Amelia Jones

The Body and Technology

Whether overtly or not, all visual culture plumbs the complex and profound intersections among visuality, embodiment, and the logics of mechanical, industrial, or cybernetic systems. By making and interpreting visual culture, visual theorists (artists, art critics, and art historians) explore aspects of the human body/mind complex as a "complicated machine" capable of extension into the world through vision (per Julien Offray de la Mettrie in his 1748 book *L'homme machine*).

Enacting technologies of representation through embodiment, visual theorists articulate "bodies" of visuality in images or words, in each case performing our own specific historical relationships to the body/machine matrix. At the height of the industrial revolution, avant-garde artists conceived their role in utopian terms: the goal of the artist (per László Moholy-Nagy in his 1947 *Vision and Motion*) was to "search the new dimensions of the industrial society and to translate the new findings into emotional orientation" through visual form. Translation was thus conceived as the primary mode of interface between body and technologized world.

Since World War II, with the explosion of cybernetics and commodity culture (the latter facilitated by new technologies of reproduction, manufacture, and communication) and the growing awareness of the brutal potential of technology in its militaristic forms, the utopian view has collapsed. Enactment or performance have replaced translation as modes for articulating the hinge between body and technology. Visual theorists from the 1950s into the 1970s reveled in more and more aggressive enactments of the body as a performance of the work of art and, through this practice, insisted on the coextensivity of body/machine and vision/machine, of artist and interpreter (Marcel Duchamp's *Etant donnés* comes to mind). In the 1980s, technological shifts began to be theorized in terms of a loss of the real; the body became the forbidden term in a highly codified rhetoric of the "gaze." According to this theory, the gaze—like the commodity culture it seeks to examine—turns everything in its purview into a Heideggerian "world picture"; any attempt to call for a return to embodiment risks essentializing the self.

At the end of the second millennium into the third, a precipitous return to corporeality has looped subjectivity back toward the explicit embodiments of the heyday of performance around 1970. The body has, however, been dramatically reconceived as nonauthentic, defined through otherness (alienated in the visual or carnal experience of others), and specific in its identifications. As the speed and intensity of technologically mediated modes of being have accelerated in recent years, visual theorists have come to recognize that technology not only transforms our ways of doing things, it profoundly conditions our experience of ourselves and others. Serious questions arise: What have been the specific intersections among visuality, embodiment, and the technological in the history of Western art? What place do artists' or art viewers' bodies have in the violently revised nexuses of power relations that arise with shifts in technological processes of imaging, traveling, healing, procreating, making, and knowing?

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Geoffrey Batchen

Carnal Knowledge

Let's begin with a basic proposition: what photography gave to modernity was not vision, but touch (or, more precisely, vision as a form of touch). And let's test it against another: this embodied type of vision is what is at stake in the current shift from photographic to electronic media.

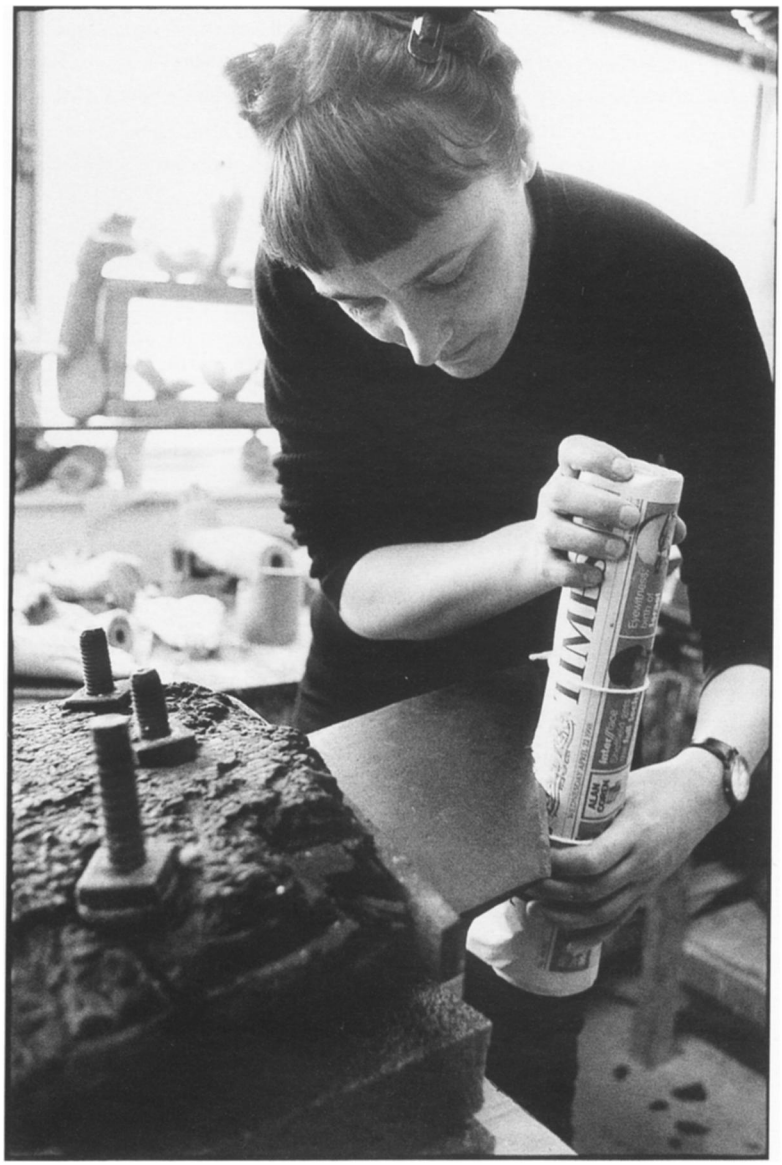
As everyone knows, photography has long been privileged within modern culture because, unlike other systems of representation, the camera does more than just see the world; it is also touched by it. Photographs are primarily designated as indexical signs, as images "really affected" by the objects to which they refer. In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes speaks of the "stigmatum" of the "having-been-there" of the thing photographed, as if the photograph has been physically bruised by a subject whose image now offers a kind of braille for the eyes. The peculiarity of its production is, Barthes says, what enables the photograph to fetishistically guarantee something's erstwhile presence in space and time. But it also helps establish a special relationship between photography's subject and ourselves. "The photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here. . . . A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed."[1]

So photography allows an imagined exchange of touches between subject, photograph, and viewer. However, photography's indexicality is not simply a matter of touch. For what makes photography compelling as a sign system is the motivation of its images as much as their causation. As C. S. Peirce himself makes clear in his discussion of indexical representation, "psychologically, the action of indices depends upon association by contiguity."[2] And it is surely this invisible, hard-to-define psychological dimension that so preoccupied Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (and Walter Benjamin, too, in his description of aura as "the unique phenomenon of a distance, however close it may be"[3]). To repeat: photography has never provided us with the truthful appearance of things, but it has guaranteed, through the magic of contiguity, the possibility of a direct emotional empathy across an otherwise insurmountable abyss of space and time. Contiguity, the condition of being in contact, is what can give any sign in the present a direct association with another sign in the past, and it is precisely this temporal and historical connection that provides photography with its uniquely "carnal" knowledge of the world.

Many contemporary artists are now stressing contiguity in their work. In *Shared Fate* (1998), for example, British artist Cornelia Parker borrowed the actual guillotine used to behead Marie Antoinette in 1793 and sheared its blade through a number of common household items—bread, newspapers, playing cards, a necktie, shoelaces. As her title suggests, these otherwise ordinary objects now share a fate with one of the great historical figures of the French Revolution, cut as much by the weight of that knowledge as by a metal blade. For this reason, the titles are important to all of Parker's work. "I think in a way the label, the title, liberates me quite a lot. It allows the material to be transformed beyond recognition, without having to give up its

1. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 80–81.
2. Charles Sanders Peirce, "Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs" (ca.1897–1910), in Justus Buchler ed., *Philosophical Writings of Peirce* (New York: Dover, 1955), 108.
3. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936), in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana/Collins, 1973), 224, 245.

Cornelia Parker. The artist cutting up objects for *Shared Fate* (1998), using the guillotine that beheaded Marie Antoinette in the collection of Madame Tussauds, London. Photo Gautier Deblonde. Courtesy of Frith Street Gallery, London.



history."[4] Parker's art is about the conjuring of these sorts of troubling transformations, about bringing us into contact with an historical presence we are asked to feel rather than simply see. To paraphrase Barthes on photography, she also shows that contiguity is something I add to the work and which is nonetheless already there.

Australian artist Anne Ferran engineers a similar conjuring with her 1998 photographic contact prints of nineteenth-century garments from Sydney's historic Rouse Hill estate. Clothing is a physical memory, an imprint, a second skin to the body that once wore it. So these photograms are traces of the body twice over, imprints of imprints. Hovering in a surrounding darkness, the garment-images softly radiate an inner light, the residual filaments for a century of absorbed sunshine. Raising the dead via the magical medium of photography, Ferran transforms history into a seance, into a direct communion of past and present. "When I try to reflect on these images the two things I keep coming up with are these: on one hand the obdurate barrier, like a high wall or a range of distant mountains, of short memory/thin skin; and on the other the longing to close the gap, recover the past, cross touch with sight, or lose them in one another, to press up close to things, cloth against paper, skin against skin."[5]

If we were to treat the work of our artists as a kind of collective cultural unconscious, then we might see in these manoeuvres some palpable anxiety about contiguity's future. And indeed, it is precisely a capacity for visual continguity that is now under threat as the photographic image is irresistably transformed into a continuous flow of electronic data. Where photography is inscribed by the things it represents, it is possible for digital images to have no origin other than their own computer program. These images may still be indices of a sort, but their referents are not the objects they picture but rather electronic flows, differential circuits, and abstracted data banks of information (information that includes, in most cases, the look, if not the epistemological substance, of the photograph). Where a photograph compels by way of "the condition of being in contact," by promising a dynamic temporal depth beneath its calm, static surface, digital images fascinate by overtly abandoning any such claim; as images they are content to be nothing but surface. Psychologically speaking,

4. Cornelia Parker, in Jessica Morgan ed., *Cornelia Parker* (Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 2000), 58.
5. Anne Ferran, "Longer than Life," *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art* 1, no. 1 (2000), 170. See also my "History Remains: The Photographs of Anne Ferran," *Art on Paper* 4, no. 3 (January–February 2000): 46–50.

the digital has no haptic purchase on history and declines to proffer the substitution-anxiety of the fetish. This is why digital images remain untroubled by the future anterior, the complex play of "this has been" and "this will be" that so animates the photograph. Digital images are in time, but not of time.

And yet they look just like photographs, so much so that it's getting harder and harder to tell which is which. Contiguity depends on the knowledge of that difference; remember, it's what we bring to the photograph but what is nonetheless already there. If we don't bring that knowledge, then there is no contiguity effect; and no contiguous umbilical cord means no more photography (at least as we have known it up till now), and this even if the world continues to be flooded with photographic images. Benjamin once celebrated/worried over photography's capacity to deplete artworks of their aura, and therefore the capacity of "the masses" to have a real connection with their own history. Faced with a proliferation of digital images, we might now wonder whether the same fate awaits the aura of the photograph itself.

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Ken Gonzales-Day

Choloborg; or, The Disappearing Latino Body

Race, gender and capital require a cyborg theory of wholes and parts.
—Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto"

In her epochal essay on the effects of technology on subjectivity, "A Cyborg Manifesto," Donna Haraway coyly positions the cyborg as something of a technologically evolved monster and claims that "Monsters have always defined the limits of community in Western imaginations."[1] If this is true, then one might conclude that race was the monster that has defined those early limits of the cyborg community.

Returning to my epigraph, it is clear that Haraway acknowledges a certain fragmentation when she writes that cyborg theory must be made of "wholes" and "parts." Race is one of those parts that has yet to be fully theorized, specifically with regard to Latino bodies. Nevertheless, she later argues that, informed by situated and embodied knowledges, such fragments contain a critical potential.[2] Given the triumvirate of race, gender, and capital, conventional knowledge tells us that Latinos embody physiological difference and are "situated" both economically and culturally, raising the question: are Latino/a bodies cyborg bodies?

In 1999, the saucy stylings of Ricky Martin made it to the Grammy Awards, while Jennifer Lopez continues to enjoy the admiration of television and movie audiences, suggesting that Latino bodies have never been more visible. They are on the pop charts, in magazines, and on television; yet, according to the cultural critic Mike Davis, Latinos have seen the lowest income growth, with the median household income increasing only $276 between 1980 and 1995, compared to $4,845 for whites and $4,576 for blacks.[3] Likewise, under NAFTA, companies like Hyundai, Sony, Sanyo, and Toyota have redefined the notion of a transnational economy. In *Magical*

1. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 180.
2. Haraway discusses situated and embodied knowledge in the chapter following "A Cyborg Manifesto," entitled "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in ibid., 191.
3. "Census and You," U.S. Bureau of the Census, November 1996, 10; cited in Mike Davis, *Magical Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City* (New York: Verso, 2000), 99.

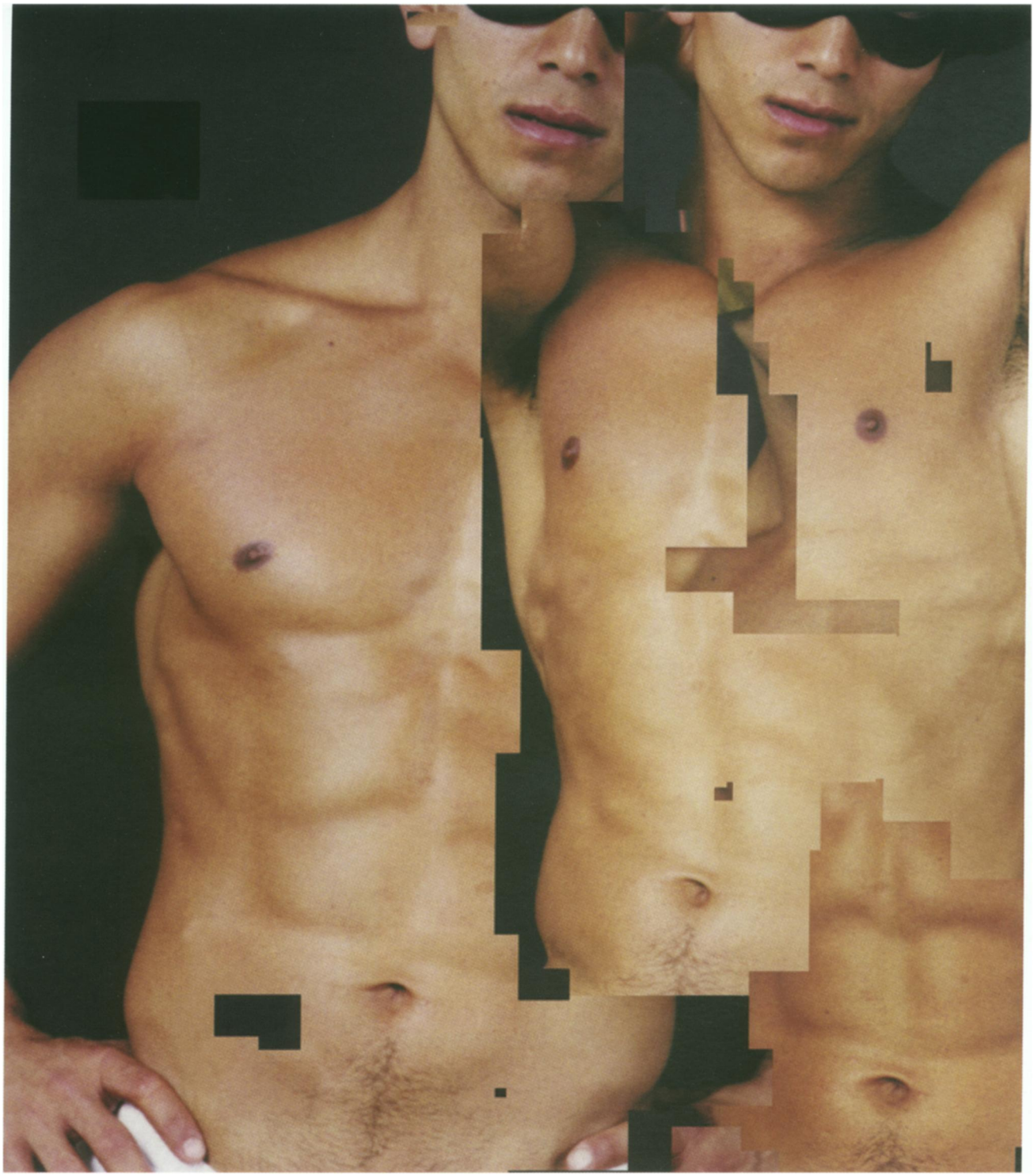
Urbanism: Latinos Reinvent the US City, Davis writes: "Just as rows of ultra-modern assembly plants now line the south side of the border, so have scrap wood and tar paper shantytowns become an increasingly common sight on the US side of the border."[4] Migrant labor played a central role in California's agricultural prosperity, and if hidden and undervalued, Latino/a workers may play the same role in the new global economy. Davis goes on to note that Apple, Sun, Adobe, Netscape, and Oracle have all "been fined or sued for racial discrimination or for failure to meet federal diversity deadlines."[5] In a nutshell, new technologies have yet to transcend old race and class relations.

What technologies do Latinos embody anyway? Clearly, our existence as a laboring underclass is anything but new. Even the glizty glamor of Ricky Martin and Jennifer Lopez does little more than reshape this mythic physicality. At **www.rickymartin.com**, one can register to "get into Ricky's Pants"—a promotional contest offering the grand prize winner a pair of Ricky's red velvet pants. On another site, **www.jennifer-lopez.org**, one can download over 1,500 photographs and even order Jennifer Lopez wallpaper. The Web is today's hottest marketing tool, claiming nothing less than the liberatory potential of capital for those who choose to spend it.

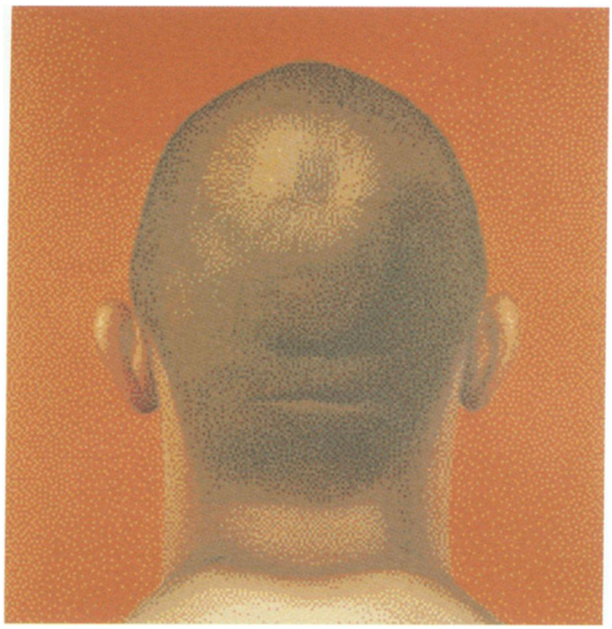
Capitalism makes use of the Latino/a body, but what of the particular appearance of this body? Ricky and Jennifer are currently sporting buffed bodies and blonde highlights, and why not? But what of the workers in Tijuana's factories? Do they tend to look a little different, highlights or no? Latinos can range from *indio*, to *mestizo* or mixed blood, to blonde with blue eyes. Even before the contemporary development of genetic engineering, the dynamics of colonization, migration, politics, capital, economics, love, and war had already reshaped the Latino/a body. Dr. Harold P. Freeman, in a recent article in the *New York Times*, was quoted as saying: "If you ask what percentage of your genes is reflected in your external appearance, the basis by which we talk about race, the answer seems to be in the range of .01 percent."[6] In the same article, the author, Natalie Angier, reminds readers that race encompasses both genetics and culture.[7]

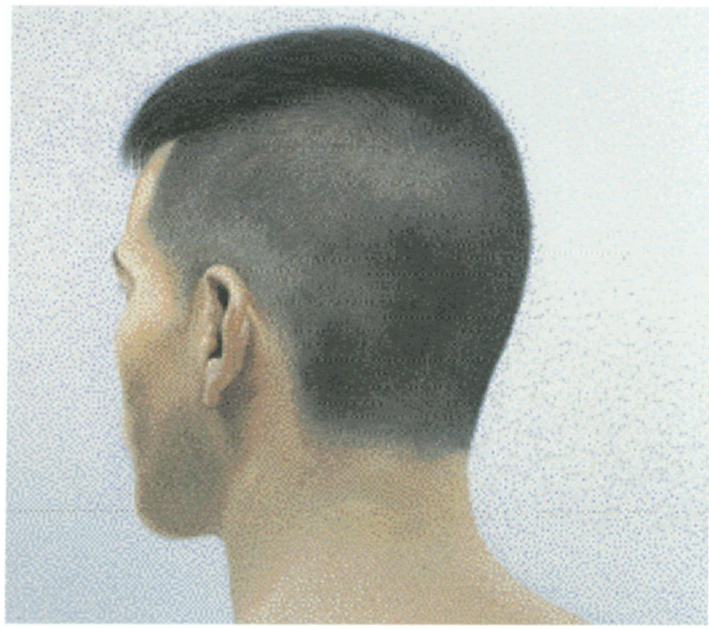
As if all this gene mixing wasn't confusing enough, according to the U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Hispanic" refers to people whose origins are Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, South or Central American, or other Hispanic/Latino. At last count, the Latino population in this country was estimated at 31.7 million, or 11.7 percent of the total population.[8] On the 2000 Census, Latinos were asked to indicate their origin in a question on "Hispanic origin," not in the question on race, because in the federal statistical system ethnic origin is considered to be a separate concept from race.[9] The Census went on to explain that Hispanics might be of any number of racial groups, and as of October 1997, the Office of Management and Budget announced the revised standards for federal data on race and ethnicity. The official categories for race are now: American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, and "some other race." In addition, two ethnicity categories were established: Hispanic origin and Not of Hispanic origin.[10] Because the Census identified Latinos as Caucasian for most of the twentieth century, these recent changes may allow new statistics to emerge as researchers can now do more than simply track Spanish surnames.

4. Ibid., 30.
5. Ibid., 102.
6. Natalie Angier, "Do Races Differ? Not Really, Genes Show," *New York Times on the Web*, Archive, Science Desk, August 22, 2000.
7. Quoting Dr. Sonia S. Anand, Assistant Professor of Medicine, McMaster University, Ontario, Angier writes: "Thinking about ethnicity is a way to bring together questions of a person's biology, lifestyle, diet, rather than just focusing on race. Ethnicity is about phenotype and genotype, and, if you define the terms of your study, it allows you to look at differences between groups in a valid way."
8. Roberto R. Ramirez, "Current Population Reports," U.S. Bureau of the Census, Ethnic and Hispanic Statistics Branch, Population Division (**www.census.gov**), Internet Release Date: March 8, 2000, 20–527.pdf., p.1.
9. U.S. Bureau of the Census, Population Division, Special Population, "Racial and Ethnic Classifications Used in Census 2000 and Beyond" (**www.census.gov**), created: April 12, 2000.
10. Ibid.



Ken Gonzales-Day.
***Untitled #132 (Composition with Lines)*, 2000.**
Ektacrome print.
24 x 18 in. (61 x 45.7 cm).
Courtesy of the artist.





Salomon Huerta. *Untitled Head*, 2000. Oil on panel. 11¾ x 12 in. (29.8 x 30.5 cm). Courtesy of Patricia Faure Gallery, Los Angeles.

Salomon Huerta. *Untitled Head*, 1998. Oil on canvas on panel. 12 x 14 in. (30.5 x 35.6 cm). Courtesy of Patricia Faure Gallery, Los Angeles.

If one goal of Haraway's "Cyborg Manifesto" was to propose a world without gender, then perhaps in acknowledging the possibility of a wide range of genetic combinations among the descendants of America's other indigenous peoples (south of the U.S. border) the OMB is trying to create a world without race. If this is so, then the Census Bureau has created 31 million Latino/a cyborgs whose racial complexities may, on the one hand, break down the barrier of race, and on the other, erase historical notions of *la raza*, statistically identifying millions of dark-skinned, straight-haired, sharp-featured, Maya and other indigenous descendants as "some other race."

The terms Hispanic, Chicano, Latino, and Cholo speak to the contested history of this chimerical body.[11] While miscegenation law in the United States, best understood as a crime of "blood," as in the criminalization of marriage between white women and black men, concerned itself with even a single drop of black blood, the racial politics involved in the colonization of the Americas was far less precise.[12] Thus, even in the wake of technological revolutions like the Human Genome Project, Latino/a bodies may pose the ultimate "ironic political myth." Assimilated, evasive, unshakably linked, we are Choloborg.

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11. The term *cholo* is mostly used in the western states, as an extension of youth culture. It is not intended to replace the term *Latino*, but simply to suggest a global/local context.
12. See Eva Saks, "Representing Miscegenation Law," *Raritan* 8, no. 2 (Fall 1988): 42.

Like discourses of religious conversions, the language framing discussions of the new technologies tends to relegate nonbelievers into categories reserved for the damned. I accepted my eviction from heaven on other charges a while back, so I'm more or less immune to the sting, but the rhetorical excess is obnoxious nonetheless.

The discourse of the new technologies centers on the "o brave new world" metaphor first put into circulation by Shakespeare's Miranda. Prospero reminded his big-eyed daughter that what was new was her gaze, rather than the objects of it. But to hear the melody of the new media Mirandas today, one might conclude that before the invention of the electronic paradigm, all the world was atechnological. Art historians could easily dismantle this preposterous proposition, but few bother to make the effort. Defeated by the "inevitability" of the triumph of the electronic, most have already ceded the territory, the title, the historical claims.

Peggy Phelan

Heaven Can Wait

But it's worth stating the obvious once again because the repetition of what we know can put into relief what we do not. Concentrating only on modernity and painting, one can trace the ways in which, for example, the rediscovery of the optical geometry of the vanishing point, the chemistry and solubility of oil and acrylic, and the persistence of the grid have both served and hindered the technologies of Western painting. Vincent van Gogh's slow approach to color—from the gray-brown-black of the early potato eaters to the yellow-green-blue of the late wheat fields—vividly illustrates his apprehension of the stored reserve within color itself. "Stored reserve" is Heidegger's definition of technology; he employed it to counter the conflation of technology as such with the uses to which technology might be put. This is a distinction worth recalling. Technology promises. What it promises for contemporary art remains still unknown, still stored within the suspension of the promise.

Pipilotti Rist. *Pickelporno*, 1992. Videotape, 12 min. Courtesy of Luhring Augustine, New York. Photo the artist.

Having devoted myself to the subtle nuances of the live arts for some time now, my cautious response to the current romance of the electronic might be dismissed as nostalgia for a lost world. And perhaps it is. But before we embrace the ideology of post-able and preservable info as *the* definition of knowledge, before we massage the cyborg body as critical and aesthetic fetish, and before we reduce the Web to the banality of enhanced shopping

opportunities, we might do well to reconsider the structure of a promise. For J. L. Austin, promises are exemplary performative speech acts. They bring about the thing they name. But what promises name is precisely the act of promising, as opposed to the thing promised. When I say, "I promise you the world," I am giving you my promise, not the world. Promises, like most performatives, are seductions; that's their appeal and their limit. The new technologies promise new languages, new art forms, new ways to transmit goods, information, and money. But the promised things, we do well to remember, are incidental to the structure of address that promises employ. The relation between the sender and the receiver remains the same. Human bodies still have holes in them. That's their appeal and their limit. And on our good days we still respond to the beckoning allure of what these holy bodies promise. Thank heaven.

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Christine Ross

The Insufficiency of the Performative: Video Art at the Turn of the Millennium

In her "Cyborg Manifesto," initially published in 1985, Donna Haraway sees the conflation of body and technology as constitutive of the cyborg—a hybrid of machine and organism in which technologies of communication and biotechnologies articulate the polymorphous recrafting of bodies.[1] The productivity of Haraway's theory lies in its postulation that the cyborg, as a creature without origins that forms itself through the confusion of boundaries (between the human and the animal, the natural and the artificial, the body and mind), is a fiction that nevertheless maps "our social and corporeal reality" and allows us to imagine beneficial couplings which undo identity in terms of mutability.[2] This proposition is concomitant with Judith Butler's postulation of corporeality as performativity, an act of imitation, identification, or melancholic subjection to social norms which is always a reenactment of norms. Like the cyborg, the performative body "has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality,"[3] and its fluidity of identities "suggests an openness to resignification and recontextualization."[4] One decade later, the question I wish to raise is the following: is it possible to think polymorphous identities *with* the mutability *and* the fallibility of the body? The fast-expanding integration of technologies of information into everyday life, the corollary blurring of work and nonwork,[5] the perfecting of eco- and biotechnologies that increasingly confuse the human and the nonhuman (such as genetic engineering, robotics, reproduction technologies, pharmacology, plastic surgery, and body fitness), and the underlying problematic belief in our ability to predict, control, conquer, and improve nature via technology (what Lucien Sfez has designated as "l'utopie de la sur-nature"[6]): all of these turn-of-the-millennium developments confirm the body as a materialization open to incessant reconfiguration, yet they also reveal how the incitement to reconfigure is at once creative and normative, fluid and normalized.

In light of these technological developments, it is interesting to note

1. Donna J. Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: The Reinvention of Nature* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 150.
2. Ibid., 163–64.
3. Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 136.
4. Ibid., 140.
5. Charles Goldfinger, *Travail et hors-travail: vers une société fluide* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998).
6. Lucien Sfez, *La Santé parfaite: critique d'une nouvelle utopie* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1995).

Douglas Gordon.
***24 Hour Psycho*, 1993.**
Video installation.
Courtesy of Gagosian Gallery, New York.

how recent media art is preoccupied not so much with the celebration of fluidity as with *insufficiency*—fallibility, limits, inhibition, dependency, the need to think fluidity *and* persistency together, the critical requirement to relate performativity to new entrepreneurial norms of socialization based on performance.[7] This is not to say that Haraway and Butler exclude those aspects in their theorization of contemporary subjectivity—Haraway speaks both of the pleasure and the responsibility involved in the transgression of boundaries,[8] and Butler defines agency as the set of necessary failures implied in the injunction to be a norm "that bodies are compelled to approximate, but never can."[9] Rather, performativity characterizes post-1960s subjectivity in what Slavoj Žižek has called the "decline of Oedipus," a period characterized by the passage from a *subject in conflict* between the prohibited and the permitted (defined through the Law of the Father) to a *subject in cleavage* between the possible and the nonpossible (defined through the decline of paternal authority and the rise of entrepreneurial norms of performance).[10] If the Freudian pathology par excellence was neurosis, the main pathology of the current performative subject, who has become the sole player responsible for his or her own subjectivity, is depression. Depression—designated by sociologist Alain

7. On this topic, see Emily Martin, *Flexible Bodies: Tracking Immunity in American Culture: From the Days of Polio to the Age of Aids* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
8. Also see Haraway, "Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective," in *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women*, 189.
9. Butler, 146.
10. For a sociological examination of identity insecurity in contemporary (post-1960s) subjectivity, see Alain Ehrenberg, *La Fatigue d'être soi: dépression et société* (Paris: Éditions Odile Jacob, 1998).

Rosemarie Trockel. *Sleepingpill*, 1999. Video still. Courtesy of Barbara Gladstone, New York.

Ehrenberg as *the* disease that "discloses the mutations of individuality at the end of the 20th century"[11]—derives from fatigue due to feelings of insufficiency in the face of overwhelming responsibilities, a fact completely erased by Butler's reiterated recommendation to "promote the proliferation of representations" and to "affirm identity categories as a site of inevitable rifting."[12]

At issue here is the integration of insufficiency in the materiality of the electronic image, as an aesthetic strategy that addresses the performative yet tired, responsible yet anaesthetized, enjoying yet compelled to enjoy[13] viewing subject. Aesthetic insufficiency could well be a means to acknowledge and question a society where "no moral law, no tradition shows from the outside who we have to be and how to conduct ourselves."[14] Depressive processes may sound negative, but I would like to see how they can be developed as potentially critical.

Recent video art plays a major role in such a rearticulation of the cyborg insofar as it considers the multiform ways in which video has shaped contem-

11. Ehrenberg, 10.
12. Butler, "The Force of Fantasy: Feminism, Mapplethorpe, and Discursive Excess," *differences: Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 2, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 119–20.
13. See Slavoj Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject: The Absent Centre of Political Ontology* (London: Verso, 1999).
14. Butler, 14.

porary visual culture, not only as the main image technology of television and computer culture, but also as the privileged post-1980s disseminator of film (through the emergence of the VCR). I am thinking here more precisely—and this is not an exclusive set of examples—of the work of Douglas Gordon, Rosemarie Trockel, and Diana Thater. Gordon's *24 Hour Psycho* (1993) is a first case in point. A mute video projection in extreme slow motion of Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) on a free-standing translucent screen, the installation stretches the narrative to an impossible twenty-four-hour narrative, dissolving diegesis to the extent that, more often than not, there is nothing to see.[15] Temporal expansion here corresponds to a depression of the image: it activates, in the viewer, perceptual and memory dysfunction, staging not so much the original film as memory struggle, the reliance on daydreaming and fantasy to fill the blanks, and inhibitory processes of perception such as inattentional blindness and inattentional amnesia.[16] Yet image depression is critically productive. It slows down a film which has been crucial for the representation of the loss of the authoritarian paternal figure at the heart of contemporary polymorphous subjectivity. This loss becomes perceptible through the decrease in perceptibility generated by the extreme slow motion: as the viewer struggles with memory and identity formation, she or he enacts the loss of the paternal and, with this, a mode of perception more porous to imaginary constructions.

Perceptual insufficiency is also set into play in Rosemarie Trockel's triptych installation produced for the 1999 Venice Biennale, an installation composed of three video film projections entitled *Eye*, *Sleepingpill*, and *Kinderspielplatz*. The *Eye* section, which consists of a large screen projection of a human eye whose activities of selection, detection, and recognition have been replaced by somnolent attention, proposes a weakening of perceptual sharpness both as a loss and as a state that might engender new cognitive possibilities. Eye in constant dissolution and regeneration, made out of the gradual numeric superimposition of seven left female eyes, devoid of stable identity markers (gender and race remain ambiguous), it moves in saccades with an occasional blinking of the eyelid, yet fails to anchor itself into a fixed position and, concomitantly, to acknowledge the spectator's presence in front of the screen. Framing the cyborg-eye with two other video film projections that bring together the contemporary world of distraction (childhood, entertainment, performance, consumerism, and noise on the one hand), and release (a public sanctuary for sleepers, silence, slowness, and the physiological need to sleep and dream on the other), Trockel stages attention and sleep disorders to propose a model of vision in which the eye sees without seeing *something*, whose productivity is located in the suspension of identity fixedness and differentiation.[17] Fluidity of identity is articulated but only through the consideration of bodily fallibility.

Gordon's and Trockel's rethinking of the performative cyborg in terms of insufficiency must be understood as an attempt both to depress the spectacle of *super-nature*—our reliance on informational, image, eco- and biotechnologies to transcend and deny the contingencies of the body (mortality, deficiency, dependency, fallibility)[18]—and to activate a perception whose performativity emerges from corporeal limits. The work of Diana Thater is especially important in this regard. Her intermedia spaces stage the spectacle through multiscreen projections of images of nature. Circulating amid the film and video

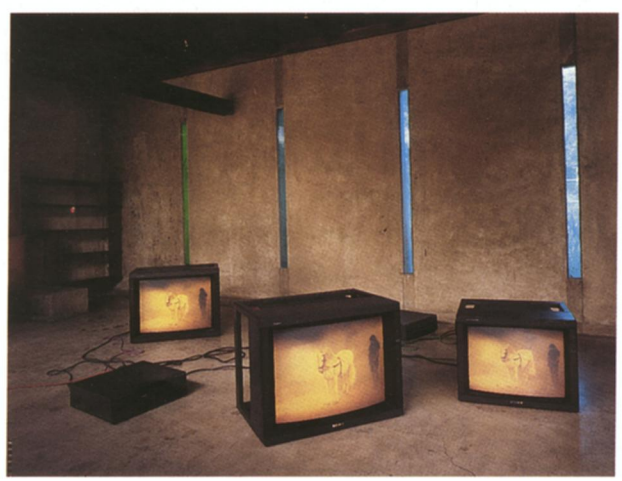
15. The notion is borrowed from Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985). Irigaray's "nothing to see" is both a critique of phallocentric metaphysics (as an exclusion of the feminine on the basis of formlessness and nonvisibility) and a philosophical project to rethink vision from within formlessness, so as to inscribe difference within the symbolic.

16. Inattentional blindness is the failure to perceive in conditions of inattention. See Arien Mack and Irvin Rock, *Inattentional Blindness* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998). By contrast, inattentional amnesia is the failure to memorize in conditions of inattention. See Jeremy M. Wolfe, "Inattentional Amnesia," in Veronika Coltheart, ed., *Fleeting Memories: Cognition of Brief Stimuli* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999), 75.

17. In this, the trilogy explores the similitude between awakening and paradoxical sleep—both are said to be attentive activities—postulated by R. R. Llinas and D. Paré, "Of Dreaming and Wakefulness," *Neuroscience* 44, no. 3 (1991): 521–35.

18. Such denial is at play, for example, in the Human Genome Project. The HGP is an international project which seeks to map and sequence (with the help of information technologies and biotechnologies) the totality of human genes, with the hope of providing the precise origin of diseases so as to eventually suppress bad genes by genetic manipulation. See Sfez.

Diana Thater. *The best space is the deep space*, 1998. Monitor edition. Each: (1) video monitor, (1) laserdisc player, (1) laserdisc. Installation view, MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles. Photo Fredrick Nilsen. Photo courtesy MAK Center for Art and Architecture, Los Angeles. Courtesy David Zwirner, New York.



projections, the spectator realizes quite rapidly that she or he is looking at images of a technologically *re-created* nature: flowers are cultivated flowers, wild animals (horses, zebras, monkeys, dolphins) are actors trained by professionals, natural landscapes are in fact theme parks. The spectacle of nature unfolds, yet is *always to be depressed* by diverse aesthetic strategies, including the absence of sound, the representation of the training or film crew, the staging of projection apparatus (wiring, monitors, VCRs). But depression also occurs through montage effects including recycling, repetition, and slow motion, as in *The best space is the deep space* (1999), an installation composed of three monitors that project, with a slight discrepancy, the same short repeated sequence of a circus horse filmed with its trainer in a process of genuflexion. Insufficiency here (the recycling of the sequence, the absence of sound, and the use of slow motion) discloses the subjection inherent to super-nature and, in so doing, interpellates the spectator in a grieving of the spectacle.

Insufficiency in recent media art, I wish to argue, is both an acknowledgment of the limits of performativity and an aesthetic strategy that reveals how fallible corporeality may well help us to complexify perception. In so doing, it envisages performative subjectivities which are defiant of the social norms of performance.

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Guillermo Gómez-Peña
(in collaboration with Roberto Sifuentes and Matthew Finch)

Aztechnology

Broadcast in New York in May 1998, this "performance interview" was originally conceived as a conceptual art piece for the WBAI radio show "Voices Against the Wall" in complicity with host Matthew Finch. With the exception of Matthew, who was "performing" himself, the performance personas—Professor Jacques Fromage du Merde, El CyberVato, and El Mad Mex—were extensions of *Borderscape 2000* and *Mexterminator*, two projects Roberto Sifuentes and I were working on at the time.

The content of the interview is a metafiction that navigates the cultural space between imagined signs and social truths. According to my performance diaries, the original idea of this piece was "to present a fictional interview which had been 80% scripted . . . utilizing its outrageous ideas and performative tone as a triggering device for the radio listeners to call in and 'confess' their views on Latinos, and immigration." Some of the "callers'" statements were excerpted from actual Internet confessions and staged during the interview. Others were "real," whatever real means in radiolandia. Later on, a slightly modified version of the piece was used as a point of departure for a live Internet chat on **Echonyc.com**, which, unlike the radio version, generated several negative reactions from participants due to "its contrived interactive nature." As one person said, "This is virtual space. You are supposed to be sincere, not to perform." "Performance, dear X, is just another way to tell the truth." I answered. An edited transcript of the piece is published here. El Mad

Max is performed by Guillermo Gómez-Peña and El CyberVato is performed by Roberto Sifuentes.

Finch: Today we have a very special program on Chicano science and racism. Noted French ethnographer Jacques Fromage du Merde is here with us in the studio to present, for the first time in public, two live Mexican cyborgs. These "artificial savages" were designed by a team of MIT (Michoacan Institute of Technology) engineers, biogeneticists, and ethnographers in close collaboration with Chicano experimental artists. Monsieur.

Fromage du Merde (French accent): Bonjour, Monsieur Finch. Effectivement, the physical and psychological characteristics of these half-machine/half-human replicants are the result of exhaustive research.

Finch: What kind of research?

Fromage du Merde: It all began with an Internet poll conducted by two Shic-anou performance artists, Guillermo Gómez-Peña et Roberto Sifuentes. They invited thousands of Americans from multiple virtual communities to confess their intercultural sins via the Net. The confessors were granted total anonymity . . .

Finch: And?

Fromage du Merde (laughing neurotically): . . . they went for it. People began to send back to the artists lots of written, visual, and audio material of a uniquely confessional nature. I mean, the kind of stuff you couldn't possibly obtain through fieldwork (breathes heavily as if having an asthma attack). This material was then analyzed by radical scholars, mainly psychiatrists and anthropologists. Then it was turned over to computer designers and robotics engineers who began to anthropomorphize the information and construct the first prototypes. Biogeneticists completed the job. These two improved super-Mexican "ethnocyborgs" are the genial result.

Finch: I don't know what to think. Are you for real?

Fromage du Merde: Your opinion does not really matter. This is science, Monsieur, not conceptual radio. El Mad Mex and CyberVato are the technological et genetic incarnation of contemporary America's fears of immigration, Spanish language, other cultures and races (sinister laughter).

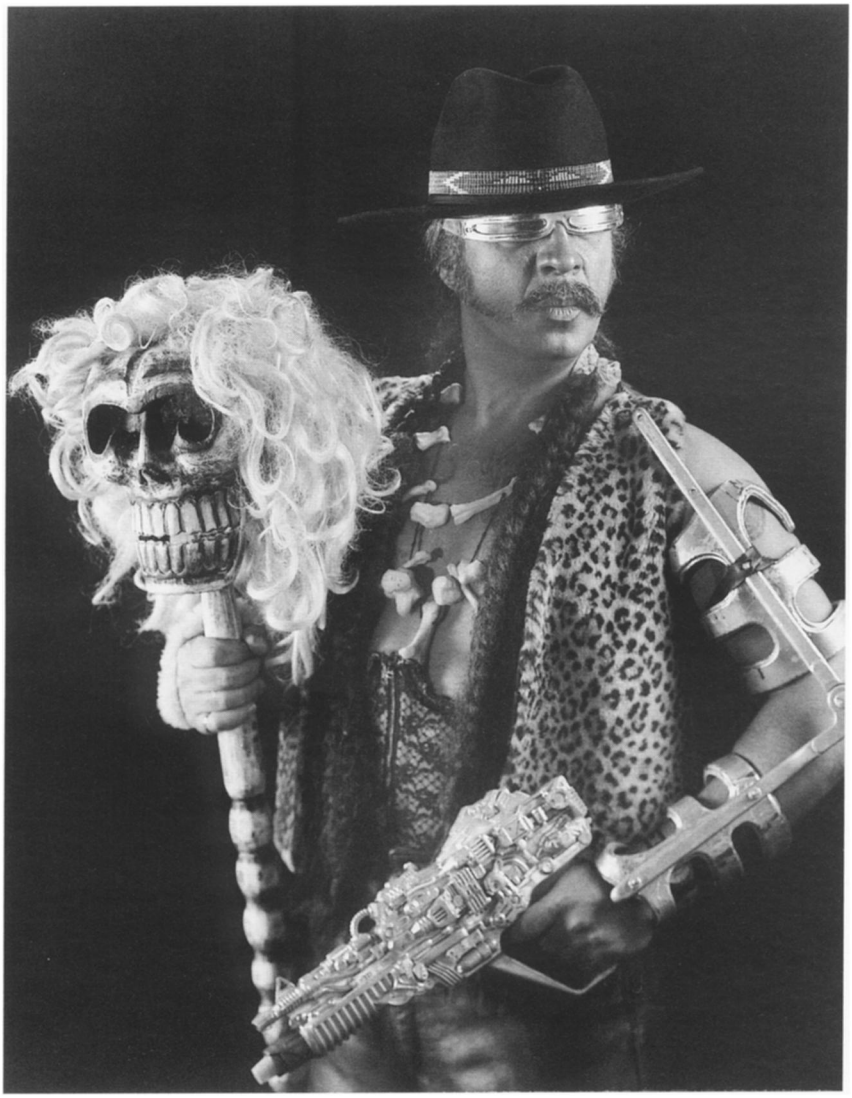
Finch: Are you suggesting that most Americans are scared of immigrants?

Fromage du Merde: Oui, oui! Scared out of their little minds! They are especially of brown people with thick accents and unfamiliar social behavior. You know, Latin American drug lords, heartless "terrorists" from Arab countries (nervous laugh), Norteño musicians from Sinaloa. The list is quite long.

Finch: You French people are not exactly innocent. You guys are also scared shitless of Arabs and other brown people. I mean, Pete Wilson loves Le Pen. He regards him as a mentor.

Fromage du Merde: But, but, but we are not here to discuss France's nouvelle racism. We are here to talk about the amazing Aztechnology.

Finch (to the listeners): Professor Fromage du Merde and his two, shall we call them, techno-ethno-graphic "specimens" are here to answer questions from the listeners, and at the same time to question the listeners' assumptions about Chicano scientific prowess. In a sense, this live broadcast is part of their research. And let me tell you people out there in radiolandia, they are certainly formidable looking creatures. They look like . . . like Japanese animé cartoon characters made in Tijuana . . . a robo-gang member . . . and the Tex Mex cousin of Arnold Schwarzenegger. But, why don't you vatos describe yourselves for our listeners.



La pocha nostra. **Guillermo Gómez-Peña as El Mad Mex. Photo Eugenio Castro.**

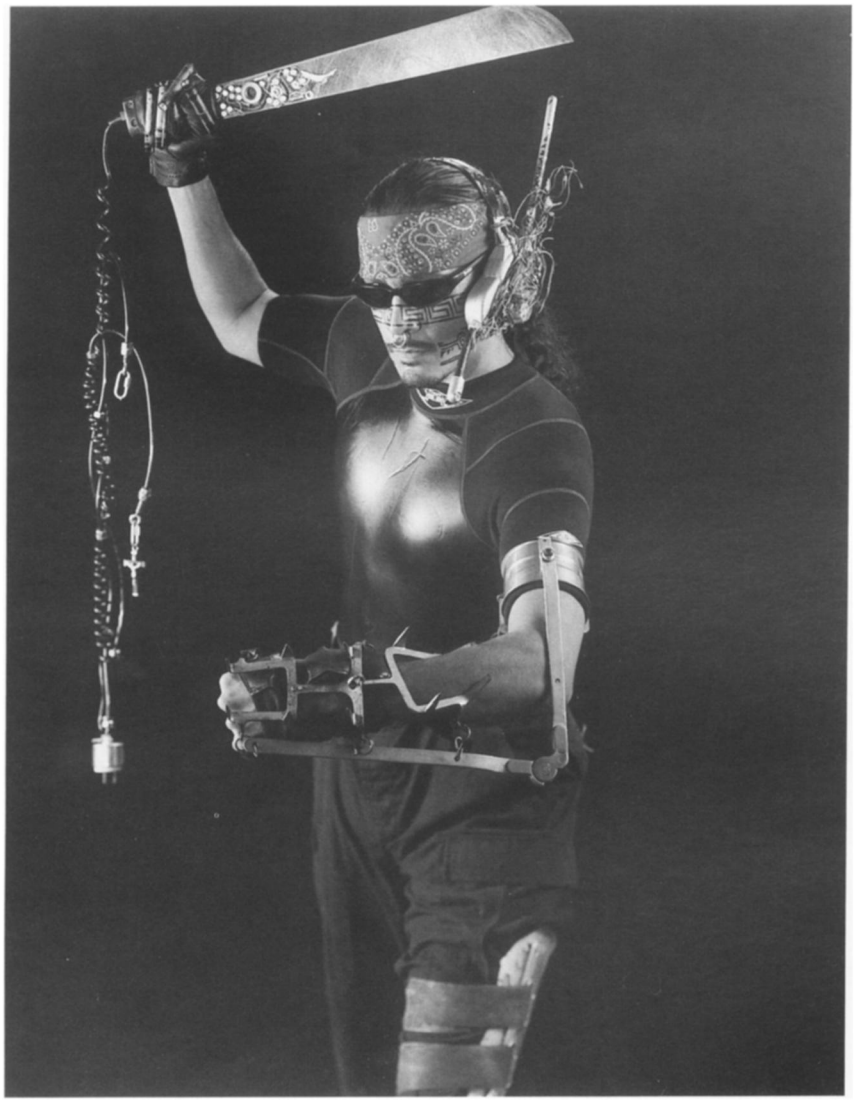
El Mad Mex (filtered voice/satanic lower pitch): My name is El Mad Mex, Homo Fronterizus, or replicante #187, as seen on the Super Nintendo video game, "Instinto Asesino." Habitat: The American Borderlands. Features: Illegal border crosser; defender of immigrants' rights; drug and jalapeño pusher. I practice boxing, Tex Mex rock, and narco-shamanism. I love to seduce horny gueras and to abduct innocent Anglo children. The Tijuana Cartel and the Zapatista movement sponsor me. I am wanted by the DEA, the FBI, and the Smithsonian Institution. My prostheses include a jalapeño phallus, a robotic bleeding heart, an identity morphing mask, and an "intelligent" tongue. And yes, I am indestructible! Ja-ja-ja (sinister laughter). I am exactly what Antonio Banderas aspires to become.

El CyberVato (computerized voice): My name is CyberVato, Homo Chicanus, and/or replicante #209, as seen on the evening news. I am considered an "endangered species." Habitat: The U.S. inner cities. Aliases: cholo, pinto, chuco, homie, "at risk youth," "information superhighway bandit," and "Calvin Klein vato." Features: Techno-savvy, neonationalist, monolingual, drug addict, survivor of innumerable cultural drive-by shootings. I experience permanent social resentment and self-involvement. My political project is to invade your city. The LAPD and the Gap are after me, ja-ja.

Finch: Can you guys describe some of your robotic prostheses for the radio listeners without imagination?

El Mad Mex: My robotic, cerbo-controlled hand looks chidisima, with polished chrome and lasers for fingertips, but to tell you the truth, it's totally useless. It's just for style. You know, Chicano culture is first and foremost about style. We are into artifice, not functionality.

Finch: And the mechanical bleeding heart coming out of your fully tattooed chest?



La pocha nostra. **Roberto Sifuentes as El CyberVato. Photo Eugenio Castro. © Eugenio Castro 2000.**

El Mad Mex: It's merely for effect's sake, puro aesthetics, ese. I am quite rrrromantic you know. Underneath my Aztec quilt, I have a hydraulic jalapeño phallus. It squirts chipotle sauce to blind the migra. Unlike Anglo high technology, which is hi-function, Chicano robotics are purposeless . . . but full of humor.

El CyberVato: Not, not, not everything we have is purposeless. I've got a virtual reality bandana with which Anglos can have a direct experience of racism without having to suffer its social and physical consequences. With my VR bandana I also get transported into very realistic 3D environments that approximate places where I am normally not allowed as a Chicano; like Beverly Hills, or Madison Avenue. I tell you: the software is amazing. The Chicano VR is so pinche realistic that I am usually the only non-Anglo person in the program. But if it gets too rough in cyberspace, I touch the "delete" button and ipso facto return "home" to the barrio. It's great, ese.

Finch: What is your prime directive, guys? I mean, what are you programmed to do?

El Mad Mex: Lots of things: anthropological fieldwork, techno-activism, cyber-sex, experimental art, techno-performance art, comic books, conceptual radio.

El CyberVato: And of course, we always enjoy confronting people's fears of otherness.

Finch: How do you go about doing this?

El Mad Mex: Every day, when we leave our UDMB techno-coffin, we instantly become public personas; walking metaphors; living border artworks.

Finch: Mad Mex, be more concrete please.

El Mad Mex: Well, we exhibit ourselves on platforms in museums and galleries. We are like living dioramas, posthuman artifacts. People can come and watch us—and interact with us if they feel like it. They can touch us, feed us, fondle us, and alter our identity by pressing digits or changing our make-up and costumes. We are like human-size paper-cut dolls. At times, they are even allowed to point replicas of weapons at us to experience how it feels to shoot at a live Mexican, ja-ja. It's like a real life Super Nintendo game with the added excitement that people are watching. And if they are adventurous enough, they can actually replace us. They get to display themselves in our place for a short period of time and experience how it feels to be looked at. We exchange identities with the audience, so to speak.

Fromage du Merde: It's great! At one point the audience doesn't know anymore if they are watching the Mexi-cyborgs, or watching their own projections, or watching themselves watching the . . .

El CyberVato: It's a fair deal. The audience gets to objectify us, and then we objectify them back. The process of exo-ti-ci-za-tion goes both ways, like the process of borderization of the U.S. and Mexico.

Finch: What do they actually find at the end of this bizarre performance experiment?

El Mad Mex: A confirmation of all their fears and desires. They suddenly realize that everything they ever imagined about us is . . . true, ja-ja. a) Yes, Mexicans are aliens; or better said, we're just partially human, as it was proved in the documentary, *The Great Mojado Invasion*; b) Yes, we are indestructible; and c) Yes, soon we will outnumber Anglos in the Southwest. In other words, we are mere blank screens for people to project their inner monsters.

Fromage du Merde (excited): Furthermore, audience members soon realize that the Mexi-cyborgs are in fact their sole creation (perverse laughter).

Finch: Professor, why do people confess these things?

Fromage du Merde: Americans are lonely and isolated tribesmen. So when you give them a chance to speak their minds and their hearts, they take it.

Finch: But why the Web?

Fromage du Merde: The total anonymity of the Internet allows for the surfacing of forbidden or forgotten zones of the psyche. Besides, there are no moral, physical, or social repercussions in cyberspace, and this can be quite liberating.

El CyberVato: Especially for white people.

Fromage du Merde: Digital technology has allowed us to create a new millennial mythology of the Latino—the Indigenous and the Immigrant "Other."

El Mad Mex: I am an intrinsic part of this new mythology, and let me tell you: it's quite sinister. You won't find any sleepy Mexicans or Chihuahuas "here"(sinister laughter).

Finch: Let's break for a PSA. Remember, the number here in the studio is . . . Our fax number is . . .

[Prerecorded Public Service Announcement]

Finch: We are back with Professor Jacques Fromage du Merde and his two Mexi-cyborgs, dealing with racism and fear of otherness in contemporary America. Let's take some calls.

Caller: I believe that a large part of this people's history, the Mexicans, is contained in the Book of Mormon. They were strong tribes who chose either to accept Christ or not to. They were taught that if they lived righteously, they would keep their Promised Land. However, they continued in war and wickedness, greed and violence, and they became unable to maintain all the Lord had given them.

Next Caller: I think immigration in itself isn't bad, but (starts to scream like crazy) if you are an illegal alien, then you must be deported!!!

Next Caller: I am so aroused by people with heavy accents. I can actually have an orgasm by listening to El Mad Mex. I'm all wet. Thanks.

Fromage du Merde: See, Mr. Finch. People are more than willing to tell us this shit.

Finch (quite nervous, clearly changing the subject matter): Mr. Fromage, both El Mad Mex and CyberVato look like characters from a Chicano science fiction movie. They don't appear to be from our time and place. Your research must suggest an immediate future where these ethno-cyborgs are the norm. Is that the case?

Fromage du Merde: Why don't we ask them directly? They have an uncanny ability to prophesize the future. In fact, El Mad Mex himself, among his myriad selves, is a techno-shaman.

Finch: Tell us, Señor, what do you see?

El Mad Mex (trance-like): The nation-state will collapse in 2000, immediately after the Second U.S./Mexico War, which, in fact, Mexico will win. The ex-U.S.A will fragment into myriad micro-republics loosely controlled by a multiracial junta, and governed by a Chicano Prime Minister. The White House will become the Brown House. Washington will become Wa-chingón. Spanglish will be the official language. Other accepted linguas francas will include frangle, japañol, and computer talk. Anglo militias and rabid teens will desperately attempt to recapture the Old Order, which paradoxically they are contributing to overturn as we speak. The newly elected government will sponsor interactive ethnographic exhibits to teach the perplexed population of the United States of Aztlan how things were before and during the Second U.S./Mexico War.

CyberVato: Our presence here is a foreshadowing of the inevitable future. The global Mextermination Project is an example of the future official hybrid culture. Our performances/installations present real-life posthuman specimens as well as unique archeological artifacts, which are both residues of our dying Western civilization, and samples of an emerging Nueva Cultura, a culture in which the margins have fully occupied the center. Enough.

Finch: Spooky, but makes total sense. We remind the listeners who wish to meet the ethnocyborgs in person that they will be on display at El Museo del Barrio on the following days: June 12, 13, and 14. We are now approaching the end of our show.

Guillermo Gómez-Peña is a performance artist and writer residing in San Francisco. He is a contributing editor to *TDR*, and a commentator on *All Things Considered*. His recent book *Dangerous Border Crossers* was published by Routledge Press in 2000.