Choloborg: The Disappearance of the Latino Body

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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 claims, as images they are content to be nothing but surface. Psychologically speaking,
Urbanism: Latinos Revert to 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." Migrant labor played a central role in California's agricultural prosperity, and if hidden and undervalued, Latino's 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." 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 guilty glamour 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 Pans" — 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's 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 not? Latinos can range from tan to more 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's 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." In the same article, the author, Natalie Angier, reminds readers that race encompasses both genetics and culture.

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. 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. 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. 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., 11.
5. ibid., 12.
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.
Lobstein: Latinos Reinvent the U.S. City. Davis writes: "Just as rows of ultra-modern assembly plants now line the south side of the border, so have scrap wood and car paper shanty towns become an increasingly common sight on the US side of the border. " Migrant labor played a central role in California's agricultural prosperity, and if hidden and undervalued, Latino's 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." In a nutshell, new technologies have yet to transcend old race and class relations.

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If one goal of Haraway’s “Cyborg Manifesto” was to propose a world without gender, then perhaps 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 3’ 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 race, 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 chimera. Body. 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. Thus, even in the wake of technological revolutions like the Human Genome Project, Latino/a bodies may pose the ultimate “tragic political myth.” Assimilated, evasive, unshakably linked, we are Choloborg.

Ken Gonzales-Day is an artist and writer living in Los Angeles. Recent exhibitions of his work include América Foto/Arte at the Museo de las Artes in Guadalajara, Mexico; Beyond Boundaries: Contemporary Photography in California, at the Ansel Adams Center for Photography in San Francisco; and Made in California 1900-2000, at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Solo exhibitions include Suzanne Vielmetter, Los Angeles Projects, and Deep River, Los Angeles.

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 local/focal context.