Acknowledgments

On the verge of completing this book, and accompanying my excitement and pleasure at finishing a long and challenging project, I continue to be confronted with images that provide detailed messages about my body and its cultural and physical position. When I am lucky, I work with colleagues, family, friends, and students to collaboratively question the structured and regulatory positions that Internet settings produce. There are also more ambivalent moments. For instance, I received a Hallmark birthday "E-card" that indicates a "wish" to "reach through the computer screen," depicts hands emerging from the computer and pulling "me" against the monitor, and shows the aftermath of this engagement where "I" wipe greasy marks from the screen.[1] It is not always easy to indicate how these humorous narratives, which suggest that the computer delivers real bodies and tactile engagements, also elide the ways that Internet settings render traditional roles and positions. While viewing the card again, I remain unsure whether to appreciate the research materials, enjoy the birthday greetings, or accept the card's representation of computer-facilitated embodiment and dirty bodies and wash my face. As I contemplate male programmers' accounts of the "extra" flesh that can accompany computer work and their belief that among the "rewards" of firmer bodies is dating thin young women who make their peers jealous, another advertising email arrives and indicates that I can still lose ten pounds.

These narratives and representations indicate that the Internet is a place where bodies exist. However, as Butler has suggested about other settings, only certain bodies are deemed to matter and have worth.[2] Butler was asked to reprieve a material body, which was "free" of social discourse and cultural values, as she expanded her thesis on the ways that gendered bodies were produced and experienced through language. Internet sites also ask about the material body and the cultural worth of our embodiment. They make it difficult to speak or engage with Internet and computer settings without accepting stories about the ability to move within the Internet space. I am

grateful that my colleagues, family, friends, and students have helped me question the ways the Internet simultaneously produces bodies and limits ideas about how we should look, feel, and understand our self and individuals within the world.

I was not expecting this insistent articulation of Internet spaces, bodies, and positions in the early 1990s, when I began hearing accounts about how the Internet challenged current conceptions of age, gender, race, and sexuality. These narratives indicated that the Internet and computer were facilitating a societal shift in the ways that identities and selves were understood. As a feminist with postmodernist leanings, I was thrilled to imagine another site where such actions were occurring. After some gopher searching and other inquiries, I signed up for a LambdaMOO text-based synchronous communication setting character. I was immediately fascinated by the narratives and representational possibilities of such sites. However, I also noticed that very different cultural forces were at work in Internet settings. Age, gender, race, and sexuality still had stable meanings because some individuals reinstituted traditional aspects of identity through programming, designing, and using sites. They made cultural positions real and necessary in Internet and computer settings.

This engagement occurred while I was in the doctoral program in art history at the Graduate School and University Center of the City University of New York and in the MFA program in creative arts at Hunter College. This book is not a product of my course work or resultant dissertation, which was about the virtual museum, but many professors provided an environment where I could do intensive research on Internet and computer settings. Particular thanks are owed to Bill Agee, Carol Armstrong, Rosemarie Haag Bletter, Andrea Blum, William Boddy, Joel Carreiro, Patricia Clough, Susan Crile, Mark Feldstein, Peter Hitchcock, Valerie Jaudon, Stuart Liebman, Rose-Carol Washton Long, Setha Low, Linda Nochlin, Jane Roos, Jim Saslow, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Ella Shohat, Chris Straayer, Lisa Vergara, Michelle Wallace, Tom Weaver, Sandy Wurmfeld, and Sharon Zukin. Some of these individuals offered Internet and new media courses, which were vital to my understanding of this developing area and set of academic fields, and others welcomed my questions within their curriculum. I am also indebted to the Grad Center for its early acknowledgment that critical work in Internet and new media studies is important and its generous funding, which included a Geoffrey Marshall Dissertation Fellowship.

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