

# New Diasporic Subjectivities and Transcultural Resistance in North American Latino Writing

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## Abstract

My article examines a particular kind of representation of collective subjectivity in recent Latin American writings of the diaspora and the North American Hispanic community, namely, a subjectivity figured both as resistant and as transcultural. This new post-ethnic subjectivity explicitly transcends the cultural borders of Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American identity in order to embrace multicultural groups and spaces in a practice of resistance to various forces and situations seen as threatening, such as globalization, the hegemony of English, urban decay and violence. My first main example involves the notion of friendship reformulated in the context of a multicultural community in California by Leticia Hernández-Linares in an autobiographical text from 2002, while the second, a short essay by Ricardo Ortiz, goes beyond the borders of the United States to invoke a transnational and translinguistic space including the Latino population of North America as well as francophone inhabitants of Quebec in Canada. In both cases, the spatial imaginary is crucial. It functions as a complex symbolic figuration of sociality and alternative forms of subjectivity and deconstructs traditional forms of belonging based on ethnicity or the nation. These new subjectivities do not float in a transcendent, globalized space, but are closely linked to specific locations and types of movement through concrete

spaces. The spatial figures in the texts I discuss are thus not merely metaphors of new forms of community, as in the case of the melting-pot. They are also an illustration of an awareness of geopolitical and cultural realities that constitutes an essential component of alternative ways of imagining ourselves as subjects in interaction with others.

*Key words:* New subjectivities, Transcultural Latino writing, Communities of resistance, Trans-American mobility, Spatial Figures

My article examines a particular kind of representation of collective subjectivity in recent Latin American writings of the diaspora and the North American Hispanic community, namely, a subjectivity figured both as resistant and as transcultural. This new post-ethnic subjectivity explicitly transcends the cultural borders of Hispanic, Latino, or Latin American identity in order to embrace multicultural groups and spaces in a practice of resistance to various forces and situations seen as threatening, such as globalization, the hegemony of English, urban decay and violence. My first main example involves the notion of friendship reformulated in the context of a multicultural community in California by Leticia Hernández-Linares<sup>1</sup> in an autobiographical text from 2002, while the second, a short essay by Ricardo Ortiz,<sup>2</sup> goes beyond the borders of the United States to invoke a transnational and translinguistic space including the Latino population of North America as well as francophone inhabitants of Quebec in Canada. In both cases, the spatial imaginary is crucial. It functions as a complex symbolic figuration of sociality and alternative forms of subjectivity and deconstructs traditional forms of belonging based on ethnicity or the nation.

Although my particular interest is in transcultural subjectivity and

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1) Hernández-Linares, "Gallina Ciega," 110-16.

2) Ortiz, "Hemispheric Vertigo," 163-78.

resistance in Latino writing that involves cultures other than the Hispanic population of the United States, I do not mean to imply that there is a single, monocultural, “Hispanic subjectivity”. As Vélez-Ibañez and Sampaio argue in their book *Transnational Latina/o Communities*, Latina/o populations “often operate in transnational and transgeographic settings.”<sup>3</sup> As a result, “new forms of identity, multiculturalism and simultaneity of multiple experience have made their appearances,”<sup>4</sup> and since these are continually transformed, their study warrants a new “processual” approach,<sup>5</sup> one that involves the examination of the constantly changing forms of the collective imaginary and cultural practices. Not only does the concept “Latino” imply infinite diversity within and between different communities. The heterogeneity of collective subjectivity is evident even within a single family, as many Hispanic authors emphasize in their fiction. Sandra Cisneros’s novel *Caramelo*,<sup>6</sup> for example, illustrates the cultural and linguistic differences between family members born in Mexico and those born in the United States, as well as differences based on race and color between people with the same national origin, so that the family-based sense of belonging can itself be transcultural. Another example would be the emergence of Latino media, which fosters a sense of collective subjectivity in the context of English hegemony, but in which the extremely diversified input comes from various Latin American countries, as well as from Hispanics in the U.S.

Transculturality has also been a central element of the culture of the United States-Mexican borderlands, and many Chicano intellectuals, artists and writers of the last forty years have explicitly described their cultural practices as in-between, fluid and hybrid. The mingling of cultures at the border has thus lead not only to cultural hybridity, but also

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3) Vélez-Ibañez and Sampaio, *Transnational Latina/o Communities*, 2.

4) *Ibid.*, 4.

5) *Ibid.*, 15.

6) Cisneros, *Caramelo*.

to a new, post-ethnic collective consciousness. In *Borderlands/La Frontera: The new Mestiza*, Gloria Anzaldúa emphasizes her multicultural, in-between status: “Because I, a *mestiza*, continually walk out of one culture and into another, because I am in all cultures at the same time.”<sup>7</sup> She also stresses the processual, constantly changing nature of the *mestiza*: “Being tricultural, monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual, speaking a patois, and in a state of perpetual transition.”<sup>8</sup> According to Anzaldúa, this hybridity will eventually lead to a new consciousness, which may entail simultaneous belonging, contradictory identifications, harmonious amalgamation, or the rejection of one of her identities. Her emphasis on consciousness in the title of her chapter (“La Conciencia de la *Mestiza*/Towards a New Consciousness”) and within the text is significant, since it signals more than hybridity, which may remain pre-reflexive, pointing instead to an explicit awareness of the self as heterogeneous.

Consciousness is generally seen as central to subjectivity, in contradistinction to identity, which often has connotations of essentialism and stable cultural or other characteristics. In his theoretical study of subjectivity, Donald Hall summarizes this distinction: “For our purposes, one’s identity can be thought of as that particular set of traits, beliefs, and allegiances that, in short- or long-term ways, gives one a consistent personality and mode of social being, while subjectivity implies always a degree of thought and self-consciousness about identity.”<sup>9</sup> What is particularly interesting about newer discourses of hybridity is this new sense of experiencing oneself as a subject. The latter is not seen as universal like the Cartesian subject, or as ethnic, or even national, but forged largely by class, race, gender, culture, and one’s position in the world, while refusing to remain imprisoned within these categories,

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7) Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 77.

8) *Ibid.*, 78.

9) Hall, *Subjectivity*, 3.

constantly moving across boundaries and changing affiliations.

Anzaldúa points beyond canonical paradigms of miscegenation, Chicano consciousness and borderlands hybridity when she claims that she has “no race,” that she is “cultureless” and that she is “every woman’s sister”, while at the same time she is “cultured” because she is “participating in the creation of yet another culture [...] with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet.”<sup>10</sup> This points to a new global awareness and broader solidarities. However, her invocation of the importance of the concept of José Vasconcelos’ “cosmic race,” which the Mexican educator, essayist and politician forged in the nineteen twenties, situates her writings in the tradition of Latin American paradigms of hybridity.

The new subjectivities I am interested in, however, go beyond an awareness of the rich diversity within the large Latino population of North America, beyond the self-representation of transcultural borderlands intellectuals, and certainly beyond the much older discourses of hybridity and the cosmic race that were often linked to nationalist ideologies.<sup>11</sup> They embrace openness to non-Latino groups and individuals in more recent mappings of belonging.<sup>12</sup> An interesting example of the emergence of new transcultural class subjects that goes beyond pan-Latino coalitions and even Anglo-Latino solidarities can be seen in certain forms of collective activism of the 1990s. In a study of unionism among Latina/o workers at the New Otani Hotel and Gardens in the Little Tokyo area of Los Angeles, Margaret Zamudio describes the creation of a multiethnic coalition with the Japanese-American

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10) Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 80-81.

11) For a discussion of various paradigms of diversity linked to nation-building across the Americas, see Chanady, “Diversity,” 287-95.

12) For a comparative analysis of literary and essayistic reflections on general intercultural contact throughout the Americas (anglophone and francophone Canada, the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean) in English, French and Spanish, see Chanady, “Inter-American Reflections,” 35-43.

community in their struggle for better working conditions.<sup>13</sup> This is not merely a question of temporary solidarity in a common struggle. It points to the possibility of the emergence of a different kind of community, based not on race, ethnicity, or other shared characteristics, but on resistance to a common antagonist in a shared space. This multicultural coalition forms a certain sense of belonging that is close to certain theoretical models very different from traditional paradigms of collective identity. In *The Coming Community*, for example, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben develops a model of community consisting of “singularities” that do not affirm an identity but simply “co-belong without any representable condition of belonging.”<sup>14</sup> Agamben distinguishes between this non-identity-based communal protest and past social protest. Important links can be made between this more fluid concept of community and the multicultural workers’ coalition in Los Angeles which points to new possibilities of subject-formation that go beyond the affirmation of particular identities.

Does this transcultural solidarity, however, really translate into a new sense of subjectivity beyond class-consciousness, or is the community of non-identity-based “singularities” destined to remain a temporary group of individuals united only by their actions of resistance or protest? Is the term community, used by Agamben and other philosophers of alternative forms of being-together, even applicable to this type of solidarity? The term community generally has certain affective connotations, such as a sense of belonging to an identifiable group within which one feels comfortable, as well as a sense of security and stability in a changing and hostile world. In her study of transnational feminism, however, Chandra Mohanty combines the emphasis on affect and the familiar with the effervescence of the new in her description of how feminists of color

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13) Zamudio, “Segmentation,” 205-24.

14) Agamben, *The Coming Community*, 85.

from various cultures provide “a sense of home and community,” defined “not as a comfortable, stable, inherited and familiar space,” but as an “imaginative, politically charged space in which the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analyses of social injustice, as well as a vision of radical transformation.”<sup>15</sup> Her following remark is particularly interesting: “Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded-together imaginatively to create a strategic space I could call ‘home’.”<sup>16</sup> Her depiction of feminist struggle entails more than simple solidarity in the face of a common predicament. This transnational community also gives her a sense of who she is (she mentions “recognition”), and how she thinks of herself as a subject. It is this particular kind of depiction of community that I am interested in – one that is transcultural, and formed largely in resistance to exclusion or domination, but may also have affective dimensions. These emerging forms of community may indeed give rise to new subjectivities.

In his study of the symbolic construction of community, Anthony Cohen explains that he does not approach community “as a morphology, as a structure of institutions capable of objective definition and description.”<sup>17</sup> He defines community as a “boundary-expressing symbol” and argues that although “it is held in common by its members,” its “meaning varies with its members’ unique orientations to it.”<sup>18</sup> He insists on the importance of “consciousness,”<sup>19</sup> and of subjectivity, which “clearly suggests the possibility of imprecision, of inexactitude of match, of ambiguity, of idiosyncrasy,” since “different people oriented to the same phenomenon are likely to differ from each other in certain respects in their interpretations of it.”<sup>20</sup> I believe we can extend this concept of the

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15) Mohanty, “Crafting Feminist Genealogies,” 491.

16) Ibid.

17) Cohen, *The Symbolic Construction*, 19

18) Ibid., 15.

19) Ibid., 13.

20) Ibid., 17.

symbolic community to understand larger groupings than towns or villages, which constitute Cohen's object of study. The networks mentioned by Mohanty are thus not merely "structures of institutions," but symbolic entities which may lead to new transnational and transcultural subjectivities. Furthermore, since individuals interpret community in different ways, collective subjectivities are characterized by significant internal variations and diversity. This certainly applies to the feminists of color discussed by Mohanty. In contrast to Mohanty's community, however, the subjectivities I will be looking at go beyond those linked to associations of common interest in transnational, delocalized networks of theory, criticism and activism. Transcultural Latino forms of self-awareness often entail new spatial imaginaries and alternative mappings of the world, or provide new models of locality and place-based belonging. The "space" invoked by Mohanty as a metaphor thus acquires more concrete dimensions in recent writings by Hispanic authors and intellectuals.

A recent example of the figuration of a transcultural consciousness which goes beyond strategic or interest-based association and which illustrates an acute awareness of place, as well as a spatial imaginary that symbolizes new forms of subjectivity, is Leticia Hernández-Linares' 2002 autobiographical description of the game *Gallina ciega*, or blind man's buff, which she played as a child in California. Blindfolded and spun around several times, the participants in the game had to catch the other children: "Behind the noise of the Hollywood freeway, I remember girls, boys, running around me, light, dark, black hair, red hair, migrants, and speakers of more than one language."<sup>21</sup> This transcultural, translinguistic and mixed-gender community of children is situated in a specific location, beside a noisy freeway whose name (Hollywood freeway) points to the life of privilege and glamour associated with this

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21) Hernández-Linares, "Gallina Ciega," 111.

icon of the American film industry. The vivid contrast between the undesirable location and the symbol of cinematic dreams creates an awareness of commonality as a group of marginalized members of society: “We saw our differences, but more important to us as children were the things that brought us together: escaping the day, the neighborhood violence, and the economic struggle around us.”<sup>22</sup> She then describes an episode in her adult life when she played the same game with girls from white and Mexican migrant families: “Barely aware of the categories “migrant,” “Mexican,” “bilingual,” “monolingual,” “white,” into which they were being molded, these girls broke out of their familiarity to learn new words and games, and make new friends.”<sup>23</sup> The transcultural interaction between the children constitutes a unique learning experience, as they leave their familiar cultural territories to “learn new words.”

Just as important as the inclusiveness of the childhood game, which brings together members of different races, languages and ethnic groups, is the explicit reference to the hostile, threatening or dystopian world of her childhood memory. The noise of traffic in an underprivileged neighborhood, the threat of violence, and economic insecurity are described as important catalysts of solidarity. The children are not merely companions of misfortune who are thrown together and manage to survive. The two following sentences are particularly significant in this regard: “This game that urges us to look for each other’s voices, to seek others in their words and not simply in their color, culture, gender assignment, helped these girls move toward a bridge, a common meeting ground;” and “Close your eyes and learn to see through your mind, through your other senses.”<sup>24</sup> The playground is described as “a large lot full of weeds and dust” in which the blindfold provides the “darkness in

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22) Ibid.

23) Ibid.

24) Ibid.

which [she] had to find [her] friends.”<sup>25</sup> The latter symbolizes a deliberate bracketing of the outside reality of poverty, violence, and urban decay (the “lot full of weeds and dust,” both in its literal and symbolic dimensions) in a successful effort to forge an alternative world of play, childhood happiness and friendship. But the passage also indicates that the function of the blindfold is to erase ethnic and racial differences and thus to resist not just the disheartening drabness of the surroundings, but also the fragmentation created by group identity and ethnic labels.

The subjectivity of marginalized individuals intensely aware of their differences from the more privileged members of society overlaps with a transcultural and translinguistic space of play. Furthermore, the emphasis on voices indicates a sensescape in which the visual is not the main anchor for identification. Being immersed in a Babelic but harmonious buzzing of voices creates a feeling of togetherness very different from the meeting of the reciprocal gaze, which often introduces distance and objectification. Another element of the game’s sensescape is touch, which also suggests a more immediate form of togetherness. The actual social dynamics of the group of children is emphasized less than the affective dimensions of the author’s memories and the symbolic implications of the game. When she mentions the need for “seeing through her mind” she is not only stressing the non-visual dimensions of the game, but also the subjective character of the experience and its formative function in the emergence of a particular feeling of belonging to a diversified group. Seeing through the mind indicates an alternative collective subjectivity that is not determined by ethnicity, race or other sociological factors, but openness toward others’ differences, thus constituting an ideal imaginary model of general intercultural dynamics. Finally, the movements of the players in the game, who spin around, run

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25) *Ibid.*, 110-11.

in circles, dodge and regroup in different spatial formations and enter into physical contact with each other (indeed, touching one's playmates is the goal of the game), symbolize the mobility and Protean nature of the group and the new collective subjectivities it gives rise to in the present and, one hopes, in their future adult lives.

The openness of this childhood community, however, is restricted to a golden age of youth and innocence, although the author admits that some young people still retain this quality. As the author grows older, she realizes that the transcultural space of her childhood is difficult to find in the adult world. She criticizes the labels and categories that divide people, the "boxes that close us in," the "ridiculous authenticity game" in college, and hopes that "new ways of identifying" will emerge.<sup>26</sup> Again, the reference is to alternative collective subjectivities, symbolized by the bridge mentioned in her initial description of the game, in contrast to the "boxes" of ethnicity. She resists both the labels imposed by those outside her ethnic group and the demand to conform to group expectations within her own culture. The model suggested here is not one of color-blindness, as the children are aware of their differences – and, possibly, proud of them. It is not the paradigm of the proverbial American melting pot in which all specificity disappears in a bubbling cauldron of homogenization and Americanization. Neither is it that of the stereotype of the multicultural mosaic, often invoked in Canada, which implies that each group remains separate and immobile, but one of an inclusive sense of community in which each "singularity" can enter freely into dialogue and other forms of interaction without losing his or her own sense of particularity. In fact, Hernández-Linares insists on her own cultural specificity: her Salvadoran background, her father's association with a Chicano rock band and her work with children from different cultural backgrounds. Very different from traditional notions of ethnic identity, in

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26) *Ibid.*, 112-14.

which the individual acquires her sense of self as a member of a group with definite racial and cultural characteristics, this personal specificity is more diversified owing to the particular circumstances of her background. Furthermore, her subjectivity is constantly transformed through new constellations of transcultural interaction. Finally, it entails not only self-awareness as an individual, but also as a member of a large association of human beings sharing the same problems, but also the same transcultural values.

Hernández-Linares' transcultural community of children, linked to an alternative collective subjectivity, remains a symbol of hope for the future world of adults in spite of the author's unhappy experiences as an adult living in a world of imposed labels. Other Latin American writers of the diaspora also present the childhood openness to transcultural solidarity and friendship as inevitably threatened by dissolution on the threshold of adulthood, but are more pessimistic. In his French-language novel *Côte-des Nègres* (1998),<sup>27</sup> for example, Mauricio Segura describes his protagonist's childhood as a Chilean in Montreal in terms somewhat similar to those of the depiction of the game *Gallina ciega*, although hockey replaces blind man's buff, and the symbolism of the blindfold as an indicator of an ideal form of alternative consciousness is absent. The novel's group of childhood friends, which includes anglophone and francophone Canadians, black Haitians, Italians, Japanese and Latin Americans, provides a refuge in a neighborhood of economic deprivation and broken homes. At one point the narrator exclaims: "Is there a street more dilapidated, filthier, more distressing?"<sup>28</sup> Linton Street, where the protagonist and most of his friends live, is described as a garbage dump, with overflowing trash cans, yellow grass and vermin, reminiscent of the

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27) Segura, *Côte-des-Nègres*. The title is a pun on Côte-des-Neiges, a major thoroughfare and neighborhood in Montreal, inhabited largely by several immigrant groups from every part of the world. *Nègres* is the pejorative term for people of African origin.

28) *Ibid.*, 46.

underprivileged heterotopia of Hernández-Linares' wasteland in California. The narrator thus describes his memories of the neighborhood as "sweet and disturbing"<sup>29</sup> in a nostalgic but also realistic portrayal of his past by an adult narrator very much aware of the social and economic context. Transcultural friendship and strong emotional attachments across the barriers of race and linguistic background characterize this underprivileged community of children. The group rapidly disintegrates, however, when they become teenagers. Influenced by friends and family, they form exclusive groups based on race and ethnicity that are hostile to each other and engage in gang battles. Just as in Hernández-Linares' autobiographical sketch, Segura's childhood transcultural identifications show their fragility when they are violently replaced by traditional racial and ethnic forms of belonging, instead of coexisting with them in a fluid amalgam of subject positions.

A very different paradigm is presented by Ricardo Ortiz, who illustrates an emerging transcultural and explicitly transnational subjectivity in the adult world. A Cuban American brought up in the southwestern United States, Ortiz informs the reader that he moved to New Hampshire to take up a teaching position and that he frequently travels to the nearby cosmopolitan and multilingual Montreal, in large part because of the vibrant gay scene. His autobiographical account of a concert given in Montreal by Gloria Estefan, a "global" performer of Cuban origin (he calls her "Global Gloria" in the subtitle of this section of his essay),<sup>30</sup> and his reflections on the significance of several particulars of the performance as well as on the political context in Quebec after the failed referendum on Quebec independence, are framed not only in transcultural terms, but also in translinguistic, transnational and hemispheric ones. In an interesting remapping of José Martí's

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29) Ibid.

30) Ortiz, "Hemispheric Vertigo," 167.

imaginary construction of “Our America,” he describes Latin America as including Quebec in two different ways: as a greater Hispanic America in which Spanish speakers are dispersed throughout the hemisphere, including predominantly francophone Quebec and English Canada, and as a pan-Latin community (including French, Spanish, and Portuguese). As Ortiz reminds us, the concept Latin America is a creation of French scholars in the nineteenth century “as a way to refer simultaneously to the Spanish-, Portuguese-, and French-speaking portions of the Americas.”<sup>31</sup>

As he describes his pleasure in immersing himself in Latin American culture (hispanophone, but also in this broader sense of the term which includes French) in Montreal, he corrects the omission of Canada in previous influential imaginary constructions of North America by intellectuals from south of the United States-Mexican border. He respectfully criticizes José Martí’s binary opposition between “our” Latin America (Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking) and the anglophone North, which the nineteenth-century Cuban revolutionary, essayist and poet conflated with the United States. Ortiz thus extends the reach of what we could call the transhemispheric Hispanic nation (I am using the term nation not in a political sense, but in the more general sense of an imagined community and large population sharing cultural roots) to include the strong Latina/o community in Montreal. In a rather ironic twist, he informs us that Montreal has a major Spanish-language website on Martí, the Cuban author of the iconic paradigm of a dual America in which Canada does not even exist. He also emphasizes the fact that Gloria Estefan felt “comfortable singing more Spanish-language songs,”<sup>32</sup> thus illustrating the identification between various “Latin” cultures (including Spanish and French).

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31) Ibid.

32) Ibid., 169.

These two remappings, namely the figuration of a transhemispheric hispanophone community and a Latin America that includes Canada because of its large francophone population, have political as well as cultural implications. The francophone audience's preference for Spanish in their communication with Gloria Estefan, even though few of them knew Spanish, is particularly significant. Ortiz interprets this gesture as a rejection of "the U.S. and its increasingly global cultural and economic reach, but also the dominance of English as Canada's majority language."<sup>33</sup> Gloria's audience thus decided to "collaborate with her in an elaborate fiction, one predicated on an active, willful denial or forgetting of the actual national configuration defining the moment in favor of an imagined, desired 'Latin' transnation where francophones and hispanophones could, impossibly, communicate with one another without or beyond translation."<sup>34</sup> This remapping entails not just a linguistic reconfiguration of an extended Hispanic America, but also criticism of the "absenting of Canada," illustrated by Martí's model of the Americas in which North America is conflated with the United States. Ortiz relates this to a "certain geographical, and geopolitical, myopia, emanating from the South,"<sup>35</sup> which contrasts markedly with Canada's increasing importance in the hemisphere, owing to its diplomatic, cultural and commercial relations with Cuba at a time when the United States had severed relations and imposed an embargo. Praising Canada's "remarkably open attitude toward economic and political engagement with Cuba's revolutionary government," Ortiz argues that this provides "a viable alternative model for the imagination of a progressive reconfiguration of 'North American' systems of not only political and economic, but also cultural exchange."<sup>36</sup> This implies resistance to a

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33) *Ibid.*, 169-70.

34) *Ibid.*, 170.

35) *Ibid.*, 173.

36) *Ibid.*, 172.

hegemonic model in which Canada is constructed by the United States popular imagination as equivalent to Latin America in its peripheral status, and thus as a region that must be integrated in a “globalizing economic machine.”<sup>37</sup>

While the construction of the “other” of the United States as peripheral and in need of integration homogenizes the heterogeneity of cultures, thus symbolically erasing the singularities within the periphery, Ortiz’s construction of a Latin space across languages (French and Spanish) maintains the internal differences in a transcultural and translinguistic community based on resistance, the desire for an “alternative ‘world’ order that is at once political, cultural and linguistic,”<sup>38</sup> a “liberatory politics,”<sup>39</sup> and “pleasure,” according to the author’s evocation of his own feelings as he travels to Montreal, described as the locus of a “fascinating” and “intellectually challenging” intersection of sexual, transnational and francophone as well as anglophone cultures.<sup>40</sup> Ortiz’ refiguration of the Americas is not a utopia, however. In his analysis of the symbolism of the spherical cage in which Gloria Estefan “glided over the audience with the help of wires and pulleys,” he argues that this was a “punning, and cunning, elaboration of the promises and pitfalls of the too-fragile pleasures of a transcendent globalism” illustrated by the venue of the concert, the Molson Center, which belongs to an “ever-expanding multinational corporation.”<sup>41</sup>

While Ortiz reads the symbolism of the sphere in conjunction with globalization, (“the globe serving as her stage”) as well as with “a kind of gestalt of the nation,”<sup>42</sup> I would like to pursue the implications of this spatial metaphor for understanding the emergence of collective

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37) *Ibid.*, 176.

38) *Ibid.*, 170.

39) *Ibid.*, 167.

40) *Ibid.*, 164.

41) *Ibid.*, 170-1.

42) *Ibid.*, 170.

subjectivity. In his three-volume study of “spherology,” the contemporary German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk uses the spatial figure of the sphere to analyze the importance of the awareness of being with others for the constitution of the subject.<sup>43</sup> Contrary to Lacan’s mirror phase, in which individuals project themselves in the virtual space of the mirror to create an imaginary ego that will accompany the emergence of the self, Sloterdijk insists on the emergence of a proto-subjectivity before birth, with the pre-reflexive awareness of an other (the placenta in the womb, and the mother’s voice that penetrates the womb in a muffled way). This originary being-with in the uterine sphere is reinforced by the affection and care provided by the mother after birth, which creates a symbolic bubble of closeness and protection. The spatial figure of the sphere thus reflects the literal form of the uterus, while symbolizing a more diffuse atmosphere of belonging and comfort, as well as immunity toward threats from the outside. While the earliest bubble is dual, later feelings of belonging involve larger spheres of multiple individuals, families, tribes, nations and even religious entities. Sloterdijk defines the sphere as “the interior, disclosed, shared realm inhabited by humans,”<sup>44</sup> and argues that “every act of solidarity is an act of sphere formation.”<sup>45</sup> More diffuse and fluid than the concept of identity, that of the sphere designates the awareness of being-with-others, and a sense of belonging not necessarily based on specific factors such as language or race. Gloria Estefan’s gliding sphere can thus be interpreted as a spatial model of new ways of “being-with” that constitute emerging transnational and transcultural solidarities and subjectivities, but also imply strong affective dimensions. Just as Gloria’s moving spherical cage can symbolize the temporariness of the elation produced by the mass spectacle and identifications with a larger transnational community of resistance, as Ortiz points out, it can

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43) Sloterdijk, *Bubbles*.

44) *Ibid.*, 28.

45) *Ibid.*, 12.

also suggest the fluid and Protean nature of new subjectivities that coexist with other models. Furthermore, the importance of voice is essential, reminiscent of the importance of the soundscape in Sloterdijk's model of the prenatal bubble, which creates a pre-reflexive awareness of being-with, as the fetus hears the mother's voice filtered through the abdominal wall. Gloria's voice also provides an anchor of affective, as well as political, identification, even when it is filtered by the non-comprehension of Spanish by many francophone members of her audience.

The symbolism of the sphere, which illustrates the emergence of subjectivity as being-with-others in an expandable, inclusive bubble not strictly defined, and not limited by stable outlines, is contrasted with that of the border, which is designed to exclude and separate. At the beginning of what Ortiz calls one of his "highly personal anecdotes," he describes his intense feelings of unease and "profound illegitimacy"<sup>46</sup> when crossing the United States-Mexico border, a reaction aroused by the suspicious and hostile attitudes of the border guards. He remembers this dysphoric southern border of his childhood during subsequent border crossings as he travels north to Canada as an adult and encounters a sign at the Canadian border announcing that travelers are "just crossing the latitudinal line marking the halfway point between the Equator and the North Pole."<sup>47</sup> This second border crossing produces a "remapping" that makes him reflect on geographical categories as he travels "literally 'up' the map" while being reminded of "all that lay to the South."<sup>48</sup> The contradictory movement of going up the map in order to go down in time concerns more than just the return of memories. This description can be read as a deconstruction of the relation between spaces of belonging and traditional geographical locations and mappings. The further North Ortiz

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46) Ortiz, "Hemispheric Vertigo", 166.

47) *Ibid.*, 164.

48) *Ibid.*, 165.

travels, the closer he comes to a community linked to the Hispanic culture of the South, especially when he joins the audience of Gloria Estefan in Montreal. Hispanic culture is no longer identified with the area south of the Mexican border and with enclaves of Latinos in the United States, but is seen as dispersed throughout the hemisphere by constant North-South movement, with the consequence that the North can no longer be cleanly separated from the South. The highly symbolic figuration of movement across latitudes within a vast spatial continuum reaching from the Equator to the North Pole thus intersects with the symbol of the sphere as a space of belonging and emergence of new trans-American and transcultural subjectivities.

Both the game of *gallina ciega* described by Hernández-Linares and the gliding spherical cage portrayed by Ortiz are mobile spatial figures of alternative transcultural subjectivities in a changing world. Ortiz also uses spatial symbols, such as crossing borders, and then replaces this symbol with that of the more neutral latitudes in his description of travelling north, in order to deconstruct the divisions of the geopolitical itself. While traditional spatial divisions do not disappear, new spatial imaginaries emerge in conjunction with collective subjectivities that intersect and overlap with other figurations of community, culture and belonging in a volatile cauldron of subject formation radically different from the purifying cauldron of the proverbial melting pot. Furthermore, these new subjectivities do not float in a transcendent, globalized space, but are closely linked to specific locations and types of movement through concrete spaces. The spatial figures in the texts I have discussed are thus not merely metaphors of new forms of community, as in the case of the melting pot. They are also an illustration of an awareness of geopolitical and cultural realities that constitutes an essential component of alternative ways of imagining ourselves as subjects in interaction with others.

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