

THE CYBERBORDERLAND: Surfing the Web for Xicanidad

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This essay examines the concept of mestiza consciousness, how technology subsumes physical identity, and how the writer/artist can respond to that disembodiment on the (World Wide) Web. Laura Molina's <http://www.Nakeddave.com> and Bianca Ortiz's <http://www.messtiza.com> are the focal point of this essay. Through their work I address the following questions: 1) should the mestiza consciousness be an "ideological football" (Nakamura, 102) used to explain racial experiences online for everyone; 2) does the Web provide Xican@s a place to write their bodies, minds, and identity while opening up a critical discussion about embodiment; and 3) how does the language in which Xican@s write affect the perception of a racialized and gendered body on the World Wide Web in reference to the off-line world? This essay focuses on the way Molina and Ortiz offer a fuller understanding of the mestiza consciousness online because of the way their bodies and ideologies are often seen as "outsiders" of the World Wide Web. [Key words: internet, cyberart, mestiza consciousness, Chicana, cyberspace, Laura Molina, Bianca Ortiz]

As more theorists confront the multidimensionality of cyberspace as a text, the mestiza continues to make her appearance as a body that inhabits the consciousness of the cyber-human. In many ways, using the concept of mestiza consciousness best illustrates how technology subsumes physical identity and how the writer can respond to that disembodiment. Therefore, in discussing the so-called World Wide Web, I focus on the internet as a space that reformulates the Xican@a¹ body, as it offers artists, such as Laura Molina and Bianca Ortiz, a new domain in which to strategically introduce a fuller sense of the mestiza consciousness while struggling against the way their bodies and languages define them as "outsiders." Because this medium purports to offer access to art, poetry, fiction, personal narratives, and words written by Xican@s in California, the lower Rio Grande Valley,² the Pacific

Northwest, the Midwest, and various places in the United States, scholars must consider how the mestiza consciousness is used to explain racial experiences online for many internet subjects. The World Wide Web provides Xican@s a space to write their bodies, minds, and identity while opening up a critical discussion about embodiment, which leads into the question of how Xican@s' racialized and gendered bodies are perceived on the internet and elsewhere.

When viewing the work and words of Xican@ artists and writers as activism, the mestiza consciousness “show[s] in the flesh and through the images in [their] work how duality is transcended” (Anzaldúa 1987, 102). Chela Sandoval best explains the connection between la mestiza consciousness and la Chican@, and she articulates that “the nature of la conciencia de la mestiza is activist-transitive” (2002, 151). This activist-transitive position, where Xican@s actively self-consciously examine and negotiate their identity, further defines the mestiza as working toward a more inclusive space on the World Wide Web. I understand this position to include the “X” in Xicanism@ as a hearkening back to Ana Castillo’s call for “integrating a feminist perspective to [their] political conscientización as Chicanas, feminist activistas, and intellectuals.” Castillo does not fail to include that “our Xicanisma helps us to be self-confident and assertive regarding the pursuing of our needs and desires” (1994, 40), thus adding a vital quality of autonomy and empowerment to the term “Xicanism@” that I will apply in this essay. Xicanism@ draws on a chorus of voices that agrees on the possibility of change, the growth of a community, and the decolonization of the social imagination (Sandoval 2000) that has constructed identity on the internet in limited ways. The work of Xican@ website writers and artists is essential in re-imagining how we approach embodiment and the internet. In this essay, I examine artists Laura Molina (www.Nakeddave.com) and Bianca Ortiz (www.messtiza.com), whose websites promote the writing and art of Xican@s in political and revolutionary

ways that make the physical and technological borders apparent. These website creators incorporate this activist-transitive position in their work by positioning their bodies against socially held constructions of the Xican@ body. Molina and Ortiz use the responses to their artwork to further create a dialogue with internet users about their bodies. Thus, by giving voice to their art and words, they are heard without having to find a professional forum willing to exhibit their work, thus making it a bold and “dangerous” medium for discussion.

I move the idea of “dangerous” to a discussion of those voices speaking truth to power and where danger lies in the potential violence or harm to the speaker. Guillermo Gómez-Peña’s use of straightforward language reminds writers and readers to avoid becoming “entangled in that rhetoric,” and that he and his colleagues “have chosen to speak from the epicenter of the earthquake, and because of that we become the easy targets of many conservative sectors on both the right and the left,” trying not to retrench “to essentialist positions” (2000, 180). When both the right and the left are able to attack Molina’s and Ortiz’s visual and written rhetoric, it is much more difficult to reside in an essentialist position in cyberspace because internet texts are fluid in nature (Molina periodically changes her website in response to her conversations with her viewers) and Web surfers read them in a fragmented manner. Consequently, the “dangerous” aspects of the discourse used on the internet are that much more significant because of the transitory aspects of the mestiza consciousness that can best explain the intangible effects of the internet on the Xican@ body.

Identity on the Internet

Within this theoretical discussion, I examine the assumptions that online users have about the lack of embodiment on the internet by incorporating ideas and questions posed by Allucquere Rosanne (Sandy) Stone (1991, 1995), Emma Pérez (1999), Mark Warschauer (2000), Jennifer González (2000), Lisa

Nakamura (2002), and Ann Travers (1999) in interpreting the work of Molina and Ortiz. I question the idea that the mestiza can be used to explain people's transitory experiences on the internet. Stone argues that "if the Mestiza is an illegible subject, existing quantumlike in multiple states, then participants in the electronic virtual communities of cyberspace live in the borderlands of both physical and virtual culture, like the Mestiza" (1995, 112). The connection between the sociopolitics of the so-called real world and that of the internet does not erase markers, especially when artists choose to make their gender, sexuality, and race apparent. Emma Pérez's third space politics ask that we "decolonize a historical imaginary that veils our thoughts, our words, our languages" (1999, 27), and theorists such as Pérez, Stone, and Warschauer examine the use of language and anonymity on the internet that attempt to disrupt "the dialects of doubling" (Pérez 1999, 32). Warschauer understands the use of the mestiza's body "as a way of keeping the discussion grounded in individual bodies" (2000, 152). This move remembers the mestiza's body, reminiscent of Molina's critics who insist that her art is dependent on her body and sexuality, and the connection found in Ortiz's "palabras" entries (described in detail below), which places a woman's and a minority's body in both the physical and so-called virtual world by making it more difficult to forget those corporeal beings that have been historically oppressed or erased. Molina's and Ortiz's work make it possible to deconstruct social distinctions such as feminism, color privilege, racism, gender, sexuality, class discrimination, and cultural differences, and to develop "multiple subjectivities" (Hurtado 2003, 274, 304).

Remembering the body is a point of contention among theorists (González 2000; Sandoval 2000; Stone 1991, 1995; Travers 1999), as it connects reality with cyberspace in ways that will demonstrate that the World Wide Web is a manmade construction that only purports to be a "virtual reality"³ with those willing or privileged enough to *forget* the realities of a sociopolitical world, or

those who construct the internet “reality” through a binary lens. This sense of online privilege is further examined by González, who states, “Race is understood not to ‘matter’ precisely because the conditions of power that produce racism are not, in this online domain, perceived as under any kind of threat from the material realm cyberspace supposedly escapes” (45).

Placing the importance of race back into the online domain is important, as many critics knowingly understand that race is inherent on and offline.

I reiterate Ann Travers’s question: “What assumptions are we perpetuating by this celebration of lack of embodiment in cyberspace?” (7). In understanding these critics’ discourse that attempts to define cyberspace through a multifaceted lens, the theory and language Xican@s have created to define themselves in the past is apparent and it applies to the cyborg consciousness, which leaves them, once again, on the borderland by incorporating the mestiza consciousness as an “ideological football” (Nakamura 2002, 102). The term is used to represent an identity, one not specific to Xican@s, that can be changed at will and used to describe racialized and gendered experiences online for a global Web community.

Redefining CyberBorders

González’s (2000) description of the “cyberborderland” as that which rests between cyberspace and the “real world” advances my examination of websites created by Xican@s. In this case, the body, including its race and gender, is determinable because of the very substantial way Xican@s⁴ use language and mark themselves as physical beings. This stems from Anzaldúa’s description of a Xican@ reality that focuses on the interconnectedness of language and identity and that applies to this medium: “Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity—I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (1987, 59). According to Anzaldúa, the body, language, and a sense of legitimacy are inseparable. The *frontera*, traditionally defined as the physical or geopolitical border between Mexico and the United

States, is defined psychologically by Anzaldúa and technologically by González. Wherever a Xican@ lives, she deals with an inner struggle: “Our psyches resemble the bordertowns and are populated by the same people. The struggle has always been inner, and is played out in the outer terrains” (87). These outer terrains have now taken on a new subdivision—the World Wide Web. Those bordertowns in our heads can now be redefined or reformulated through the internet, as it illustrates the way mestiza discourse is being integrated into a theory that attempts to explain multifaceted aspects of the World Wide Web, and how the mestiza body is not being integrated into this method of defining the inner workings of the internet. Stereotypes abound and are changing and mutating to incorporate a new mestiza identity and body placed in the outer terrains.

Several theorists bring together body and language by focusing on the way people of various cultures can cross the digital border (González 2000, Nakamura 2002, Gómez-Peña 2000, and Haraway 1997). They use the terms “insider” and “outsider” to illustrate the accessibility and inaccessibility of the internet to different communities, groups, and individuals. Guillermo Gómez-Peña draws together body and language as a person who considers himself to be a naturalized citizen of the “World Wide” Web, having crossed “the digital border without documents” (2000, 258). He continues by explaining, “We are no longer trying to persuade anyone that we are worthy of inclusion; we now know very well that we are, and will always be, either temporary insiders, or insiders/outsiders” (259). Coining the phrase “cyber-immigrants,” Gómez-Peña considers language a border that Chicana/os must continually cross in the seemingly “World Wide” Web, even through the digital divide.

For example, Molina and Ortiz find an alternative outcome to the digital divide that resembles the strategies of Marge Piercy’s characters, Nili and Riva in *He, She, It, a Science Fiction Tale about XYZ*. In her analysis of the

characters, Donna Haraway illustrates the weaknesses and strengths of language when used as a commodity. Haraway sees that Nili and Riva “are committed to the principle that information must not be a commodity. In the vulnerabilities and potencies of their altered bodies, these technologically savvy women understand the bond of literacy and wealth that structures the chances of life and death in their world.” The revolutionary aspect of language, of maintaining a “bond of literacy” through a medium that can so easily be corrupted by corporate orders, leads to a tenuous relationship between body and language—the physical and psychological, and as Haraway points out, as “insider and outsider” (1997, 2).

Outsider status is marked as the “cyber-immigrant,” which strains the “bond of literacy.” *A Nation Online*, a report released by the National Telecommunications Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce, focuses its attention on internet use and language, noting that “68.4 percent of all Hispanics and 85.9 percent of Hispanic households where Spanish is the only language spoken” (2002, 73–74) find themselves as outsiders because they are not using the language of the internet. This statistic is changing as America Online, Sony, AOL Latino, and various other companies are courting the Latino population in the United States with Spanish-language Web pages. This in itself illuminates how the insider/outsider status is adapting to this technology through consumerism targeting racial groups and their language.

Outsider status, or the digital divide, is also marked by capital. When examining the offline population, NTIA states that households with incomes between \$15,000 and \$35,000 are unable to afford internet access. Add a lack of education, and most low-income adults are computer illiterate. The U.S. Department of Commerce states that “60.2 percent of adults (age 25-plus)

with only a high school degree and 87.2 percent of adults with less than a high school education” (2002, 73) do not own or know how to operate a computer. Yet, in a study of online users, Alonso Soto estimates that with “roughly 13.7 million internet users, Hispanics are the largest minority group online in the U.S.” (2004), while the Center for Media Research finds that of the 12 million heavy and moderate internet users they surveyed, “Hispanic adults (age 18-plus) who frequent the internet are considerably more affluent than other Hispanics and adults in the general population” (2004). With such conflicting statistics, it is apparent that more research must be done on both the offline and online populations of Latinos in the United States.

Overall, these statistics map the boundaries of the cyberborderland, making the changing gaps quite clear: we can map a distinction between insiders/Web users/unmarked speakers or writers and outsiders/marked speakers or writers/those who lack access to this technology. The next generation of Xican@s who are well versed in the *lingua franca*⁵ of the internet have the potential to move us forward. It is they who travel the cyberborderland as insiders/outsideers, create their own Web pages, webrings, blogs, and newsgroups,⁶ while broadening the *lingua franca* of the internet to include Spanglish and other literacies that help define them. Molina and Ortiz make the physical and technological borders apparent by creating a place for their bodies in cyberspace while promoting the use of mestiza language that serves the Xican@ community specifically (Spanglish, Spanish, English, Pocho—to name a few). By framing their work as insiders/outsideers, Molina and Ortiz both promote crossing borders, making the mestiza consciousness visible on the internet. Borders become more significant when these women respond critically to the language directed toward them. Their bodies become the texts spectators read, and this in turn provides a site of discourse reality beginning to create new images of Xican@s in cyberspace.

Molina and Ortiz use language to build themselves a place to reside as insiders/outsiders, and their work provides excellent avenues for discussing the concept of website borderlands. Written language drives the internet, making borders definable through what is in the text. As Nakamura makes clear in *Cybertypes*, we must “focus a critical gaze on the ways that race is played in these theaters of identity” (2002, xvi). Since many users write with a sense of anonymity in these “theaters of identity,” more can be revealed about the effect the writing or art has on an imagined audience by focusing on the reader’s response to the text or art. The work these cyber-Xican@s produce and share is not done anonymously, however; as we shall see, they *own* their identity. They mesh the technological and the physical worlds through their art and language. Therefore, the method in which they project themselves onto an unknown and vast audience allows their ideas to expand the borderland on the World Wide Web, but only if internet users online are willing to critically engage in an overt discussion about embodiment, race, and gender. Otherwise, the internet will continue to reflect a reactionary gaze and audience.

“The Angriest Woman in the World”

I begin the discussion with the websites www.Nakeddave.com (2003) and www.messstiza.com (2003), which offer a place for Chicanas to verbalize their emotions in writing without encountering any censors who may edit the Xican@ off the Web/page. With this in mind, the personal reflections or journal sections of many of these websites prove fruitful in understanding the discourse of race and gender in cyberspace when it comes to audience. Through this medium, Molina and Ortiz provoke a type of cyber-thinking among individuals, hyper-linking people to an awareness of their comfortable homogeneity. Simultaneously, they are linked to a cyber-Xican@ consciousness that forces them to think from and/or outside of their social location. For instance, Laura Molina, who calls herself “the angriest woman in the world,”



Fig. 1.
 "Dave as Cupid," detail of *The Vision of Saint Teresa of Avila*.
 Artist: Laura Molina. 1998 (unfinished). Oil on canvas, 52 x 40".
<http://www.nakeddave.com/NakedDave01.html>.

paints her ex-boyfriend in the nude (see fig. 1) as a way (at first) to cope with their breakup, which occurred twenty-five years before she created the website titled "Naked Dave, a Woman's Obsession." Interestingly, this page models Molina's use of satire as an emancipating tool in her language. She responds to individuals who e-mail her about her work and has a dialogue with them about what they see as her "pathological" tendencies. She writes:

A friend of Dave's asked me why I put him through this. Since he's totally indifferent to what I do, I don't believe he's going through anything, only I am. His friend probably thinks I'm wrong to do this and the display of authentic emotions makes most people uncomfortable. People don't mind seeing such passions on TV or in movies, but they don't want to actually see it in real life. Many times I have heard the cavalier and unknowing "get a life" response. But this

is real. These paintings ARE my life and for right now my past is my future. Everything isn't pathological, ya know, and we're all human. If you think I'm obsessed, then check out www.davestevens.com... See the artwork of the hypocrite who said to me, "You can't paint me naked." He objects to my objectifying him...(too bad, pal).

Molina's insistence that this is real life and not television or cinema illustrates how cyberspace has blurred the real and the imaginary. The cyberborderland makes its appearance as a place where "dangerous" discussions can take place—where discourse has both positive and negative consequences.

"The Bond of Literacy"

But the idea that technology can connect the real and imaginary is not anything new, as another section titled "Letter to Naked Dave and Frequently Asked Questions" illustrates. Molina begins with a quotation from Oprah Winfrey: "Your experience is a commodity. If it happened to you, it happened to 10,000 other people." Framing individual experiences as commodities is an innovative aspect of television—people's experiences have made her millions of dollars. But while Winfrey is somewhat abstract in her comment, what Molina reveals with this quotation is the "bond of literacy" (Haraway 1997, 2) that connects women's experiences and the way language can relate stories that sometimes change the physical lives of other individuals reading or listening to them. Molina's written exchanges with those viewing her art exemplify this "bond of literacy," as they illustrate how her body is defined in connective ways with some readers and negative and disassociating ways with other viewers as she exposes herself through the language of an insider/outsider.

Thus it is important to examine the two camps that responded to Molina's artwork in her website—those who found sense in her state of being, mainly

other Xicanas—and those who responded through their anonymity and found her to be pathological and obsessed. Molina's body, then, represents a place where other Xicanas see themselves, and this is noted in the e-mails she receives about her art. For example, in 1999 Professor Laura E. Pérez from University of California, Berkeley, identified with Molina's work:

I thought that "Naked Dave, a Woman's Obsession" is positively insane in a way that I can understand...It is "insane" in the sense that "normal" people are supposed to let bygones be bygones, etc. What I think is terrific about the site is that it refuses to do this, to pretend that past relationships, past pain should go quietly into the night. As a viewer, and particularly as a woman, I see Naked Dave as a kind of exposé, and I feel emotional vindication and an identification with the will to not [let the] past drop "politely," given that it is these ideas of propriety that are actually psychologically abnormal.
(<http://www.nakeddave.com/e-mail2NakedDave.html>)

Pérez's response, as well as other women's connection to Molina's artwork, illustrates Haraway's notion that "in the vulnerabilities and potencies of their altered bodies, these technologically savvy women understand the bond of literacy" (2) that physically connects women's technological bodies.

The following responses show the strength two women found when viewing Molina's website. The first was an e-mail sent from a woman in Argentina, who writes, "I must say being the 'Angriest Woman in the World' is a tiresome job. And I thought I held that position. Ha, ha. I really liked the Naked Dave series." Another woman writes:

The nice thing about this site is the way you just went out and did what you had to do. REVENGE is there but lurks deeper than that.

It's something else, I kinda feel it. You can't "Go Postal" and you can't tell enough people your feelings so you express it in art. The music, the paintings, WOW! Bookmarked it and I'll be back to wallow in my own pain. Thanx. -H. (www.nakeddave.com/email2NakedDave.html)

These two women respondents show a strong sense of solidarity with Molina's work that allows for their own survival, making a space available to them where they can respond to the sense of disembodiment often associated with the World Wide Web.

Molina also includes an excerpt on her website from "The Comic Journal Message Board" to illustrate the resistance she has experienced.⁷ These posts, unedited by her, reveal how her paintings are a reflection of her race, gender, and social positioning.⁸ The responder/reactor begins the post by quoting the following from Molina's biography published on the website:

I feel the need to assert my identity in the most militant way possible because otherwise, as an American, I am invisible. In a culture where nothing happens until it happens on TV, I don't exist. As an educated, native-born, English-speaking, fifth generation Mexican-American and a feminist, there is almost no reflection of me in the movies or television, which is almost as bad as being stereotyped. My paintings make my own statement that I am true to my emotions even if they are unpleasant ones like rage and obsession which may upset the viewer and I boldly declare that my passions, needs and desires are not pathological. I often use my own face in my paintings. By becoming the stereotype I also break it, because as the artist I have control of the image and what it conveys to the viewer.

Molina's words focus on turning the reactions to her art into a commodity that can lead to a "bond of literacy," but this is misunderstood here as the responder criticizes from a personal level:

If you say so, *mija*. I'd say that being a fifth-generation Pocha makes her seem a little pretentious when she plays the Aztlán card so strongly, then complains that her culture hasn't been shown sufficiently on TV. Then, I'm only first generation and got all my Hispanic [sic] affectations from *Love and Rockets*, so what do I know. And yeah, drawing somebody who you had a five-month thing with is pathological. And pathetic. They're nice paintings though. (mhcamos-Member posted 27 June 2002 11:54 a.m.)

Molina's critics create a future body—a cyborg identity—defined by the various personal experience(s) of the viewers. The *control* Molina had of the image disappears once she makes a space for responses on the website. Molina's artistic intentions may be subsumed by the commentary she receives, but when a user critically examines the website, it is apparent that the anonymous commentators who focus negatively on the way Molina defines her racialized body—as a fifth generation Pocha—are creating meaning through their own situated knowledge, in this case, as a first generation “*Love and Rockets*”⁹ Hispanic. This mode of response does not explicitly engage cultural criticism, yet it must be examined to understand how *mestiza* discourse and literacy work in multiple ways in cyberspace.

The Body as/or the Text?

Myth making about gendered and racialized people is easily perpetuated when discourse is created while critical thinking is absent (a sentiment also felt by Ortiz). Therefore, we must consider what discourse might surround Molina's art if the paintings of naked Dave were to stand alone without the written text. Would Molina's racialized and sexualized body be attached to the paintings as readily? Perhaps, but controlling literacy is an important aspect of the kind of power that constructs identity. Thus, Molina finds it difficult to deconstruct masculinity without being challenged or seen as pathetic and pathological (two terms that were repeated often on the message board).

The crucial part of an interaction between web surfers and artists such as Molina is that they do not read all the links available to them, creating a disjointed vision of her body/site/text, a “cybertype” (Nakamura 2002). In “Naked Dave: A Woman’s Obsession, Part 2,” Molina addresses the part of her audience that often misses the point of the site:

Naked Dave it not so much going over people’s heads as it is going straight between their legs....You have a right to your opinion, but if you are going to put your uninformed criticisms up on the Internet, please read the entire text, so you know what the Hell you are talking about and realize that some of the details of the story are “between the lines.” (2003)

In order to help explain her art, not her body, Molina makes it clear that the entire site works as a whole. If one is to read only one section, the entire story/site will be fragmented. For example, in a link that leads to a preview of her upcoming work, Molina writes about how she works as an artist. She constantly repeats that her obsession is not so much with Dave as it is with painting and finishing the series of Naked Dave that she began. In one sentence, she tries to make her audience understand that her work is not about her or Dave’s body, but about how she views art. To an audience that may only be clicking on pop culture icons, she explains why she paints her ex-boyfriend naked: “My unwilling Muse would like me to stop painting him, but I am not about to give him what he wants. This painting, when it is finished, will be revealing a secret at the core of my Naked Dave series.” Molina works to define the language used to construct criticism about her work into the cyber-discourse that shapes the way her artwork is perceived. Molina attempts to make her readers move away from defining her as a pathetic and pathological Xican@ artist, and in so doing, sets an example of how we write ourselves in cyberspace.

In her latest piece, “Amor Alien,” (see fig. 2 and cover art) Molina’s art draws on the relationship she has had with respondents to her previous artwork. The tensions between her work and some of her viewers come forward in this piece. Molina takes the painter Jesus Helguera’s “Amor Indio” (1946) as inspiration for her “Amor Alien.” In this rendition, she delves deeper into the relationship that the viewers (do not) allow her to have with the image of Dave. In the following response, the viewer is made privy to her body, sardonic humor, and the sarcasm in which she approaches those viewers who continually misinterpret her work and intentions:

I portrayed myself as a green-skinned, indigenous resident of the fictional red planet Dave is visiting. The joke is that *he’s the alien*. But as we all know from being educated in the USA, nothing exists until a White man sees it (Columbus “discovered” America) and Dave doesn’t really think of me as human, if he ever thinks of me at all, (doubtful) so this is entirely appropriate. I’m also “The Other” that you fear or maybe, identify with. At a certain point, I realized that any generic, clean-cut White male could stand in and it would still work, but I couldn’t stop myself. Hee, hee.

Molina uses her website as both a way to have an open dialogue with the public about her art and to continue finding material for it. Her (or her creation of Dave’s) body becomes the tool through which many of the responders look when interpreting her art.

Molina continues by focusing on the inherent patriarchal notion that women’s art, especially when disseminated easily through the internet, creates discomfort among some viewers. She explains, “There’s something I’ve realized about why these paintings make people so uncomfortable. Dave Stevens is a ‘male muse’, and an unwilling one at that. The traditional gender roles have been reversed. This upsets the order of things. Women are not supposed to



Fig. 2.

“Amor Alien.” Artist: Laura Molina. April 2004.

Oil, fluorescent enamel and metallic powder on canvas, 49 x 37”.

<http://www.nakeddave.com/NakedDave02.html>.

have my technical skill or use it to toy with and objectify a male subject.”

Whether it is positive, as when women find solidarity with the artist, or negative, when Molina’s body becomes a site of instability, sexual harassment, or violence through language, the text is continually read through the creator’s racialized and gendered body. When Molina enters this space, she finds herself in the cyberborderland where two ideologies collide. As noted in Molina’s latter statement, her use of the internet is constructed as an advantage that a Xican@ should not be permitted to obtain.

Thus, the internet can be viewed as a place where patriarchy maintains itself and where ideas and words can easily revive a colonialist imagination that

wishes to maintain a privileged state through the use of science (technology) and capitalism. Perhaps the danger for some of the responders is the “corporate rhetoric [that] continues in the assertion that the body created [in this case, naked Dave] ‘becomes the personal property’ of the person who assembled it” (González 2000, 38). The rhetoric of fear is found within some of the responses that naked Dave is being objectified by a Xican@ deemed pathological. And when the objectification of a body means controlling the body, her paintings are then brought down to a level of “low” art by the cyber community in order to make the art less influential.

Passing through Borders

One way to make art less influential for the dominant society is by objectifying the Xican@s’ racialized body. This is not a new concept for Chicanas whose work (written or visual) is often ghettoized for marketing purposes. In fact, Molina uses that objectification to her advantage by showing her art as progressively crossing real/physical and ideological/virtual borders. González explains the importance of remembering the connection between virtual space and real bodies:

Such play with racial identity nevertheless can and does have concrete consequences as real as those occurring in other cultural domains of social exchange such as literature, film or music. Because “passing” (or pretending to be what one is not) in cyberspace has become a norm rather than an exception, the representation of race in this space is complicated by the fact that much of the activity online is about becoming the fantasy of a racial other. (2000, 29)

The border between the real world and cyberspace becomes the color line that an individual must choose to pass if s/he is willing to pretend “to be what one is not.” This border is what makes the mestiza consciousness a vital aspect for Xican@s and their preservation of identity on the internet.

In contrast, when individuals who disregard the color line tinker online with identity, they are relying on the privilege of forgetting the body. This is especially the case when issues of access and literacy are constantly at the forefront of discussions regarding internet use in the United States. Therefore, having to cross the color line that W.E.B. Du Bois articulated in his 1903 publication, *The Souls of Black Folks*, is not and should never be an easy decision to make. In fact, being able to pass recreationally is a privilege that marks a body's ideology. Stone points to adopting an identity not one's own as the old Cartesian trick:

[We] need to pay close attention to [adopting identities that are not one's own], because of the way that power works in asymmetrical forms. And that means that the people who get to let go of the body leave behind them a residue, so [in order for it to be successful] other people have to support that act. In an ideal circumstance where power was not working asymmetrically, then anybody could let go of the body without necessarily impacting anybody else. (1995, 3)

The internet offers a level of anonymity that blurs those lines between the physical and cyber-body, leaving the power structures of reality and fiction blurred for many individuals. This allows the mestiza consciousness to be used as an "ideological football" (Nakamura 2002, 102) that represents identities changed at will, and all the while underscoring the term's importance to Xicanas in the cyberborderland. Unfortunately, because many internet users embody a sense of anonymity, passing is a common act among them. As noted by Sherry Turkle, "In cyberspace, hundreds of thousands, perhaps already millions, of users create online personae who live in a diverse group of virtual communities where the routine formation of multiple identities undermines any notion of a real and unitary self. Yet the notion of the real fights back"

(1995, 267). Therefore, the border is not static, nor is it a completely malleable entity, suited for each individual's needs.

If the user is literate in mestiza discourse, the borderland represents a reality that hits the individual head-on without apologies. She understands the freedoms, restrictions, and dangers of an ambiguous identity. Adopting such an identity is not a choice; therefore, those who choose to adopt an *othered* identity in order to “see what it feels like,” or “how people respond to that identity,” are in fact attempting to take part in a mestiza discourse, but in a fraudulent way. Because the body of la mestiza is visually marked racially and sexually, passing is a contradiction that many Xican@s do not condone. For the Xican@s whose websites I examine in this essay, passing is not an option. For instance, in her “artist’s statement,” Molina clearly shows how viewers of her artwork mark her body. Molina expresses, “I feel the need to assert my identity in the most militant way possible because otherwise, as an American, I am invisible” (2003). She also states that she will not be silenced while portraying through her language and art that she is actively choosing not to become invisible. Thus, racial passing is not a new concept, but now that passing is present on the internet, and done for a variety of reasons by those able to write the lingua franca fluently, a new community (be it Euro-Americans passing as the other, males passing as female, or non-mestiza passing as mestiza) is being introduced to this concept without the realization that many *othered* communities have been and are socially trained to read this racial discourse in their daily encounters with racism, sexism, and classism.

Palabras and Visual Rhetoric

When the body of a woman is marked both sexually and racially, patriarchal signification continues to attempt to fully mark or unmark women of color—making them invisible. The work of Bianca Ortiz (2003), a cyber-artist from

San Pablo, California, illustrates a sense of empowerment and pride as she resides in the cyberborderland and refuses to be unrepresentable. Ortiz's work opens up a venue to show how a marked body can use "palabras" or words to build a liberatory space within the cyber community. Judith Butler explicates her view of women as "*unrepresentable*" when they are within a patriarchal order. Butler understands that "women represent the sex that cannot be thought, a linguistic absence and opacity....In this sense, women are the sex which is not 'one,' but multiple" (1999, 14). Challenging the patriarchal order as well as Butler's assessment of it, Ortiz's website, www.messtiza.com, offers an avenue between real life and cyberspace in an attempt to represent herself. She weaves in and out of the border by posting her work online and in her 'zines, *Mala Zine #1* and *Mala Zine #2*, which she publishes and sells through the internet.¹⁰ As her website states, most of her work focuses on issues of the "pathologized mexicana/latina bodies, authenticity, pop cultural hell, relationships with whiteness, punk rockness and xicanidad, negative perceptions of vocal women of color, living in wartime," and a variety of other contemporary and theoretical issues. Her website invites discussion about the connections between language, the body, and the internet.

In one of her illustrations titled "forgetting," (see fig. 3) she paints a woman looking down with an almost despairing quality. The words "Forgetting how to" are written on the left margin, and on the right side of the print and to the right of the woman's face, "la la la" is written multiple times. Ortiz explains what this image represents:

Forgetting is never really forgotten; it is the process of creating a safe mental space to buffer events that we want to be expelled but in that we often forget more than just the unpleasant. We may forget how to be touched, how to create, how to make art and how to write what we

truly want to. La la la can be interpreted as music, or just as daily life, it's the components of routine that [are] used to release ourselves from realities that bring us pain and the most horrible of memories. It also, often aids us in forgetting how to do the things we love. (2004)

This drawing expresses those feelings of being inarticulate when trying to verbalize and explain the racialized and gendered body to a homogenous audience. She also focuses on the connection between the body, language, and memory—and how often memory is what is reconstructed by not forgetting the body. This is about embodiment and survival.

Ortiz moves beyond the polite rhetoric often required of “angry Xicanas” to create that safe space where a woman can remember what she has for so long forgotten, for both herself and the Web surfer searching for Xicanidad.

In another illustration, titled, “i am,” (see fig. 4) she articulates this attitude with the words, “I am a Chicana mestiza radical feminist/ and if this bothers you, I don't give a fuck,” making the space in which she resides perfectly clear. She elucidates the image's meaning when she writes:

In a fit of feeling disassociated from white feminist friends, verbally attacked from more second wave centered feminists, and bothered by racism from individuals and through public policy, I drew this picture of myself with the words “I am a chicana mestiza radical feminist and if this bothers you, I don't give a fuck.” It was meant as declaration to them but ended up as a political statement to myself. It was extremely empowering to draw and to subsequently photocopy into my zine. (2004)

Similar to Molina, Ortiz writes about sociopolitical issues with no apologies to their white audience or those who may take offense. Ortiz specifically

places herself as a radical feminist working against a dominant discourse, and through this position, she marks it by placing the *c/s* (con safos) symbol in a prominent place on her website, making it known to the reader that the written material and the images are to be respected as those of the author. José Antonio Burciaga brings to public discourse the specifically Xican@ definition of “*c/s*”: “Some Chicanos will also end a placar, graffiti, with the message ‘con o sin safos’, which means that with or without safety, with or without this code, whether you like it or not, whether you insult me back or not, this placar, insult or praise, stands.” He clarifies: “Whether you agree with me or not, whether you like it or not, with all due respect, this is my reality” (1993, 7–8). Ortiz uses this symbol to demonstrate her boldness in maintaining her position on issues that affect her body.

In many ways, as an artist and writer, Ortiz creates a place within cyberspace where, unless the users share the same political, social, and personal views, they face their hegemonic beliefs through their passing discomfort. Throughout Ortiz’s website, her language locates her as an outsider/insider. In the 4 April 2002 “palabras” entry, she writes:

The computer decided to die over a month ago in a dramatic display of popping and sporadic sleeping until it would no longer turn on so now updates will be even more infrequent.... This all gives me more of an incentive to stay away from scary internet places and other self-important tripa which despite my claiming “doesn’t matter to me” still causes me high levels of annoyance.

She illustrates her discomfort with the information provided on the internet that positions her as an outsider—not as a Xican@. She then takes this opportunity to move her readers from the internet itself to matters involving



Fig. 3.
"forgetting." Artist: Bianca Ortiz. 1997.
<http://www.messtiza.com/arte/arte.html>.



Fig. 4.
"i am." Artist: Bianca Ortiz. 1997.
<http://www.messtiza.com/arte/arte.html>.

the real bodies of the “unsolved murders of over 260 women in Juárez, México, across the galvanized border from El Paso, Texas” (2003). Ortiz points the Web surfer to Lourdes Portillo’s 2001 film *Señorita Extraviada* that takes a look at the deaths of these women. The harsh reality of the palabras Ortiz shares with her readers is due to 300 women having been found murdered and over 450 women having disappeared as of this writing.¹¹ She marks her body with a strong sense of political consciousness, and asks her readers to step outside of cyberspace and make their voices heard. She shows where they can use their marked American bodies and socially conscientious selves to write letters to human rights organizations, give financial support, and become part of organizations working to resolve these murder cases. Ortiz moves the user into the cyberborderland, asking them to see and understand how cyberactivism can help those whose absence is more real than anyone would ever wish.

Ortiz’s mestiza discourse clearly illustrates how cyberspace is not a site where one can rest, be at peace, or feel safe. She shows how her body is intricately tied to what she sees, reads, and experiences in cyberspace. Her response of 12 September 2001 is copied verbatim in order to convey her remaking of the lingua franca on the internet:

I am not feeling awake or eloquent and to make it all worse I am receiving hundreds of emails from listservs wherein people are actually discussing the pros and cons of “nuking the middle east” and other such things. *sigh* I am waiting for the visions of U.S. military hitting the “harborers of evil” 100 times harder than the damage sustained within the U.S. while the television plays another “spontaneous” rendition of america the beautiful. Other than that, I feel sick and this grand display of nationalism & nativism is only creating cramps in my stomach and knots in my shoulders.¹²

González illustrates that race does matter even if cyberspace is thought to allow an escape from the material realm (2000, 45). The reactions of Xicanas such as Ortiz and Molina illustrate the ways in which race is inherent on the internet. In fact, Ortiz's body reacts and resides in that space between cyberspace and the real world. The sickness to which Ortiz's body succumbs illustrates that these two realms are connected through the physical apparatus of the human body. Ortiz's corporeal reaction is best understood by referencing Anzaldúa's idea of *la facultad* (1987, 60) and applying it to the digital environment. *La facultad* is "a shift in perception" that

deepens the way we see concrete objects and people; the senses become so acute and piercing that we can see through things, view events in depth, a piercing that reaches the underworld (the realm of the soul). As we plunge vertically, the break, with its accompanying new seeing, makes us pay attention to the soul, and we are thus carried into awareness—an expressing of soul (Self). (61)

La facultad draws on changing perceptions necessary to hone when disembodiment shifts realities. But what remains constant are symbols and language, and it is those who understand the mestiza consciousness who have the "acute awareness mediated by the part of the psyche that does not speak, that communicates in images and symbols which are the faces of feelings, that is, behind which feelings reside/hide" (60). Stone describes this as being a part of a cyber-discourse rarely addressed, which is "the cyborg as a totally fantastic, fictional, quasi-real boundary creature. And that's a sense in which we're all cyborgs, really, in that we all have to negotiate our parts, our own internal boundaries, the edges of the barbed wire that Gloria Anzaldúa talks about." She continues: "other people are collapsing into us, they're already there, we're already, in a sense, collapsed into each other" (1995, 4). The "collapse

into each other” exemplifies the cyberborderland’s existence because groups and individuals are affected by other communities through the myriad of information available on the internet.

Cyberspace is the arena where explanations are crucial for understanding one another. Women of color are often asked to explain themselves; for instance, Molina and Ortiz are often asked to explain their politics, religion, gender, class, and especially their racialized bodies. When the answers to these questions do not broaden the perceived border for the dominant user’s ideology, cyberspace becomes a cramped place. It is then that cyborg and mestiza consciousness become necessary tools for understanding the world (wide web). This also makes the cyberborderland a place of resistance—a place of learning.

A Lesson in Literacy

An important aspect missing in cyberspace almost always present in the physical world is our bodily ways of communicating, and Ortiz alludes to this in one of her “palabras” entries posted on 24 February 2001:

It’s knowing that you as a woman of color will be discounted as being able to explain yourself effectively (written, spoken, artistic) without hearing that you are concentrating too much on _____, the blank being any one of the components that has created you. And if attempted, your choice of words, the tone in your voice, your posture, your facial contortions, your whole is scrutinized. It’s not the words [that] are heard because one’s life can be described and analyzed without the offense of personalization so much the better by someone who has the status of being the other.

Mestizas are trained to read the discourse of race and gender, and even though gesture and tone are missing online, cyberspace is also bringing on a familiar

lesson in visual and written literacy. The mestiza discourse is a reality and one that is often negotiated within a combination of physical and written discourse. Written discourse often leaves the Xican@ in a position where she struggles to justify her identity because language that marks dominant ideology is repeated over and over and over again until words seem to repeat a well-known racial narrative from the real world. In a response to an over-used and often misunderstood term, “white guilt,” for instance, Ortiz playfully and sardonically writes on 14 June 2000 in her “palabras” entry: “made/ you/ look./ So, it’s the same old shit/ new medium, right?” She ends with a retort not often given when attempting to answer politely or clarify what white guilt means. She states, “My advice: Go listen to that Minor Threat song and wallow. Yeah, you are ‘guilty of a crime you didn’t commit.’ La la la, time for a new chorus.” These words or conversations about race occur frequently (sometimes annoyingly); therefore when Ortiz leaves the blank space open, she illustrates the frustrations she has with speaking and writing words not heard or critically engaged by the reader/ listener. Stone’s idea that the old Cartesian trick works through asymmetrical forms of power (1995, 3) helps explain Ortiz’s reasons for writing through a rhetoric of frustration that often occurs when a dominant discourse takes precedence.

If we examine Ortiz’s reaction to language, her website forces readers to enter the cyberborderland, where her identity encounters those who wish to continually mark her body as powerless. When Ortiz poses the question on 24 February 2002, “Who is afforded the luxury of detachment?” she sets her place within a mestiza consciousness as she asks those reading her website to come to terms with their own privilege. This is necessary since the privilege often embedded in the internet is ubiquitous. The cyberborderland is both real for Xican@s and fabricated for others because it is in this place where one can either come to acknowledge their privilege, or continue the activity of forgetting the body.

To illustrate how her marked body exists in the cyberborderland, Ortiz focuses on how her website has become a place of resistance for a Xican@ who has been using words her whole life. She understands the power of image and performance that helps Xican@s verbalize their anger, but she fears that the outcome may remain the same.

Ortiz looks to a combination of performance and language as the new *mestiza* discourse but in order to come to a contextual understanding of her position, she warns that critical thinking must always accompany these two literacies. Without critical thinking, a *mestiza*'s discourse will continue to fall into the hegemonic structure. Her statements vary from, "I do not need to use up all of my energy in order to accommodate anyone—so deal with it" (posted 9 July 1997), to a later entry: "A veces no me importa como parezco—uncooperativo o difficil because I do not tolerate the mierda that other mujeres of color may (albeit reluctantly so)—therefore, let me be written off as one of the angry ones..." and then, "Maybe if I perform my anger, it will be more tolerable?" (posted 11 April 2001). For those who have lived within the *mestiza* consciousness, these sentences reverberate with a common theme of racial discourse that has led to the creation of theoretical terms such as Anzaldúa's (1987) idea of "cultural schizophrenia" and "borderlands." These words are part of the language of the *mestiza*, and it is this *mestiza* consciousness that is being used to broadly define cyberspace consciousness as a place where bodies, technology, and identity are being shaped.

Examining "Cybertypes"

As I state at the beginning of this essay, the manner in which *mestiza* discourse is being used to define the internet is transforming and propagating stereotypes describing the *mestiza* body and identity. Molina's and Ortiz's work illustrates how the perpetuation of stereotypes gives strength to racial discourse quite similar to pre-internet times, yet we are also in uncharted territory. González describes the

“tragic mestizo” as a figure where historical, political, and social meaning is placed. “Here there is also a notion of the body in pieces, somehow unable to become accurately assembled into a properly functioning subject or citizen—hence the laws banning miscegenation that were only repealed in the United States in 1968” (2000, 35). González positions the mestiza body in history as a fragmented figure that cannot hold meaning unless that meaning is dysfunctional (such as being pathological, emotional, or unemployed). The *idea* of the tragic mestizo, miscegenation laws, and the fragmented body allow for theorists such as Haraway to use the mestiza as a site where the cyborg body can produce meaning. Through the internet, this fragmentation is moving the mestiza body forward, leading to new definitions of the cyber-Xicana. The results are positive, such as opening up a domain where the “angry Chicana” can voice her concerns on the internet.

This fragmentation, when not theorized to include the asymmetrical forms of power, can be uninformed, thus producing what Nakamura calls “cybertypes” (2002, xiii). But the term also allows for another avenue in which the mestiza body is defined and understood. Cybertypes take on the same role on the internet as do stereotypes. Ortiz titles her fanzine “Mamacita” in order to complicate the Virgen de Guadalupe/Malinche dichotomy often transferred onto a Chicana’s body. A piece of “hate mail” she received illustrates how written discourse can create a visual impression of Ortiz, attempting to reduce her body to that dichotomy, thus lessening her power as a critical thinker online. Ortiz understands the power of this dichotomy and realizes that in order to counteract her “first online hate mail which is somewhat amusing but mostly pathetic,” she must open it, “despite [her] urge [to] delete the mail.” Here she finds an e-mail with the subject line, “Rethink yourself.” It begins by addressing her as “Miss Mamasita,” and continues with sexually explicit hate speech. Using the moral platform of the role model for Latinas, the author chastises Ortiz for allegedly appearing in a pornographic magazine, and claims she is unfit to represent Latinas (posted 6 March 2000).

It is after this attack that Ortiz moves to the internet to define “mamasita,” expecting that internet users will have predictable results. She estimates that her search will return pornographic “hits” and she is correct. On 8 March 2000 she sarcastically responds, “Why do I bother? So for some reason I searched for ‘mamasita’ thinking that maybe it wouldn’t be all porn. But this here is the internet, of course. I especially like the part about how many of the Latina women and girls ‘are smuggled from Cuba and South America’ for your viewing enjoyment. What the?” These cybertypes are not dissimilar to those found outside of cyberspace, tying the Xicana body to technology in eroticized and problematic ways.¹³ The comments Ortiz finds in her e-mail reflect her as an image of La Malinche or la Chingada, who as Ana Castillo examines in *Massacre of the Dreamers*, insinuates “that female sexuality is at fault again, since it is woman who conceives and who therefore gave birth to the new race” (1994, 109). The viewer of her website pushes Ortiz into an either/or role of being the virgen or the whore. It is apparent that Ortiz cannot escape from being placed into the role of la Malinche, and what is even more detrimental is that the Chicana feminist theory that has made this figure a liberatory one is not likely to be a part of the respondent’s discourse.¹⁴

The discourse of gender and race continues as Xican@s are beginning to be seen as an even larger threat to the homogeneous American psyche. Creating cybertypes is an innovative way to maintain white privilege online as the world is globalized and the United States is connected through the internet to information previously difficult to find.¹⁵ Therefore, Xicanas who choose to mark their bodies with their race and gender both inside and outside of the so-called World Wide Web are in fact keeping their status as cyber-immigrants, naturalized cyber-citizens, and definitely as the insiders/outsideers who find strength in the cyberborderland.

Conclusion

The idea that one must be a citizen of the World Wide Web contains aspects of domination. In “‘The Souls of Cyber-Folk’: Performativity, Virtual Embodiment, and Racial Histories,” Thomas Foster discusses the idea of citizenship and defines the notion of citizen as the “universal position of white men” (1999, 138). If those being excluded from obtaining citizenship online are considered immigrants or outsiders, then this is a matter of access, but also embodiment. Yet this idea is not going to change as long as we keep repeating the same rhetoric and argument when we (don’t) discuss privilege, especially when many internet users are bound to the idea of the perceived anonymity of the Web. Travers adds to this argument: “The scarcity of critical dialogue in threads relating to bodily differences reveals that, contrary to the optimism of those who associate anonymity with greater opportunities for participation in public space, the ‘body’ remains a highly contested site” (1999, 120).

Ortiz and Molina struggle and push for critical dialogue that illustrates how bodies are presented on the internet. In one posting of July 1997, it is clear that Ortiz does not yet see a change to the way her body is marked by her website guests. She explains:

And it’s always the extremes: total agreement so much that I am cynical about the person’s true feelings or me being called a bitch or fucked up or overreacting or making too big a deal. But both these extremes are too connected in my thinking. Both are reactions of someone who has not really thought about the words. I doubt that someone who blindly accepts everything I say as the truth has gone through any kind of deep mental process and really evaluated the ideas. The same goes with the ones who attack instead of criticize. There’s no effective communication

when there's name-calling or condescending tones. Give me real ideas—
is that so difficult?

As noted in Ortiz's words, cyber-artists are pushing for a critical dialogue that moves beyond a simple reaction to their words. Ortiz's idea mirrors Molina's when they ask readers to look at the words, what they incorporate, and how they are socially and politically located. It is an assignment in mapping one's cybersocial location. Because Xican@s mark their bodies and ask that their words be read critically from this social location, their websites are centrally located in the cyberborderland—the borderland that rests between cyberspace and the real world.

What places these websites in the cyberborderland is their conscious use of the mestiza discourse. Their mestiza consciousness is what allows them to define their own bodies, even when they struggle through the dominant discourse in order to make their voices legitimate (Anzaldúa 1987, 59). Language is a clear marker of bodies and ideologies on the internet, and as the responses to Ortiz's and Molina's work illustrate, they will continue to live in the (cyber)borderlands where terrorizing marked bodies takes place. Words such as "war" and "attack" repeat themselves throughout the responses to these women's work, illustrating how it is vital to analyze the dominant cyber-discourse through a mestiza's lens.

Molina adds to this analysis as she represents the idea of borders in a unique fashion when she integrates the idea of access into every part of her website. She includes a pop-up that viewers see when they attempt to open certain images on her website. It warns, "The QuickTime 6 player, the Flash 7 internet plug-in and an up-dated browser are recommended for viewing this website. NakedDave.com contains commentary by the artist which may include irony, satire and sarcasm. An I.Q. over 99 and a sense of humor is also

recommended.” The borders that these Xican@s cross are constant. Internet cyber-immigrants, insider/outside, and cyberbodies must understand this duel whether it is portrayed in a serious or comedic manner.

At the beginning of this essay, I asked if the World Wide Web could expand the cyberborderland and make the *mestiza* consciousness an applicable term used to describe the overarching sense of disembodiment on the internet for its users. In response to this, the shifting line between the real and the imaginary, the physical and technological worlds, the embodied and disembodied must be examined through a critical view of social positions, including race, gender, class, and sexuality. To do this, internet users and guests to these websites must be willing to truly and knowledgeably engage the *mestiza* consciousness and move away from assuming that cyberspace is a place where one can play with identity. For now, it is apparent that the cyberborderland will remain “the same old shit / new medium, right?” until a critical dialogue can begin to take place within the cyberborderland where Xican@ websites offer this opportunity. The internet offers a medium where a user surfing the web for Xicanidad can find raw and straightforward language when discussing embodiment. Thus, when cyberspace is not seen as void of the physical or real, it can be seen as a place where the *mestiza* consciousness resides, and this may then allow the Web to actually be *world wide*.

Notes

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¹ Chela Sandoval (2002) offers an explanation of the importance of the "@" sign in "Xican@." She understands the "@" sign as "a technological feat" and a "cyborg creation, a mixture of the indigenous, colonizing, and machinic cultures" that "is meant to re-gender meaning" and represent "a transdisciplinary recognition since the 1960s" (150). However, she is using the sign to indicate male and female. My essay places the emphasis on the female body, thus Ana Castillo's use of the "X", while acknowledging that all bodies are gendered.

² From my vantage point as a two-year resident of the area, the term "Chicana" is often not the term of choice for many people living in the Rio Grande Valley.

³ Sandy Stone (1995) points out that the term "virtual reality" is "such a damn catch word." I think a lot of us wish it would go away....I keep saying, VR is not cyberspace!...The goggle and glove thing has captured people's imaginations because of what it promises; the same things electricity promised back when it was going to transform your life." Her reference to the virtual environments created by the military but also used by gamers, engineers, and medical professionals illustrates a common misconception about social virtual reality. It is not real or virtual as I suggest in the essay.

⁴ I refer to women in particular because both artists are female. Men are not excluded from finding themselves in this essay, but I use the @ sign in reference to the technological feat it represents and the "a" it holds within its meaning.

⁵ The lingua franca of the internet is often the English language or what is perceived to be the standard language (see Computer Language Company).

⁶ A *webring* is "a navigation system that links related Web sites together. Each ring links sites that pertain to a particular topic." A *blog* is "a Web page that contains links to Web sites that cover a particular subject or that are based on some other criterion, such as interesting or entertaining sites." A *newsgroup* is a message board or discussion group on the internet (see Computer Language Company).

⁷ *The Comics Journal* is "a magazine that covers the comics' medium from an arts-first perspective." For more information about *The Comics Journal Board*, visit http://www.tcj.com/1_frontdesk/about.html.

⁸ In the following e-mail written in 2004, Laura Molina describes her cyber art presentation's success as well as why she does not have a message board on this website:

NakedDave.com has never had its own message board because I would be deluged with hate mail and unwanted commentary posted on the internet at my expense....This internet art presentation has been up for 5 years and has generated enough controversy to have over 30 sites linked to it and at one time had a dozen message board discussing it. In early 2002 an independent bookseller in Maryland called "Landwaster Books Inc." apparently took out a full page back inside cover ad in *The Comics Journal*. Their web site had a link to this site, noting that they appreciated anything with an unique or independent viewpoint.

⁹ This responder is referring to “Love and Rockets,” the collection of comic books created by Los Bros Hernandez: Jaime, Gilbert, and Mario Hernandez.

¹⁰ The zine, short for a fanzine, is drenched in pop culture. For a more in-depth history, see Heath Row’s 1997 essay “From Fandom to Feminism: An Analysis of the Zine Press,” which explains its connection to science fiction and the periodical press.

¹¹ Alicia Schmidt Camacho makes an important connection between the body and discourse when she analyzes the Mexican woman’s body as disposable in reference to the Juárez killings and “even in service of a discourse of protest.” She explains, “To reduce the complex forms of women’s negotiations with patriarchal, state, and corporate power to an abstract narrative of human wasting is to neglect the important ways in which mexicanas have narrated their struggle for control of their own bodies, labor, and political agency, and often militated for better working conditions and fair wages” (2004, 33).

¹² In much of her work, Ortiz moves beyond the rules of Standard American English grammar and uses alternative spelling and capitalization, in order to reclaim English.

¹³ Interestingly, an internet search I performed on “mamasita” resulted in sites that sell maternity clothes, sites for restaurants selling spicy Mexican food, and others that were sexual in nature. Because there was an abundance of the term “spicy,” regardless if the site was discussing food or women, the idea that cybertypes abound was not easy to dismiss.

¹⁴ For example, see Del Castillo 1977, Quiñones 2002, Alarcón 2002, Alcalá 2001.

¹⁵ George Lipsitz describes Ortiz as working against a system that “demonizes people of color for being victimized by [social, economic, and political] changes, while hiding the privileges of whiteness by attributing the economic advantages enjoyed by whites to their family values, faith in fatherhood, and foresight—rather than to the favoritism they enjoy through the possessive investment in whiteness” (1998, 18).

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