *The People of Paper*, merits attention here. Saldivar locates the novel in the first mode of his postrace aesthetics in that it embodies the "dialogic and critical relation between contemporary ethnic fiction and postmodern metafiction" as a "shared history" (4), and thus problematizes the idea of a "Latin@" tradition. Evoking Latin American magical realism, and indebted to the postmodern turn in U.S. and much fiction across the globe that began in the 1960s, *The People of Paper* revels in its own highly self-conscious narrative experimentation, the title iterating that the characters exist only on the page. One of the novel's narrative drives is a struggle against omniscient narration, cast as an astrological battle with Saturn – later revealed to be the author himself – that involves a character, Federico de la Fe, collaborating with a gang of flower pickers in the small town of El Monte in southern California. That location does evoke a "real world" site and associated history of Mexican immigration and labor exploitation, but that, arguably, is as far as the novel gets in gesturing toward historical veracity and realism.

The People of Paper calls attention to itself as a manufactured artefact that defies categorization given its insistent amplifications, digressions, and challenges to linearity. Contrasting columns of text in some chapters separate the experiences of particular characters, some text has been blocked out, and some names have been cut literally from the pages of the novel in its physical, printed form. Such devices evoke the late

eighteenth-century novel, *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*, by Laurence Sterne. Federico de la Fe deals with his personal struggles and tragedies by applying burns to – and thus resurfacing or, more precisely, rewriting – his body, in a fictional parallel to the palimpsestic physical feel *and* readerly experience of the novel itself. That sensation is amplified in the character Merced de Papel, a woman made from origami whose lovers, the fathers of her legion progeny, bear her paper-cut scars on their bodies' private parts. The novel exemplifies a growing trend within Latin@ writing to deploy extensive and self-conscious intertextual references and metaphysical tactics, while also equally knowingly drawing on literary traditions that cannot be easily located within a Latin@ canon or literary tradition.

Another novel that invites scrutiny given its elastic postrace and post-Sixties relation to latinid@des is the Puerto Rican-born Giannina Braschi's *The United States of Banana* (2011). Her first “novel” to be written in English, the text forms a trilogy of sorts – given its shared characters and genre-mixing narrative devices – with her earlier *El imperio de los sueños* (1988; translated as *Empire of Dreams* in 1994), and the English-Spanish code-switching *Yo-Yo Boing* (1998). Implicitly anchored in the fraught Puerto Rican relationship with the United States since 1898, *The United States of Banana* nonetheless deals with the detonation – again literally – of that relationship into global terrain caused by the events of September 11, 2001, and subsequent declarations of the War on Terror by the George W. Bush administration. Cast in the novel as “a chicken with its head cut off” (45), the United States, now the sole imperial superpower, is represented entering the twenty-first century in a full-scale identity crisis, as announced by the novel's opening lines about the end of the world.

In a sense, as a novel, Braschi's *United States of Banana* is also in a formal identity crisis due to the fluidity of its generic framework. As Elizabeth Lowry argues, it “is in fact a mixed genre work: part memoir, part epic poem, part speculative fiction, part polemic, and, at times, a stage play” (156). The text relies heavily on numerous intertextual references, including the Spanish Golden Age play by Calderón de la Barca, *La vida es sueño* [Life is a Dream], which provides a structural basis for the theatricalized second part of the novel to make absurdist points about the Puerto Rican–U.S. relationship and U.S. global power alike. Moreover, a figure called “Giannini Braschi” herself appears in this polyglot, self-deprecatingly humorous text as both a character and the main narrator. That narratological ruse – again, a familiar postmodern trope – assists the author in bringing into literary representation a visceral sense of the cultural and geopolitical chaos that the events of 9/11 inaugurated, not just for New York and the United States but

for the world (Lowry 156). An important trajectory in the novel lies in its musings about whether or not the post-9/11 twenty-first century will see a resurgence of Latin Americanism opposed to U.S. hegemony (18). But those musings grate against the speculative future of the text (in the second part) in which all Latin Americans are granted U.S. passports. The gesture does not provide them access to cosmopolitan mobility across the hemisphere, but rather to lives as worker-fodder for U.S. capitalist interests.

Literary attentions to hemispherical understandings of "America/América" – an implicit geospatial frame for Braschi – have characterized the work of many writers now accorded status in Latin@ canons. But the works of Braschi and other writers are appearing to experiment and play much more deeply than previous generations with notions of hemispherical relevance, both on personal and literary levels. For example, the Los Angeles-born Roberto José Tejada approaches poetry as a preferred medium for exploring his sense of hemispherical belonging and meaningfulness – arguably as a cosmopolitan expansiveness attuned to displacements across the globe – that transcends national lines, identifications based on gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, and in his case, the binational record of U.S.-Mexican relations.⁸ Tejada came to continental literary prominence in his mid-twenties as the founding editor in 1991 of the renowned bicultural and bilingual (English and Spanish) literary and visual art magazine *Mandorla* in Mexico City. As Tejada notes in a 2012 interview with Esther Allen, the magazine aimed to be transcontinental in its publication approach while also attending to the literary legacies of Anglophone and Hispanophone avant-garde traditions. Tejada also agrees with Allen that a hemispherical identity is much more important to him than any minority Latin@ identification when defined in relation to majoritarian national U.S. culture. However, Tejada also recognizes that his personal identification with an hemispherical identitarian position is risky: it emplaces him in an uneasy contrapuntal relationship with a neoliberal desire – as exemplified by the establishment of NAFTA in 1994 – for the end of economic borders and other national obstacles to the circulation of labor, commodities, and finance, to the benefit of multinational capitalism. Nonetheless, a personalized hemispherical anchor and an interest in connecting disparate historical moments of crisis, as with Braschi, are evident in such collections as *Mirrors for Gold* (2006), *Exposition Park* (2010), and *Full Foreground* (2012). The poems in *Full Foreground*, for example, like the *United States of Banana*, build from the events of 9/11, but move backward to contextualize that date in relation to other moments of violent upheaval: home-grown terrorism (McVeigh's bombing of the Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995); the ethnic cleansings that began in

1991 after the breakup of Yugoslavia; and the Gulf War of 1990–91 inaugurated by the first Bush administration (Allen).

Tejada is not alone among Latin@ writers who favor hemispherical identitarian parameters. Another example is provided by New York playwright José Rivera, the first Puerto Rican-born author to be nominated for an Oscar in recognition of his screenplay for *Diarios de motocicleta* (The Motorcycle Diaries), the 2004 film about Ernesto “Che” Guevara directed by Walter Salles. The screenplay and many of his theatrical works, from *The House of Ramon Iglesia* (1983) to *School of the Americas* (2006), the latter returning to Guevara to imagine his last day of life, confirm the description of Rivera by Caridad Svich as someone who “has established his theatrical voice at the intersection of the Old World and the New World, at the juncture of the Americas” (83). Svich notes that “the issue of cultural identity is not at the centre of Rivera’s writing” as it is with many other Latin@ dramatists. Rather, that issue provides one piece in a broader set of dramaturgical, personal, and political concerns: “Environmental, moral, social and political decay in contemporary society is as much on Rivera’s mind as how to syncretise a Latino (indigenous, African, Spanish, Creole) and ‘American’ identity” (83). Rivera himself refers to his sense of self as a collation of options that are at once doubled because of his Puerto Rican background and the rival aesthetic interests and demands of writing for the screen and for the stage: “Two loves. One lifetime of constant balance. Two sensibilities. Two audiences. Two languages. Two esthetic [sic] philosophies. Two ways to narrate a story. One pen, one hand, one hopelessly split brain” (Rivera 2006, 90).

Rivera’s self-reflection could apply to Edwin Torres: poet, performer, collaborator with such groups as the Spanic Attack Artist Collective and the Poetry Project, self-designated “lingualisualist” (Poetry Foundation n. d.), and a highly anthologized stalwart of the Nuyorican Poets Café in New York. As befits that repertoire, he is responsible for diverse outputs including the CD “Holy Kid” (1998), the interactive website “Brainlingo,” and such poetry collections as *Fractured Humorous* (1999), *The All-Union Day of the Shock Worker* (2001), *Onomalingua: Noise Songs and Poetry* (2002), *The PoPedology of an Ambient Language* (2008), *In the Function of External Circumstances* (2010), *Yes Thing, No Thing* (2010), *One Night for the Sleepy* (2012), and *Ameriscopía* (2014). As he says in “Sutra,” from *Ameriscopía*, “I’m just a plaything / for judgement / a collection of entrances / arranged / by impossible history” (9). The poems respond to external events and personal events in equal measure – 9/11, new fatherhood, local performance spaces, food stalls – in a digressive nomadism that has always characterized Torres’s writing, as was noted as early as 2000: “The nomad

is a constant in Torres' work, an alter ego for this poet who is claimed by a diverse group of avant-garde factions" and, by implication, identifications (Coultras n. p.).

A number of the authors discussed in this chapter could also be read nomadically in relation to a trend identified by Claudia Sadowski-Smith as "U.S. fronteriza fiction." By this she means spatialized representations of the U.S.-Mexico borderlands – influenced as much by Mexican literary representations as U.S.-based ones – that are legible in hemispherical and global contexts as moving away deliberately from the "symbolic focus on the border as a terrain of Chicana/o identity formation (and largely beyond imagery associated with Aztlán) [in order] to locate Chicana/o border communities within debates about globalization in Mexican border towns" (719). As Sadowski-Smith elaborates, "U.S. fronteriza writing draws attention to the fact that as 'products to be used' and as 'means of production,' specific geographies, such as U.S. borders, embody and are transformed by social, political, economic, and topographic conditions that enable, shape, and sustain certain forms of social organization as well as cultural production" (723). This is an important, if controversial, insight: it suggests that certain canonical approaches to the "Borderlands" no longer carry the critical weight they once did, and that Chican@ authors in particular are no longer beholden to expectations that their narratives must deal with cultural identity and evoke the symbols of the Chicano Movement.

Two quite distinct authors exemplify this trend: the Texas-born Oscar Casares and the Californian Nina Marie Martínez. Casares's story collection, *Brownsville* (2003), and his novel *Amigoland* (2009) are both set in the city of Brownsville in deep South Texas, and as befits that setting are literally part of a long Borderlands literary tradition. Both *Brownsville* and *Amigoland* contain numerous references to border militarization and the U.S. immigration regime. The symbiotic relationship between Brownsville, Texas, and the Mexican city of Matamoros, Tamaulipas, across the Rio Grande is also a given for Casares. "Domingo" from *Brownsville*, for example, focuses on an undocumented migrant in Brownsville whose separation from his family in Mexico causes him great anxiety. *Amigoland* is the story of two estranged brothers, one of whom, Don Fidencio, is in a nursing home. The other, Don Celestino, is persuaded by his housekeeper and lover Socorro (who crosses the border bridge from Matamoros daily to work for him) to repair the relationship. They spirit Don Fidencio out of the nursing home and undertake a road trip into Mexico in a quest to find certain truths about their grandfather. However, Casares's narratives are not portrayals of Mexican American marginalization in relation to Anglo-American hegemony. Rather, they exemplify a narrative aesthetic that seeks to "move beyond cultural

nationalist concerns with questions of Chicana/o identity formation and beyond the more metaphorical use of 'borderlands'" (Sadowski-Smith 735).

A second example of that trend is provided by Nina Marie Martínez's picaresque-like novel *¡Caramba!* (2004), which also evokes the *telenovela* and magic realism, and has clear affinities with the rapidly developing genre of Chica or Latina Lit (Aldama 129–35). Like Toscano's *Deck of Deeds*, the novel is structured loosely around the game of *lotería*, with illustrated cards announcing each chapter. While most of the characters are Mexican Americans, none of these residents of the fictional town of Lava Landing, California, either refer to themselves in terms of that identity, or expend energy exploring the cultural politics of Chicano identity. The novel is also marked, as with so many Latin@ creative works, by an ear for code-switching, Spanglish, and Spanish slang, which are seamlessly embedded into the dominant English, and without apology.

Martínez's uses of Spanglish and Spanish-origin words and expressions in a predominantly English-language text is a shared feature of all the authors referred to in this chapter, but other Latin@ authors are going much further with their linguistic aesthetic. Susana Chávez-Silverman, for example, utilizes the Latin American literary form of the *crónica* or chronicle in two collections: *Killer crónicas: Bilingual memories/Memorias bilingües* (2004) and *Scenes from la cuenca de Los Angeles y otros natural disasters* (2010). The author constructs her *crónicas* out of e-mails that she has sent to individual and collective interlocutors across the world. The *crónicas* that result from this interactive regimen resist generic categorization as memoir, autobiography, prose poetry, epistolary writing, diary writing, fictocriticism, and even the chronicle itself, thus also evoking Saldívar's postrace aesthetic. But arguably the key characteristic of Chávez-Silverman's approach is her inventive intermixture of Spanish and English, or perhaps better said, Spanishes and Englishes, which may not conform to or replicate Spanglish (Lennon). But even that description falters given that the distinct accent and regional dialectal modalities of all the languages in which she writes are conveyed through unorthodox spellings, which evoke the specific places that concern the author: South Africa, California, Spain, Argentina. The cosmopolitan reach of such writing is increasingly common across Latin@ literatures, a point that was recognized in the 2005 *Los Angeles Times* review of *Killer crónicas* by Daniel Hernandez, which he described as "a testament to the maturing sense of global and pan-Latin citizenship being claimed by Chicanos and U.S.-born Latinos in the American West."

There is little doubt that "Latino/a literary forms in the . . . early twenty-first century are a much more diverse terrain than in earlier epochs" (Aldama 127), and that this diversity is tied to a great extent to the demographic

expansion of the Latin@ population. As catalogued in this chapter's opening, that expansion is paralleled by global shifts in U.S. power and the country's internalized sense of self as an immigrant-receiving state, both processes back-dropped by the rapid technological advances of the digital age. In those contexts, Latin@ literatures are not simply contributing to the new latinid@des, but are embroiled in their own identitarian elasticity and copiousness. However, the optimistic global outreach encoded above in Hernandez's reading of Latin@ cultural citizenship and in Aldama's recognition of Latin@ literary diversity continue to encounter certain limits within Latin@ literary studies.

Questions about Latin@ authenticity and who to include or not in the new latinid@des as mediated through Latin@ literary texts continue. One example will suffice as a way of closing: the case of Daína Chaviano, the biggest-selling living Cuban-born author of our epoch, and one of the most acclaimed authors of speculative fantasy and science fiction in the Spanish-speaking world. Despite an impressive back catalog of publications in Spanish, her sole novel available in English translation to date is *The Island of Eternal Love* (2008). Chaviano also brings to the Latin@ literary table a writerly preference for the English-language literary canon, and not the Hispanophone and Latin American canons. Chaviano is routinely described by critics and scholars as Cuban and Latin American, terms that thus fix her as always already outside ongoing debates about latinid@des, and that overlook her residency of Miami since 1991. This conceptual discrepancy has been recognized by Sabrina Vourvoulias who notes that Chaviano's "work is often left out of conversations about Latino/a speculative fiction in the United States." Chaviano is one of numerous Latin American-born authors now resident in the United States whose presence and literary outputs appear to indicate why Milian's plea for a critical distancing from the "ontological grammar of Latinidad" (6) is now emerging as a central debate in the evolution of latinid@des in the twenty-first century.

Notes

- 1 Even in the 1980s and 1990s cultural and intertextual references in diverse Latin@ literary texts often signposted surprising vectors of identification and dis-identification that could radically re-signify, contradict, or disavow the purported Latin@ identification of the texts' protagonists and, by implication, of the authors themselves (Allatson 2002).
- 2 One example is provided by *Latinola Rising*, an anthology of speculative and science fiction edited by Matthew David Goodwin, to be published by Restless Books in 2016. The collection is the outcome of a crowd-sourcing campaign initiated by the editor in 2014.

- 3 This pluralization reprises Frances Aparicio and Susana Chávez-Silverman's preference for *Latinidades* over the singular *Latinidad* due to the multiple and often contrapuntal identitarian weights the pluralized term can carry.
- 4 Milian discusses Central American American disruptions to *latinid@des* in terms of underlying assumptions about whiteness, blackness, and brownness. See also Alvarado for a comparative analysis of transcultural interchanges between U.S.-based Central American and Chican@ narratives, and Arias for a critical overview of the generation of Central American American writers that emerged since 2000.
- 5 See Oboler for the first analysis of the debates over *Latinidad*, and Caminero-Santangelo for her analysis of critical and literary approaches to *Latinidades*.
- 6 Foster's novel evokes numerous performance pieces by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and the speculative cyber-punk science fictions of Ernest Hogan, including his *Smoking Mirror Blues* (2001). That novel imagines a Californian future in which artificial intelligence software enables an Aztec trickster figure, the God Tezcatlipoca, to escape the virtual realm and run rampant through Hollywood. Hogan describes himself as "a recombocultural Chicano mutant" (Mondo Ernesto Blog).
- 7 These possibilities evoke discussions in Chican@ studies from the 1970s through to the 1990s over the ethnic authenticity of Chicanesque writing (*La literatura chicanesca*) or writing about Chican@s by non-Chican@s (Allatson 2007, 141).
- 8 Such approaches resonate with José David Saldívar's arguments about "transamericanity," his approach to U.S. narratives by authors from a range of ethno-racial backgrounds that replaces the texts in a transcontinental framework, one that also underwrites his attempts to make broader comparative cognate-subaltern points between Latin@ writers and writers from the Global South such as the Indian author Arundathi Roy.

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