

Playing God

Leanie van der Vyver



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GRA
designLAB

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Gerrit Rietveld
designLAB

Student
Leanie van der Vyver
1017516

Lecturer
Xandra de Jong

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Preface

My motivation for choosing the theme for my thesis is because I wanted it to act as an in-depth research for my Graduation project. I entered this project knowing one thing: I want to make an accessory that transcends fashion.

Writing this thesis started off with tantrums. I was more lost than I could have ever imagined. The process to select a subject was the hardest part for me; I had to go back, way back...

For most of my life I have had a love/hate relationship with fashion. From the age of 14, every art project I did was in some form or another, a comment on fashion. After high school I immediately started to work in the fashion industry, first as a model and then as a stylist for 8 years. I feel that I have true knowledge of what the fashion world is really about. I have never wanted to be a fashion designer. I can't stand working with floppy fabric and the act of sewing bores me to death. I especially hate how aesthetically one-sided it can often be. Nevertheless, I have always wondered what it might be like, if I did it my way.

For my thesis I wanted to critically investigate certain aspects of modern life, - current subcultures and technological advancements and specifically considering the effects of these themes on the human body.

PREFACE

Fashion and accessories can be seen as projections of our identities. I feel it is important to research more abstract methods (other than fashion) that humans are using to physically express themselves. By looking at aspects of modern life - current subcultures and technological advancements - I can more accurately predict a future for the human body and, in turn, the next accessories it will require, and, or desire.

Introduction

Just being human is not good enough anymore nor has it ever been. What is very clear is that people are not satisfied with what they were naturally born with. Neither the prehistoric cave dweller nor modern man has ever considered the human body aesthetically satisfactory. It is human nature to want to be more than what we are, and from the beginning of time we have gone to extreme measures to express on the outside how we desire to be perceived. On the surface, we are physically turning into ideal dream versions of ourselves. Being born a certain way is no longer a life sentence. We can choose exactly who we want to be. What are the possibilities of this new God-like control we have over our bodies?

Right now you can truly become more than just yourself, more than human. It's almost as if we have shifted from reality into fantasy. The sky is the limit when it comes to controlling our own image. Being online is considered a trusted version of yourself. We are behaving as if we have robotic extensions and we can now generate body parts and also have access to the technology to obtain super powers. We now have complete power over our own image and abilities. What is currently being done and where might these God-like powers potentially lead?

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Since perfection has become obtainable through technological and medical advancements, to simply strive for perfection is not good enough anymore. Though we can't really control who we are, in which ways do we control what others think of us? How do we transform ourselves to be more than perfect humans?

This thesis will discuss some of the ways that humans physically and mentally augmenting themselves to better reflect their inner and ideal selves. The focus of this thesis will be on the current and unconventional methods we are using to get closer to our own personal ideal, specifically how the ideal of perfect beauty is transforming into an ideal of heightened abilities.

As we exist in the real world, we now have a parallel digital life on the Internet. Social networks like Facebook, Twitter and Tumblr are all virtual spaces where we have complete control over who we are and what we look like. The Internet is one of the places where our aspirations can become manifest. On the Internet, free from the confines of reality, the bodies we were born with and the lives we are living, we can be whomever we wish to be. Building up a carefully considered virtual image, Photoshopping our profile photos and making selective status updates are all efforts to paint a perfect picture of our wildest narcissistic desires. Chapter 1 will cover the relevance of our online personas and how our e-personalities are over-perfected digital extensions of who we are. In this chapter, the possible future evolution of our digital personas will be investigated, for instance, what might happen to our online selves after we die?

In order to make one's e-personality as real and as convincing as one's real self, one needs to nurture it by being well represented online. Mobile devices like iPhones and Blackberries allow us to be online every minute of the day. In fact, our mobile phones are the second most common ob-

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jects we carry on our bodies after our house keys. How have we become dependent on these personalized robots? Chapter 2 will take a closer look at society's mobile phone obsession and how the mobile device is evolving. Could it become part of our bodies in the future?

Another physical manifestation of our desire to be more than what we are, is body augmentation. With cosmetic surgery you can design yourself exactly how you want to look. In chapter 3, the focus will be on examples of people who are practising these techniques with different motivations than the desire only to be younger and more beautiful. What could the future potentially hold for Cosmetic Surgery?

Another age-old method of transforming into our personal vision of perfection is through body modification. It is a growing subculture that is changing the conventional views of beauty. These individuals are dealing with what they were given in a very different way. Why are people tattooing their eyeballs or having horns implanted under their skin? Are they embracing their inner "fantasy" selves? If the body is a prison for the soul, the body modification enthusiasts are transforming their physical beings to match their internal identities. This phenomenon will be investigated in chapter.4. What else are they doing to augment and express themselves? Could this mean a future of more interesting looking human beings? Could these techniques be applied to extend our human capabilities? During the writing of this chapter I was in an accident that physically altered me. In this chapter I will also be sharing my experience and newfound fascination with the power of changing one's appearance.

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Having a limb amputated or losing an eye due to an accident or a disease is the height of a traumatic event in any human's physical life. The uncompromising reality of nature has rendered the individual with a void to fill. Nature being unable to fill this void, it is up to the individual to complete his or her body as he or she sees fit. The individual has complete control over how to extend what should naturally be there. In my final chapter I will be discussing examples of how some amputees are reinventing the human body. How can we learn from them to further advance our bodies? Should we wait for a traumatic experience in order to gain new super powers?

Digital

In this chapter I will discuss how we are able to use the Internet to recreate ourselves. By designing an e-personality to represent us in the digital world, we can amend the things we don't like about ourselves and have complete power over what we project to the rest of the world. I will examine how significant our digital alternative personas are and the different ways people are attempting to become perfect, super humans on the Internet. What are the God-like powers we possess? How are we using them and can we defy death?

*“Hard to resist waltzing into Facebook presenting to be thinner, more popular and more successful than we really are. It allows us to reinvent the portions of ourselves that we are unhappy with and offers us freedom to engage in behaviors that our more responsible selves might put a stop to in the harsh light of day.”*¹ - Elias Aboujaoude²

Long live the e-personality! What is an e-personality? Being born online is creating a virtual alter ego to present you in the digital world and on online social networks. This e-personality lives along-side what we have always perceived as our only personality in the digital world.

1 Elias Aboujaoude, *Virtually you, The dangerous powers of the E-personality*, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2011

2 “Dr. Elias Aboujaoude” is a psychiatrist and author based at Stanford University, where he is Director of the Impulse Control Disorders Clinic and the Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Clinic. His research interests have focused on obsessive-compulsive disorder and behavioral addictions, including problematic Internet use.

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About three years ago I suffered the loss of Crispian, my best friend and creative partner back in Cape Town. Being so far from home at such a crucial time forced me to practically live on Facebook³. It was a place where I could be in contact with the other friends and family in mourning, as nobody in Amsterdam had any idea who he was. In fact, I was actually told of his death via a Facebook message. This was the message from his brother Justin:

“Hi Leanie, I’m sorry to inform all the friends of Crispian that he passed away sometime this weekend. We assume that it’s diabetes related and will try post more info once we know more. We’ll always remember him with love and miss him terribly. Please pass on the news to his friends.”

- Justin Plunkett.

On Facebook I was showered by hundreds of messages of condolence from friends and I visually expressed my sadness by posting photographs of myself hysterically crying. I was so grateful for this platform and its ability to make me feel closer to where I wanted to be. Because of my isolation, I was completely forced to deal with and mourn this tragedy online. To have this very real moment, in such an unreal environment, made me realize just how powerful our online presence can actually be.

Crispian remained the same on his Facebook profile, alive and kicking. I could still communicate with him by sending him my thoughts through messages. He was not dead at all. Online, I could still enjoy his company. I could see his past status updates and enjoy a sea of photos making their way onto his page. There, on Facebook, he is immortal. Super human.

3 “Facebook” is a social networking service and website launched in February 2004.

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Experiencing death over the Internet left a strange taste in my mouth. My dilemma is that because I am away from home, I have the same relationship with all of my friends; at the moment, they have all been reduced to profiles. This whole experience seriously confirmed the powerful presence of the online persona. It is a very real entity and its presence is becoming more significant as people are spending more time living online.

I researched the topic a little further and found some rather strange online services that deal with one's virtual death. One such website is, MyLasteMail.com⁴. On this website one can carefully construct and address various farewell emails to loved ones that will reach them after one's death, which will act like an online legacy "they can treasure forever". Another online service is MyWebWill.com⁵ that carries out one's final online wishes. This service could forward one's passwords to one's family, or it could make one final Facebook status update or tweet. The fact that we are at the point being born online, by our mothers posting birthing photographs and subsequently spending a parallel life there along with the fact of having a legacy to worry about, clearly signifies the e-personality's importance. Might an e-personality represent a twenty first century "real alter ego" of sorts⁶?

By the end of this year there will be more than a billion people using social networks. All these users are continuously creating online content.

4 "Mylastemail.com" is a unique service offered. You can record your last words, your last message or last wishes to be conveyed to any one you nominate after your death. you can leave your departing messages for your love ones. <http://www.webboar.com/www/mylastmail.com> (date visited-02/10/2011)

5 "MyWebwill.com" - Serving your last online wishes. <http://www.nextnature.net/2010/01/my-webwill-%E2%80%93-serving-your-last-online-wishes/> (date visited-02/10/2011)

6 Elias Aboujaode Virtually you, The dangerous powers of the E-personality, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2011, (page15-17)

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At this moment, there are 48 hours of video being uploaded to Youtube every minute. Every day there are 200 million tweets being posted. On an average, the Facebook user creates 90 pieces of content every month. If one compares the amount of content we are creating to previous generation's 6 or 7 family photo albums, and 8 full hour home movies, one can immediately see it as a quite substantial legacy, an intimate archive that will out-live us for possibly hundreds of years online. We are currently sharing more about ourselves online than ever before. Before the Internet we were classified in generic demographics (sex, age, occupation), but now a complete stranger has access to what your favourite film is or where you like to go on holiday. What we are creating online is a transparent, nearly complete persona.⁷

As I stated earlier, there are already online services that allow us to decide what happens to our e-personas after dying. But what if we want "it", our creation of ourselves, to stay alive? I believe that we are currently writing the personality data content to what could be our personal alter-ego robot. This could be a robot that uses the online data of all our online social activity, to create an immortal version of ourselves, made up from status updates, catch phrases, favourite films, music and other online content creations – a version our loved ones could interact with long after our death. Imagine the possibilities of never knowing your grandmother but being able to "watch/experience" her through her online legacy in a three-dimensional material or holographic form.

The e-personality can act as a liberating force to the real-life individual. It allows one to overcome shyness, be more assertive and allows one to form relationships and friendships that would be impossible otherwise.

⁷ Ted talk, Adam Ostrow: After your final status update, July 2011, http://www.ted.com/talks/adam_ostrow_after_your_final_status_update.html (date visited-08/01/2012)

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In most cases the virtual version nicely complements the actual person and acts as an extension of his real-life persona. Seen under the best possible light, it is bolder, stronger and more efficient than the real-life original.

These new personality traits are a welcome new addition that might make us feel happier about ourselves. Having an e-personality that seems freer and more resilient offers a break from the inhibitions of our real circumstances.⁸ It is just you and your computer screen – you are free of what usually holds you back and you are completely in control. We can sculpt ourselves and act exactly how we please, with hardly any real surveillance from authorities. Unconsciously we give free reign to our imagination, allowing it be our ambassador in cyberspace with special attributes of intelligence, status and charisma that we do not normally possess, or at least, not nearly to the same degree. This, alas, does not always result in the real person sitting behind the computer screen feeling smarter, more successful, or more charismatic. To the contrary, we often begin to prefer the online version of who we are. Our lives as we have known them, with our average IQs, so-so jobs and bodies that leave something to be desired, now become boring in comparison with the online lives we have built or Photoshopped⁹ for ourselves, where the various details that make up our virtual identity are all above average.

For example, I have a friend who is socially very awkward. She's had quite a hard childhood and has also been struggling with eating disorders in an attempt to have control of least one aspect of her life. She is a beautiful girl and still a virgin at 30. She has so much love to give but thinks of

8 Elias Aboujaode *Virtually you, The dangerous powers of the E-personality*, W.W. Norton & Company, Inc, 2011, (page 20)

9 "Adobe Photoshop" is a graphics editing program.

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herself as a monster that nobody else can love.

As a result she has become quite active in the anonymous faceless world that is the Internet and its millions of ways of connecting with people. She joined a few online dating services and created her online persona. She carefully crafted her e-personality to compensate for all of her living self's shortcomings. She was now blonde, not brunette; she was tall and outgoing, living a carefree and successful life.

She soon developed a few relationships with men and would spend all her free time getting to know them and this new better version of herself. She became particularly attached to one guy. According to her, they were falling in love; they shared every free online moment together. The moment arrived that the guilt of the lies she was living online became too much and she decided to reveal her true self to her online lover. She became completely convinced that he was in love with her, the real life person. She decided to confess everything to him and come clean on all the details she had skipped out or elaborated on.

To her relief, he was also leading her on. He turned out not to be the guy she was developing real feelings for. They were both falling in love, but with the person they wanted to fall in love with. Eventually they never met and the relationship fizzled out after they had come clean. This example illustrates first-hand just how deceiving e-personalities can be. She was heartbroken and I had to help heal a make-believe heartbreak.

The insignificant changes she made to her physical appearance gave her the confidence to step out of her body and to show who she really was, or really wished she was. It was almost as if her body was a prison for her soul. Living vicariously through one's digital persona gives one the ability to instantly be skinny for instance, to "walk around" in a skinny body for

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a period of time and experience how people might respond to us if we look the way we dream of being. The possibilities are endless. Online we now have the God-like powers to create ourselves exactly how we want to be.

The God-like powers I am referring to painless plastic surgery in the form of Photoshop. You can lose 30 kg in a minute, give yourself a nose job in two minutes. Depending on your skills you can truly reinvent yourself.

An example of the powers of Photoshop can be seen in the photo series of feminists Manon van de Zwaal & Monique Bergen Henegouwen¹⁰ for HP de tijd magazine.¹¹ Here one can see the raw photographic material before and after Photoshop re-creation.¹²

You can now also sound very knowledgeable; by re-posting smart quotes from the ocean of quotes on the Internet, you can get notices of the best art exhibitions and seem informed by leeching off other people's impressive knowledge. The Internet also gives everyone access to what is "in fashion." Basically, there is no more secret society or invisible cool gene. If you know someone popular and in fashion, you can see exactly what makes him so; you have access to his music files through Spotify¹³; see where he shops and goes out through Facebook; and you can even see where he does exercise and for how long he runs, through Nike¹⁴/ Run-

10 "Manon van de Zwaal & Monique Bergen Henegouwen" are a Dutch photographic duo.

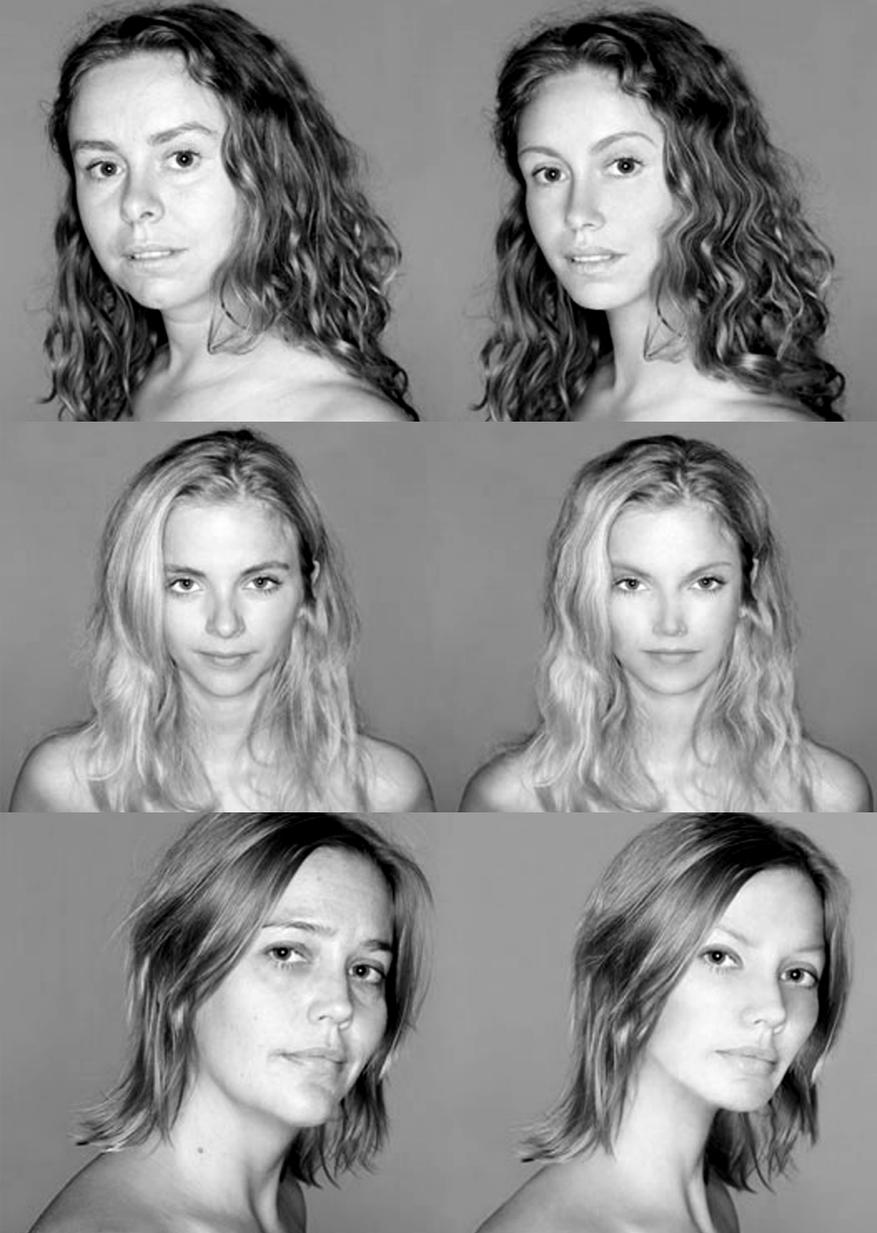
11 HP/De Tijd is a Dutch weekly magazine, published by Audax Publishing.

12 "The Photoshop Beauties: Before and After", nextnature, 30/12/08, <http://www.nextnature.net/2008/12/the-photoshop-before-and-after/> (date visited- 02/01/2012)

13 Spotify is a DRM-based music streaming service offering streaming of selected music from a range of major and independent record labels.

14 "Nike + iPod" gives you feedback while it records your run and publishes it to your social network. Indicating all the information regarding your routine, including location.

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Photoshop beauty.

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keeper¹⁵. You can be “him”, or even better than “him”, if you use the full combination of all these powers. Thanks to these powers it is now harder than ever to distinguish the real from the fabricated humans.

Our real bodies are no longer prisons for our souls. We have now been set free, to let our true colours shine as such. Yet everyone is only making slight amendments, shaping themselves according to this conventional ideal of what is beautiful. Surely all our souls/personas are not skinny, white, runway models. Surely we could have more fun with these self-created personas. If the sky is the limit, why are we only 1.8 meters tall? It might be because of the enormous pressure we feel regarding our immortal online version. We don't want our grandchildren to get the wrong idea about us. We are carefully considering the eternal repercussions of our online actions. We are currently shaping the content for our eternal online legacy for future generations.

Our online e-personality is thus an extension of our mental selves and needs a body to function. The bodies that accommodate our digital selves are, of course, computers and mobile devices. In the next chapter I will be focusing on mobile devices and how they can be considered part of our bodies.

¹⁵ “Runkeeper”, online social fitness community and running app to connect with friends to train and track your workouts.

Connected

Mobile phones and other mobile devices¹ have become literal extensions of the human body. Most people would not leave the house without its physical presence. It's our camera, our phone and the lifeline to our social networks. Complete with the Internet, our mobile devices have become our external brains and some of us are even dependent on them for survival.

I recently read a paper about the cell phone habits of teenagers regarding the phenomena of mobile phone obsession and Internet addiction². The paper featured an experiment to determine what would happen if there was no Internet access or any mobile devices to occupy teenagers. The experiment was done on a 16-year-old British girl and the test was designed to last one month. She was not to have any access to any of her social networks (online), any Internet (computer access) or any mobile devices (cell phone, ipod, ipad, laptop) for the duration of the month.

The girl started off feeling frustrated by what she thought she was missing out on and of being out of the loop and cut off from the world. She was constantly wondering what her friends were up to. As the days went by

1 "A mobile device" is a small, hand-held computing device, typically having a display screen with touch input and/or a miniature keyboard and less than 0.91 kg.

2 Ian Coombe, "Mobile Device & Social Media Influence in 2011", A Case Study of under 18's in Britain, Executive Strategic Director, AKQA London.

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she grew very bored and became much more aware of her surroundings. She discovered that she had heaps of free time on her hands and started investigating new hobbies.

The 16-year-old discovered baking! She baked cupcakes and decorated them each with great detail. Very impressed by her productivity, she seemed to be discovering something that could develop into a passion. She was delighted until about two minutes afterwards, when the frustration of not being able to share the experience killed her spirit. Without the affirmation from her online friends, it was as if what she had done hadn't even happened. She was incapable of just appreciating her accomplishment without the acknowledgment and praise from her social network. This is like the eternal question: when a tree falls in the woods and there is nobody there to witness it, does it still make a noise? This raises the question of whether she only ever does things to provoke a reaction from others or to please her fans. Social networks provide audiences. Facebook "friends" should be renamed fans or followers, even disciples. After the month she swore never to part from her beloved iphone ever again. This need for affirmation and the ability to have all your friends with you at all times is what makes having an iphone, blackberry, ipad and other mobile devices so addictive.

Constant mobile connection to the whole world and what it has to offer does not provide any space to relax or to become bored. There is a beauty in staring at the ceiling and allowing your mind to naturally wonder, allowing it to discover new thoughts un-inflicted by digital distractions.

The mobile phone's consistent presence and wearability starts blurring the dividing lines between our bodies and our immediate environment. So what defines the human body? Is it that which makes up a person: a mass of flesh, blood, bone and functioning organs? Is a transplanted organ

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part of the human body? How about a synthetic implant, like a cochlear implant³ or pace maker⁴? I think it's fair to say that a synthetic functioning body part replacement could definitely be considered as part of the body. Surely tools that are not intended to replace body parts, but which nevertheless enable certain people to perform something like a familiar and normal bodily function, like wheelchairs, can also be considered as parts of the body? I found this segment from Apparelyzed website (spinal cord injury peer support on the Internet):

“To a wheelchair user, his/her wheelchair is part of his/her body and personal space and should be treated as such. Do not rest your foot on the wheelchair, or touch the wheelchair unless you have been asked to. Never move a person’s wheelchair whilst s/he is in it unless you have been asked to. This can be very dangerous as people with a fine sense of balance can very easily fall out of their wheelchairs if not warned before being moved. If you think someone in a wheelchair needs assistance, always ask before taking any action”⁵

This segment confirms to me that aids such as wheelchairs are also considered part of it's users body.

You are never alone with your cell phone. These devices have become like little pets, complete with their own accessories, clothes and sounds. Like real pets, they even comfort us when we are alone. Our mobile telephones are extensions of our personality, almost like little “mini-me’s” of technology. We speak into them as if they are the persons we are talking to. The mobile phone is designed to feel luxurious. We like to touch it and

3 “A cochlear implant” is a surgically implanted electronic device that provides a sense of sound to a person who is profoundly deaf or severely hard of hearing.

4 “A pacemaker” (or artificial pacemaker, so as not to be confused with the heart’s natural pacemaker) is a medical device that uses electrical impulses, delivered by electrodes contacting the heart muscles, to regulate the beating of the heart.

5 Apparelyzed, an online spinal cord injury peer support website on the Internet <http://www.apparelyzed.com/etiquette.html> (date visited-13/12/2011)

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press its buttons. It was made to fit perfectly into our hands and gently pillows our face when we are in conversation. It sleeps close to us, in some cases under our pillows. It fits so well into our bodies that it has truly become an extension of it. This kind of intimacy goes beyond a fetishism⁶ - it is narcissism⁷.

Our phones are now just another part of us. They have even become smarter than us in certain aspects. Reading QR codes⁸ are for instance impossible without your decoding iphone. Augmented reality⁹ is also inaccessible without your mobile device to decode the information. I suspect that these examples are only the beginning of our complete dependence on such gadgets. The dependence we have on them in order to function properly and the fact that our virtual representatives exist through them confirms that they are moments away from being a part of our bodies; at the very least, the possible first object to be morphed with our bodies.

The lines between where the human ends and where the device begins are getting particularly blurred in the art of Australian artist Stelarc¹⁰. He is also known as the man with three ears.¹¹ In 2008 he had a cell-cul-

6 "A fetish" is an object believed to have supernatural powers, or in particular, a man-made object that has power over others. Essentially, fetishism is the etic attribution of inherent value or powers to an object.

7 "Narcissim" refers to inflated self-importance, egoism, vanity, conceit, or simple selfishness.

8 "QR code", Quick response Bar code.

9 "Augmented reality" is a live, direct or indirect, view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented by computer-generated sensory input such as sound, video, graphics or GPS data.

10 Stelarc (Stelios Arkadiou) is a Cypriot-Australian performance artist whose works focuses heavily on extending the capabilities of the human body. MUTATION MANIFESTO <http://www.crossroads.wild.net.au/mutate.htm> (date visited-15/12/2011)

11 Performer gets third ear for art, BBC news, Thursday, 11 October 2007, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/health/7039821.stm> (date visited-15/12/2011)

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Ear on arm, Stelarc.

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tivated ear implanted under the skin on his left forearm. His plan is to implant a microphone inside the third ear that will make use of a Bluetooth¹² transmitter to broadcast what it hears over the Internet. He hopes to also insert a speaker in a gap between his teeth in order to perform full telephone conversations completely without a device, but instead of a conventional earpiece, he wants to hear the incoming voice in his head. This work illustrates the possibility of merging the body with a mobile device, where the body is becoming a mobile phone.

Another example of how one's relationship with a phone can become more intimate is the Elfoid phone/robot designed by Hiroshi Ishiguro.¹³ The 20cm long Elfoid features a number of control buttons (which are hidden behind its skin) and a camera that captures emotions on your face and your head's movements. The Elfoid used by the person you are talking to replicates the information "in real-time", transmitting not only your voice but also your "feelings". This example further extends the imaginable possibilities of how communication might become more like real human interaction. Here the phone is becoming more like the human body.¹⁴

The evolution of the mobile device could go two ways: On one hand, mobile devices might merge with us and become incorporated into our bodies. In this instance we might be elevated to super human communicators. Having a phone conversation will start resembling something like

12 "Bluetooth" is a proprietary open wireless technology standard for exchanging data over short distances.

13 Professor Hiroshi Ishiguro is director of the Intelligent Robotics Laboratory, part of the Department of Systems Innovation in the Graduate School of Engineering Science at Osaka University, Japan.

14 Elfoid: Humanoid mobile phone, 04 Mar 2011, <http://pinktentacle.com/2011/03/elfoid-mobile-phone/> (date visited-04/01/2012)

CONNECTED



Elfoid.

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telepathic¹⁵ communication. Or on the other hand, the phone might diverge and become our clone. At the moment, our mobile device is practically the three dimensional (body) representation of our digital persona in the real world. In Chapter 1 it becomes clear that with all our online content creation, we are currently writing the “personality data” for what could become a robot that represents us in the future. The possibility of one’s phone becoming the ultimate extension, a personal clone now seems rather believable. Especially if we look at Siri¹⁶, a new iPhone assistant, this application is possibly a precursor to a synthetic clone. Right now it’s just a personal assistant robot, but in the future, when all your long list of personal social media/life data is uploaded, it could be the ‘brain’ of your synthetic clone. It’s been watching, learning and studying you for years, so it knows how to act and behave like you and even make similar decisions. It perfectly recognizes your voice and is probably moments away from simulating it perfectly. Also the Elfoid robot phones are a kind of prototype for a real life double that could potentially become our representatives in the real world.

Our beloved mobile devices are only getting closer to us. For us to become super-humans and communicate device-free, they need get under our skin, to truly become one with us. In the next Chapter I will focus on how people are using cosmetic surgery to acquire super human status.

15 “Telepathy” is the induction of mental states from one mind to another.

16 “Siri” is an intelligent software assistant and knowledge navigator functioning as a personal assistant application for iOS. The application uses a natural language user interface to answer questions, make recommendations, and perform actions by delegating requests to a set of web services.

Flawless

According to the American Psychological Association (APA), attractive people are perceived as more intelligent, healthy, sociable and dominant than the average-looking person. This is considered the ideal that most humans desire to be¹. Unfortunately for most, we are not all perceived as attractive, but there are ways to obtain a more beautiful appearance.

Cosmetic surgery is the practice of surgically enhancing one's face or body beyond the average level toward an aesthetic ideal. Today, getting plastic surgery is no different from buying a Louis Vuitton² handbag, and people acquire it for very similar reasons. It's about achieving a desired image in order to survive and deal with the pressures and expectations of everyday life. The result of cosmetic surgery permanently alters what physically defines us. We can physically change the things we don't like about ourselves.

Noses are straightened, teeth recapped with DaVinci veneers³, cheeks and double chins pulled tight; yet all of these repairs are only an escape

1 Alan Feingold, PhD, in the March 1992 issue of APA's Psychological Bulletin (Vol. 111, No. 2, pages 304-341).

2 Louis Vuitton Malletier – commonly referred to as Louis Vuitton, or shortened to LV – is a French fashion house founded in 1854 by Louis Vuitton. Louis Vuitton is one of the world's leading international fashion houses.

3 “DaVinci veneers”, are cosmetic porcelain teeth veneers.

FLAWLESS



Head Swap.

FLAWLESS

into the “shelter” of a fake face. To alter one’s appearance is like wearing a permanent disguise. Cosmetic surgery has subsequently become a solution to dealing with larger issues like low self-esteem and depression – the ability to change what we don’t like about ourselves.

To fix your physical shortcomings, has never been more publicly acceptable. Celebrities often speak openly about what they “had done”, whereas in the past it was seen as a taboo or a scandal. For some reason that illusion of possessing natural perfection has been broken - their secret is out. And the public is following their role models.

One such role model is MTV reality star, Heidi Montag.⁴ At the age of 23 she underwent a complete transformation to become “*the best me*”. In preparation she mulled over what to have done next, saving photos of stars like Angelina Jolie⁵ and consulting her surgeon more than 20 times.

She eventually had her breast implants increased to DDDs⁶, a brow lift, a nose job revision, lipo⁷ on her stomach and thighs and a butt augmentation, among other things.

4 Heidi Blair Pratt (née Montag; born September 15, 1986) is an American media personality and singer. She came to prominence with her starring role on the MTV reality series *The Hills* from 2006 to 2010.

5 Angelina Jolie, (born Angelina Jolie Voight; June 4, 1975) is an American actress and director.

6 DDD’s, referring to bra cup size.

7 Lipo is Liposuction, also known as lipoplasty), liposculpture suction lipectomy (“suction-assisted fat removal”) is a cosmetic surgery operation that removes fat from many different sites on the human body.

FLAWLESS

HEIDI MONTAG

Obsessed With Being "Perfect"

BEFORE
NOV. 20, 2009

AFTER
JAN. 10, 2010

WHAT WOULD DRIVE A 25-YEAR-OLD STARLET TO UNDERGO HEAD-TO-TOE PLASTIC SURGERY? FOR THE HILLS' HEIDI MONTAG, IT WAS A MIX OF INSECURITY AND HOLLYWOOD PRESSURE. "WE ALL WANT TO FEEL ATTRACTIVE," SHE SAYS. "SO WHO IS ANYONE TO JUDGE ME?"
BY JENNIFER GARCIA
PHOTOGRAPHS BY ART STREIBER

WHAT SHE HAD DONE:

1. MINI BROW LIFT
2. BOTOX IN FOREHEAD AND BROW AREA
3. NOSE JOB REVISION
4. FAT INJECTIONS IN CHEEKS, MANDIBULAR FOLDS AND LIPS
5. CHIN REDUCTION
6. NECK LIPOSUCTION
7. HIPS PINNED BACK
8. GREAT AUGMENTATION REVISION
9. LIPOSUCTION ON WAIST, HIPS AND INNER AND OUTER THIGHS
10. BUTTOCK AUGMENTATION

Heidi Montag.

FLAWLESS

Heidi Montag, People Magazine:

*“I was made fun of when I was younger, and so I had insecurities, especially after I moved to L.A. People said I had a “Jay Leno⁸ chin”; they’d circle it on blogs and say nasty things. It bothered me. And when I watched myself on *The Hills*⁹, my ears would be sticking out like *Dumbo*’s!¹⁰ I just wanted to feel more confident and look in the mirror and be like, “Whoa! That’s me!” I was an ugly duckling before.”¹¹*

With our role models all striving towards the same ideal image of beauty, surely they must all be starting to look the same. With the celebrity-crazed public and the abilities of modern cosmetic surgery, an epidemic is born. The celebrity-worshipping public is aspiring to look like their favourite celebrity, who is in turn trying to look like their favourite celebrity. So the modern epidemic would have to be that if people the world over continue to amend their bodies towards the same common goal, we are all going to look the same. But does everyone have the same boring view on beauty (ie: tall, skinny, long-haired, fair flawless complexion)?

You can now design yourself exactly how you want to look, and that is precisely what French artist Orlan is commenting on with her art. She was the first artist to use plastic surgery as her medium of choice.

8 James Douglas Muir “Jay” Leno (born April 28, 1950) is an American stand-up comedian and television host.

9 *The Hills* is a reality television series which originally aired on MTV from May 31, 2006 until July 13, 2010. The show uses a reality television format, following the personal lives of several young adults living in Los Angeles, California.

10 *Dumbo* is a 1941 American animated film produced by Walt Disney and released on October 23, 1941. The title character *Dumbo*, is an elephant who has huge ears and is able to use them to fly, carrying what he thinks of as a magic feather.

11 People magazine, Wednesday January 13, 2010, Featured article: Heidi Montag: “Addicted to Plastic Surgery”, <http://www.people.com/people/article/0,,20336472,00.html> (date visited 01/01/2012)

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She is a feminist artist who has long been troubled by women's historic role in art (largely undressed and on the receiving end of the male gaze). She decided to go under the knife again and again – not because her life was at risk, but because she believed surgically changing her body could be a powerful work of art. Since 1990, she has undergone a series of choreographed “performances” during which her face is surgically morphed through the use of plastic surgery. Her intention is not to become “beautiful” but rather to suggest that the “objective (beauty) is unattainable and the process horrifying.”

She underwent nine plastic surgery operations, intending to rewrite Western art on her own body. For example, she has the chin of Botticelli's Venus, the nose of Gerome's Psyche, the lips of François Boucher's Europa, the eyes of Diana from a sixteenth-century French painting and the forehead of Leonardo da Vinci's Mona Lisa. Orlan picked these characters, “not for the canons of beauty they represent... but rather on account of the stories associated with them.” Diana, because she is inferior to the gods and men, but is leader of the goddesses and women; Mona Lisa, because of the standard of beauty, or anti-beauty, she represents; Psyche, because of her fragility and vulnerability within the soul; Venus, for carnal beauty and notions of fertility; Europa, for her adventurous outlook to the horizon, the future.¹²

12 Orlan manifesto, <http://www.english.ucsb.edu/faculty/ecook/courses/eng114em/carnal.htm> (date visited-12/11/2011), <http://www.orlan.net/> (date visited-12/11/2011) <http://www.irasabs.com/?tag=the-lips-of-europa-by-boucher> (date visited-12/11/2011)

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Orlan.

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Orlan defines her work as “Carnal Art,” which she explains as “*a self-portrait in the classical sense, yet realized through the technology of our time.*”

Was she trying to make herself more beautiful?

“No, my goal was to be different, strong; to sculpt my own body to reinvent the self. It’s all about being different and creating a clash with society because of that. I tried to use surgery not to better myself or become a younger version of myself, but to work on the concept of image and surgery the other way around. “My work is not a stand against cosmetic surgery, but against the standards of beauty, against the dictates of a dominant ideology that impresses itself more and more on feminine . . . flesh.”¹³

So instead of making the changes to her face and body according to her own personal whims, she made them literally based on celebrated details of certain moments in classical art. Orlan’s art offers commentary not only by questioning the notion of an ideal beauty, but also the lengths to which people will go to achieve it.

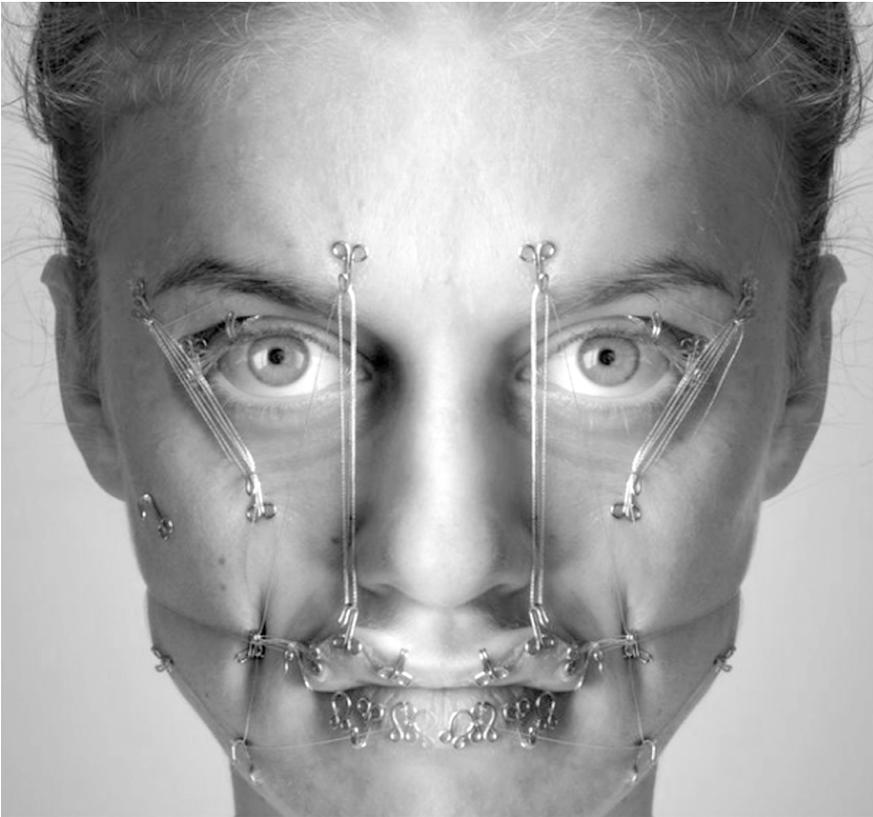
In the work of artist Lucy McRae¹⁴, one can see that she is also concerned with human enhancement. Instead of making permanent alterations to her body, she practises what she calls, “body architecture”. Her solutions come in the form of ingenious low-tech prosthetics that cross all the borders of fashion and architecture. In collaboration with Bart Hess¹⁵ she created a performance called ‘Low-tech plastic surgery’ for the MU gal-

13 Orlan quote, <http://www.orlan.net/adriensina/conference/extract3.html>, (date visited-07/01/2012)

14 “Lucy Mcrae” (1979) is a “Body Architect.”artist, Her work explores the intertwining of fashion, architecture and the human body. <http://www.lucymcrae.net/home/> (date visited-07/01/2012)

15 “Bart Hess” (1984),artist, explores several fields combining material studies, animation and photography. <http://barthess.nl/> (date visited-07/01/2012)

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Lucy McRae.

FLAWLESS

lery¹⁶ in Eindhoven. Here they glued hooks and eyes to the faces of visitors. By doing so, they were able to redefine the landscape of the face by altering the appearance of cheekbones or emphasizing the lips, creating an analogue version of plastic surgery. With cosmetic surgery being such an openly discussed topic, why not make the process more visible too? This work illustrates that there are potentially more thought provoking ways to amend oneself. Here we see the desired effects of plastic surgery literally worn as an accessory.

With Lucy's wearable cosmetic surgery I start to imagine the possibility of designer surgeries. Big design houses like Prada¹⁷ and Chanel¹⁸ have been actively developing revolutionary cosmetic creams, masks and make-up, so you can really get their signature look. With cosmetic surgery becoming as commonly practised as buying designer wear, what if they were to take things one step further by selling cosmetic surgery templates? You could get Prada eyes. Luxury truly has become the new middle class and perhaps this is its new evolution. Celebrities are already acting as preset templates for us to base our desired faces on. This is predominantly because people are not being exposed to different ways of thinking (indoctrinated by the media). Unless you are a great designer, you will always need a reference to base your thoughts on.

16 "MU", art gallery in Eindhoven, Netherlands shows what art can be, not what art should be. MU zooms in on the hybrid here, now, and later of visual culture. 2008.

17 "Prada" is an Italian fashion label specializing in luxury goods for men and women (ready-to-wear, leather accessories, shoes, luggage and hats), founded by Mario Prada.

18 "Chanel" is a French fashion house founded by the couturier Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel, well established in haute couture, specializing in luxury goods.

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Michael Jackson¹⁹ is a good example of a human collage consisting of other celebrities' best assets. The singer has to be considered to be the ultimate post-modern artist considering the way he was able to transform his race, gender, age and identity through the use of mass media. His body is art beyond acceptance for most people. He is almost like a human collage. Michael had the nose of Barbie²⁰, bright pink lips, deer eyes, translucent white skin, Elizabeth Taylor²¹ hair and a Kirk Douglas's²² jaw line. He transformed his physical being to match his internal identity.

This was predicted by Bernard Rudofsky²³ in 1972, when he wrote:

*“It is a fact that nearly everybody, even the least observant person, has a precise, albeit mistaken, idea of what he looks like. As a rule he is dissatisfied with nature’s product. He may be unsympathetic to his reflection in the mirror, he may scorn his photographic image; he may reject the portraits he or his admirers commissioned from painters and sculptors because none of them corresponds with the picture he has forged of himself. Although his objections may be unjustified, his insistence on a super-realistic likeness is understandable. He demands more than artistry or resemblance, in fact, resemblance may be the last thing he wants. To shore up his ego, he needs an icon, a holy picture of his inner self. Only a faultlessly constructed mask will meet his need and his approval.”*²⁴

19 Michael Joseph Jackson, (born August 29, 1958 – June 25, 2009) was an American recording artist, entertainer, and businessman.

20 Barbie is a fashion doll manufactured by the American toy-company Mattel, Inc. and launched in March 1959.

21 Dame Elizabeth Rosemond “Liz” Taylor, (February 27, 1932 – March 23, 2011) was a British-American actress.

22 Kirk Douglas (born Issur Danielovitch, December 9, 1916) is an American stage and film actor, film producer and author.

23 Bernard Rudofsky (April 19 1905 - March 12, 1988) was an Moravian-born American writer, architect, collector, teacher, designer, and social historian.

24 Bernard Rudofsky, The unfashionable human body, written by in 1972, Chapter 2 , Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd, (page 35)

FLAWLESS

People are straining themselves physically, financially and emotionally to feel more accepted in society. It's about using the little control we have to change the things we don't like about ourselves. It's about love, loving yourself, hoping for more love.

In this chapter I discovered the possibility of cosmetic surgery templates potentially becoming the evolution of luxury products. If we are going to be designing ourselves, lets bring in the big guns. Lets employ the most successful designers to help us reach our ultimate and up to date aesthetic best.

We already know that we can become more perfected versions of ourselves by using cosmetic surgery. In the next chapter I will be discussing how other subcultures are using the same principles of cosmetic surgery to realize their less conventional ideals of beauty.

Modified

*“Whatever the reasons for wanting to change his physique, whatever the relevance of his narcissistic or autoerotic inclinations, the factor that goes farthest to account for this unholy obsession is his boredom. Bored with the natural shape of his body, he delights in getting away from himself, and to judge from past and present performances, the resources at hand for making his escape are inexhaustible.”*¹ - Bernard Rudolfsky

Today that is more relevant than ever. Body modification (BM) refers to changing the human body with additions and alterations. It could be said that the human shape was not designed according to our personal taste. At no point in history did man accept his natural body shape as the final version, and from the beginning of time, he decided that there was room for improvement.

For example, the Aurignacians², an ancient civilization that lived around 47,000 BC, practised mutilation of the hands with the same confidence as teenagers getting their ears pierced today. The more common forms of BM are piercing, tattoos, breast augmentation, and liposuction. Body builders practise BM by bulking up, while anorexics simply waste away. Some people’s facial augmentation is hard to detect, with a generally

1 Bernard Rudolfsky, *The unfashionable human body*, written by in 1972, Rupert hart-Davis Ltd, Chapter.4, page 93.

2 The Aurignacian culture is an archaeological culture of the Upper Palaeolithic, located in Europe and southwest Asia.

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pleasing result, while others may give themselves elfish ears. I will now discuss some lesser known and some more extreme BM procedures.³

Nulllo is a shortened form of the word “nullification”, a catchall for all body modifications involving significant removal of tissues. For example, castration, amputations, and tooth removal are all examples of “nulllo”

A Subdermal implant refers to a kind of body jewellery that is placed underneath the skin, allowing the body to heal over the implant and creating a raised design.

Magnetic implants involve having magnets implanted under the skin that allow the wearer to attach magnetic items to the outside of the skin, and also enable the wearer to sense Electromagnetic fields.

Saline solution is a 0.9% sterile salt-water solution that can be used to inflate body parts through injectable saline drips. The saline solution can take a few days to re-absorb (deflate). The saline solution form of modification is a temporary one and is most commonly used in a practice referred to as “heavy play”⁴ and is injected into the scrotum, since at least in part, it is the easiest to inflate. This practice has also been used to inflate various other body parts. The most creative application is a new sub-culture in Japan referred to as Bagelheads.

Being a Bagelhead is a Japanese body modification fad where body art enthusiasts inject saline solution in order to create a bagel-shaped swelling on their heads. Those who alter their heads in this way are known as

3 Online Encyclopedia of body modification, http://wiki.bmezine.com/index.php/Main_Page (date visited-10/11/2011)

4 Heavy play, refers to sadomasochistic sexual acts incorporating body modifications.

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Nipple nullification.

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Bagelheads. These enthusiasts purchase bags of saline solution and IV needles. Before a party they inject saline solution into the skin on their heads. The most popular spot where the Bagelheads like to create these shapes is on the forehead. If desired, the lumps can be moulded into other shapes and even coloured with food dye. Some side effects include possible infection, eyes swollen shut, pressure headaches and stretched skin. Why would anyone do these things to themselves? Is it a challenge to the conventional image of beauty?

*“It is certainly not true that there is in the mind of man any universal standard of beauty with respect to the human body. It is, however, possible that certain tastes may in the course of time become inherited.”*⁵

- Charles Darwin.

According to a BM site⁶, the number one reason for getting body modification is for cosmetic reasons - because it is attractive to them. Someone who might look ugly to the general public looks good to himself. For some, the bodies they were given do not match their ideal of beauty. This is generally the reason for more extreme modifications, like surgeries and amputations. Trends in certain societies, and different standards of beauty, are reasons for other modifications (foot binding, tanning, highlights). Some people want to stand out from the crowd (brightly dyed hair, extreme piercing) or do it for shock value. Some ancient cultures, societies and groups find it a spiritual experience to stretch or pierce, cut or suspend etc. For some, the process, not the result, is what is important. These people find the ritual to be a very important coping mechanism like a stress relief or escape. The entire point of body modification is, of

⁵ Bernard Rudolfsky, *The unfashionable human body*, written by in 1972, Rupert hart-Davis Ltd, Chapter.4, page 94.

⁶ BME: Body Modification Ezine, <http://ask.bmezine.com/> (date visited-10/11/2011)

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Bagelheads.

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course, that it's a form of personal expression. These are all people who simply wish to change themselves into their fantastical views of beauty.

Apart from narcissistic motivations, BM must have some other motivations, for instance, modification in the name of art and technology.

I already mentioned Stelarc in Chapter 2 who had a sub-dermal implant of an ear on his forearm. Another artistic hybrid, where technology meets the human body, is in the work of artist Wafaa Bilal. His 3rdi (Third eye) Project⁷ consists of a surgically implanted camera in the back of the artist's head. This camera spontaneously and objectively captures images, one per minute, and so making up the daily life of the artist. It then transmits them to a website for public consumption.⁸

Wafaa Bilal shares:

“The 3rdi makes a technological apparatus part of my body and distributes the recorded content openly within space using the Internet. The arbitrary imagery captured by the device will retain fractured records and distribute a narrative to be completed by the viewer as their corporeal space is also compromised by the presentation.”⁹

7 3rdi (Third eye) Project, project duration, December 15, 2010-December 15, 2011, <http://3rdi.me/> (date visited- 13/11/2011)

8 Iraqi-born artist Wafaa Bilal, an Assistant Arts Professor at New York University's Tisch School of the Arts, is known internationally for his on-line performative and interactive works provoking dialogue about international politics and internal dynamics.

9 3rdi (Third eye) Project, project duration, December 15, 2010-December 15, 2011, <http://3rdi.me/> (date visited- 13/11/2011)

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3RDI.

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Avant-Garde celebrity, Lady Gaga¹⁰, also featured some cosmetic body modification in her “Born this way” music video in 2011¹¹. After the launch of her video she adopted the “body modification style” and caused uproar as fans thought it was real.¹²

Featured in the cover story of Harpers Bazaar¹³ April 13, 2011, she discusses the motivation behind her temporary body modification:

“It’s artistic expression,” Gaga says¹⁴. *“It’s a performance-art piece. I have never, ever encouraged my fans or anyone to harm themselves, nor do I romanticize masochism. Body modification is part of the overarching analysis of ‘Born This Way.’ In the video, we use Rico¹⁵, who is tattooed head to toe [including a skull on his face]. He was born that way. Although he wasn’t born with tattoos, it was his ultimate destiny to become the man he is today.”*

The contradicting statement she is making with her fake body modifications is another thesis in itself that I will not be discussing. I do, however, think that they were more aesthetic and in better taste than other conventional examples of sub-dermal implants. In the feature’s photo shoot she is also portrayed with a further evolved body sporting five breasts. This might be an image to keep in mind regarding the future of body modification. In my graduation project I want to further explore how far this

10 Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta (born March 28, 1986), better known by her stage name Lady Gaga, is an American singer and songwriter.

11 Avant-garde represents a pushing of the boundaries of what is accepted as the norm or the status quo, primarily in the cultural realm.

12 Born This Way is the second studio album by American recording artist Lady Gaga, which was released on May 23, 2011, by Interscope Records.

13 Harper’s Bazaar is an American fashion magazine, first published in 1867.

14 “Lady Gaga: The Interview”, Harper’s Bazaar, Derek Blasberg, May issue, 2011

15 Rick Genest (born August 7, 1985) is a Canadian artist and fashion model born in Montreal. He is also known as Zombie Boy for being tattooed like a corpse across the majority of his body.

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Lady Gaga.

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might possibly go, especially if it gets surgically more intensive.

The evening after completing this chapter about Body Modification a very ironic event took place. A complete stranger in a fit of rage physically assaulted me while I was simply crossing the road. Whether he thought I was someone else, or I just happened to be at the wrong place at the wrong time, is still unclear. This attack has left my body involuntarily modified. He knocked two of my front teeth out of their natural position, and severed the nerve and blood vessels of my front right tooth. All the teeth of my top right jaw have also moved making biting impossible. Besides suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder)¹⁶ I am also dealing with my dying tooth's discolouration. I am trying to recognize and study the emotion/shock of dealing with the unconventional change of one's appearance and trying to compare it to having BM done to better understand its motivations. In my case, the situation was obviously out of my control, but the anxieties involved with a change to one's body must be similar.

I am finding myself severely disturbed by the small changes to my face. Obviously my changes are associated with a very traumatic experience; they are like visual reminders of the moment/instant I was attacked. When I look in the mirror and see my teeth in the "wrong" position, I am instantly transported back to the moment of impact. I am filled with feelings of fear, angst and pain. I am obviously not pleased with what I see and how it is making me feel.

But what if that pain was self-inflicted and the results exactly designed according to one's personal desire? It could be a powerful way to mark or

¹⁶ Posttraumatic stress disorder, (PTSD) is a severe anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to any event that results in psychological trauma.

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Fractured tooth.

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celebrate an event or an accomplishment; wouldn't enduring pain make the experience more significant? You will form more significant memories even on a cellular level. The BM enthusiasts must also enjoy a feeling of power and control and therefore project a hard tough exterior, as if to say, "Look what I can do to myself". It also ties people together, like the survivors of a traumatic experience. The BM groups can almost be seen as victim support groups, wearing their social dysfunction while marking relevant moments in their lives.

But if I have to be honest, and this is being brutally honest, I get excited to see myself. One could call it a morbid fascination, but I think there is something inside me that likes the fact that my mouth now looks a little different; it's exciting and eye opening. Besides the pain, I like that it kind of makes me a bit quirky looking. Another plus is that I imagine it raises questions with people, like "What happened to her?". Some might treat me with more sympathy, some might think I am tough and will steer clear of me. Another positive point is that I perhaps seem more interesting. People might be curious, and in that way, this affliction could start a conversation with someone I normally would not have spoken to, perhaps someone else with a messed-up mouth. This injury in itself has become a powerful accessory.

When I started writing about BM it was merely a morbid fascination with a world of nightmarish aesthetics and very poor taste. To me MODs¹⁷ were nothing more than lost individuals resembling freak show characters. The MODs are a group of people who are not attractive, rich or popular, a group fighting individuality by making drastic changes. I still do not agree with the aesthetic, but the art is definitely showing very interesting

17 MOD's, referring to Body modification enthusiasts as a collective.

MODIFIED

possibilities and I really respect any group who boldly challenges the image of conventional beauty.

BM, like any other aesthetic choice we make to further express ourselves beyond the human body, has very personal motivations. The stereotypical image of conventional beauty is so ready for reinterpretation and I feel there is a lot of space for more interesting humans.

As humans, we cannot predict the future of our mental health. We are allowed to and do change our minds as often as our underwear. I think we need our bodies to be a consistent force and image of who we are; something real to hold onto, something we can depend on when life changes the world around us. The consistency of our bodies is a valuable survival tool. Having a blank canvas is certainly better for the psyche than a body altered with pixie ears and or devil horns.

Synthetic

This chapter will look at how certain amputees unconventionally complete their bodies by use of prostheses. A prosthesis is a mechanically engineered device that replaces a missing body part. This artificial extension assists the body to function as nature intended it to. How could we learn from amputees and in which way do they appear to be more advanced than us? Could a prosthesis worn by an able human body be a powerful accessory? Could it give our bodies extra functions or even super powers? How have prostheses become sexy in media and how do they contribute to more interesting looking and functioning human beings? Does this God-like power of adding more advanced body parts now give us the possibility to truly be more than human?

One of the reasons why this subject is so interesting to me is that my mother lost her right eye three years ago. Once again, I was on the other side of the world and had to simulate the scenario for myself. I wore an eye patch covering my right eye for a week. I wanted to determine the severity of living with only one eye. It was very hard to cross the road; pour water into a cup and I also found that people treated me very differently due to the eye patch. I was very sad that this is how my mother had to continue the rest of her life. The loss of sight in one eye was just something she had to get used to but what to do about this void? Are people going to treat her differently because of the way she looks? She eventually had a glass eye prosthesis made and I had my doubts about it, until I actually saw it. It was absolutely perfect and matched the old one 100%.

SYNTHETIC

I was amazed, and already then started wondering, what else could we put in its place?

In the search to find a better solution I found a great example of how the tragedy of loss has transformed a man into a human with super abilities. It is: “The Eye Borg Project”¹. This is the work of Rob Spence, a documentary filmmaker residing in Toronto, Canada and Kosta Grammatis, an engineer from San Francisco, California.

After losing his eye in a shotgun accident at age thirteen, Rob started fantasizing about getting the eye of “The Six Million Dollar man”. This was a TV series about a Bionic Astronaut played by Steve Austin in the mid-70s. He had an eye which was a camera.

In collaboration with engineer Kosta, Rob built a prosthesis that can capture and transmit video. Rob Spence is also currently working on a documentary film about the Eyeborg Project and the experience of living with a bionic eye. He hopes it will raise questions and build awareness regarding issues around surveillance in our society.

During my investigation on how the human body could be extended, I researched the work of artist, Matthew Barney. In his Cremaster Cycle he extensively uses the human body by extending it with symbolic accessories and aesthetic prostheses.

The Cremaster Cycle is an art project consisting of five feature length films. In Cremaster 3, he introduces a woman who plays 3 characters in the film. The first character is the Entered Novitiate - she is the cheetah

¹ Eyeborg project, all information found of official website, <http://eyeborgproject.com> (date visited 15/12/2011)

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Eyeborg.

SYNTHETIC

woman, who has the skinny hind legs of a Cheetah. In another scene she plays Oonagh MacCumhail who is the woman who has Jellyfish instead of lower legs. I was immediately intrigued by these sculptural body parts and researched it further.

The woman is Aimee Mullens. Aimee is a double amputee and had both of her legs amputated under the knee at the age of one as she was born without fibulas. She is best known for her incredible athletic accomplishments in the 1996 Paralympics in Atlanta.

She did her first TED² talk in 1998, where she shared her innovative legs with the world in an attempt to make them more accessible to other amputees, and to also try to change society's view on disabled people. This TED talk literally was the launch pad to the next decade of her life's exploration. TED gave her the opportunity to put a call out to innovators outside the traditional medical prosthetic community to apply their talents to the science and to the art of building legs. Many people answered this call.³

She first graced the cover of Dazed & Confused⁴ magazine wearing her sprinting legs with the subtitle reading : "Fashion able". This is where

2 TED was founded in 1984 as a one-off event and the conference was held annually from 1990 in Monterey, California. TED's early emphasis was largely technology and design, consistent with a Silicon Valley center of gravity. The events are now held in Long Beach and Palm Springs in the U.S. and in Europe and Asia, offering live streaming of the talks. They address an increasingly wide range of topics within the research and practice of science and culture.

3 TED archive video from 1998 http://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_on_running.html (date visited 17/12/2011)

4 Dazed & Confused is a British style magazine, that was set up in 1992 and published monthly. Its founding editors were Jefferson Hack and Rankin. Topics covered include music, fashion, film, art, and literature.

SYNTHETIC

fashion designer Alexander McQueen⁵ noticed her and was then the second person to react to her brief. He made her a pair of ornately carved wooden legs. They were made from solid ash wood, incorporating heels and were ornately decorated with carvings of magnolias and grapes. She modeled these legs in his Spring 2000 Collection at London Fashion week. The beautifully crafted legs from Alexander McQueen made her realize that: “Poetry matters.”

*“Poetry is what elevates the banal and neglected object to a realm of art. It can transform the thing that might have made people fearful into something that invites them to look, and look a little longer, and maybe even understand.”*⁶ - Aimee Mullens.

After her explosion in the fashion world, she came onto the radar of previously mentioned artist, Matthew Barney. He answered her brief by casting her in his Cremaster Film Opus. For this art piece, they experimented with making her all kinds of very unconventional legs. She had legs cast in soil, glass legs and eventually introduced her with Cheetah legs. These legs were a legacy to her former athletic career.

Aimee Mullins on her collaboration with Matthew Barney:

*“This is where it really hit home for me -- that my legs could be wearable sculpture. And even at this point, I started to move away from the need to replicate human-ness as the only aesthetic ideal.”*⁷

5 Lee Alexander McQueen,(17 March 1969 – 11 February 2010) was a British fashion designer and couturier best known for his in-depth knowledge of bespoke British tailoring, his tendency to juxtapose strength with fragility in his collections, as well as the emotional power and raw energy of his provocative fashion shows.

6 Aimee Mullins, TED video, Feb 2009, http://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_prosthetic_aesthetics.html (date visited 12/12/2011)

7 Aimee Mullins, TED video, Feb 2009, http://www.ted.com/talks/aimee_mullins_prosthetic_aesthetics.html (date visited 12/12/2011)

SYNTHETIC



Wooden legs.

SYNTHETIC



Cremaster.

SYNTHETIC

Today she has over a dozen pairs of prosthetic legs that various people have made for her. They all have different qualities; some are designed for harsh terrain, while others are cosmetic and look completely life-like. She enjoys playing around with them and some days leaves the house with her sculptural jellyfish legs. Incredibly, she also has the ability to vary her height up to super model height of 1.8 metres. The ability to change one's height made me realize that Aimee is not disabled, and that she, in fact, has superhuman powers.

As mentioned in chapter.4 about body modification, people are clearly bored with the human body. Fashion designer Alexander McQueen was the first to be inspired by the aesthetics and powerful message associated with missing limbs.

Another fashion designer, Thierry Mugler⁸, is finding inspiration in the possibilities of prosthetic extensions. In 2011 Mugler featured double amputee athlete Oscar Pistorius⁹ in his new "Amen"¹⁰ perfume campaign. The campaign shows Oscar sprinting with "Muglier-esc," chrome leg extensions. Muglier must have been very eager to apply his "machine/human hybrid" aesthetic to this incomplete human body.

Oscar's biggest claim to fame is the fact that in 2007 he took part in his first international competitions for able-bodied athletes, due to sufficient running times. However, his artificial lower legs, while enabling him to compete, have generated claims that he has an unfair advantage over

8 Thierry Mugler is a French fashion designer and creator of several perfumes.

9 Oscar Pistorius - All relevant information found : <http://www.oscarpistorius.com/> (date visited 20/12/2011)

10 Amen, perfume created by Thierry Muglier.

SYNTHETIC

able-bodied runners. The same year, the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) amended its competition rules to ban the use of “any technical device that incorporates springs, wheels or any other element that provides a user with an advantage over another athlete not using such a device”. This fact clearly indicates the super-human abilities generated from engineered prostheses. Could this be the first division between mechanically engineered life forms and normal human beings?

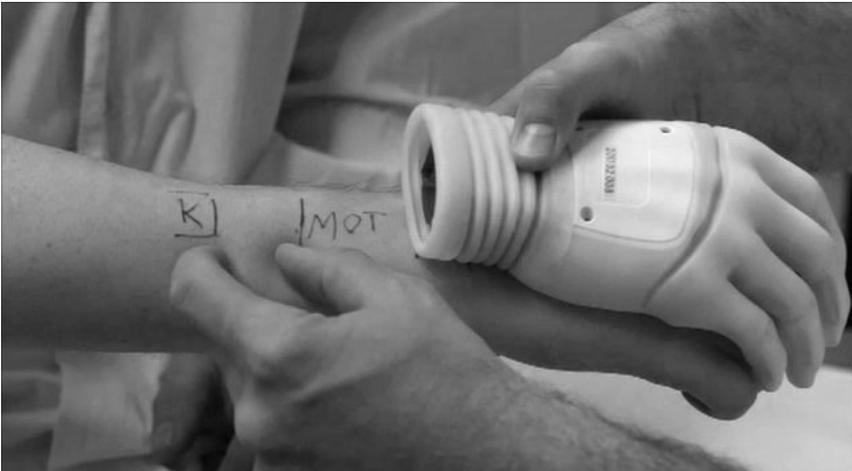
Most importantly, all of the previously mentioned individuals did not have a choice to be modified in this way. They were either born disabled or had an unfortunate accident, which rendered them that way. I am hoping to learn from these isolated cases to try to imagine what these remarkable advantages might mean for able-bodied human beings. The next example is a little bit different; he, in fact, had a choice.

After being electrocuted at work, a young Austrian man named Patrick found that he could no longer move one of his hands as well as he used to. He lived with the injury for a few years, but then decided he'd rather amputate the hand and replace it with something bionic - a synthetic hand controlled by nerve signals from his brain. The new hand would move in ways his old one never could, spinning all the way around on his wrist.

Patrick was the first person to opt for amputation and a synthetic hand, rather than living with a hand that he could no longer use. He is thus not replacing a lost limb, he is removing a limb in favour of a bionic replacement.¹¹

¹¹ BBC news/health, 18 May 2011, Amputee Patrick demonstrates his new bionic hand, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-13378036> (date visited 05/01/2012)

SYNTHETIC



Bionic hand.

SYNTHETIC

To me this is where the lines are getting blurred and my initial prediction is becoming probable. By adding prosthetics we can improve our current functionality. The next question is: do we have to amputate body parts to reap the benefits of prostheses?

I am eternally grateful for the fact that I do not have to live with a disability. The thought of being rendered without a crucial part of our body like a limb, is a near impossible thought for most humans. Our bodies define us; they are us; we know precisely how to operate them flawlessly. Even simply losing my front tooth has proven to be severely traumatic.

But with this said, reflecting on this final chapter in my thesis, I am envious of the fact that I can't change my height. I am envious that I don't have a camera-eye that can seamlessly document my life, literally from my unique perspective. To me it is very clear to see the advantages prosthetics offer some disabled people. The ability to custom-make, personally designed extensions that optimize one's functionality is truly remarkable. I think that there is a great deal for the able-bodied to learn from these individual cases. We, too, can improve our functionality and personal abilities by adding a mechanically engineered device.

Perhaps prosthetics are the answer to satisfy our insatiable desire to be more than human. As determined in previous chapters, people are using various methods to amend themselves into better versions of themselves. In the first chapter the method discussed was that of using online social networks as virtual and mental extensions for us to augment internal insecurities by creating super e-personalities online. In the second chapter it was about how we maintain these e-personalities through mobile devices and have started using these devices like external brains. In chapter 3 the focus was on how cosmetic surgery can be used in ways to advance our human aesthetics to super-human aesthetics. This subject is then

SYNTHETIC

continued in chapter 4, but now looking at how far one can stretch these super-human aesthetics and instead of becoming conventionally more beautiful, you can now become a fantasy version of yourself. In this final chapter 5 the focus shifts to unfortunate victims that in most cases had no choice but to be mechanically altered. In their own right they are also in search of perfection, their personal perfection; something that could justify this injustice; something to fill their physical void in the best way they can imagine. Perhaps this could be compared to what people are doing when they get cosmetic surgery. They are also simply trying to fill the void in their lives. By no means is Amy Mullins just getting by – she is getting a kind of equivalent to cosmetic surgery by wearing the legs that make her radically taller. This to me is the essence of this chapter. I do not think that we have to necessarily amputate functioning body parts to benefit from these mechanical modifications.

Conclusion

As the human body and its environment are evolving into new domains and possibilities, this means that our physical needs are also changing.

In Chapter 1 it is stated that there is a whole new world for us to experience; it is the digital world of the Internet. In this digital world we are mentally extended into a physically, non-existing human representation. I am referring to the online e-personality. Being online is like putting on another body. Here we experiment with the idea of walking around as our desired selves. This online persona is a carefully crafted digital accessory to the real life version. Free from insecurities, impulsive, fun and clever, you can now own a Prada handbag simply by updating your status or posting an image of you holding it. You can be exactly how you want to be and create yourself with God-like powers.

In this thesis, the first prediction for the future of the human is that it might partially change life forever. Through our online content creation we are writing the code/personality for what might be our representative after we die; therefore becoming immortally represented on the planet.

I continue by looking at the current host of this representative in chapter 2. The host I refer to is the mobile device that is currently the physical representative of the e-personality; in other words, the body of the online persona. In this chapter the relationship between the mobile device and the human is described as beyond intimate.

CONCLUSION

Mobile devices have almost become a functioning body part we cannot live without. Here the prediction is that the mobile might either evolve by literally becoming a part of our bodies or it might evolve by developing an engineered body and potentially represent us in the real world. These engineered robots would be programmed with all of our online data from all the content we are creating on social networks daily. This might be a believable path for the realization of the ultimate accessory, the personal synthetic clone.

In chapter 3 my attention shifts to the powerful ability to sculpt and perfect our own bodies. By having cosmetic surgery done, you can transform what you look like in a few hours. Here it seems that everyone is using the same mould to base their new look on; for example the Heidi Montag case study. Here it seems that because of this, cosmetic surgery fanatics are all starting to look the same. I find that the aesthetically altering power of cosmetic surgery is only scratching the surface of its potential. By using Orlan as an example we start to see how cosmetic surgery might evolve and that it can be used as a powerful medium of self-expression. This illustrates the incredible potential the two worlds, namely body modification and plastic surgery, might have together. Both of these subjects practise augmentation for a desired aesthetic goal, but with different motivations.

Offline we have the same powers as online but not everyone is a talented designer. Moreover, in body augmentation the future could go two ways. One potential future for cosmetic surgery combined with body modification is to have these alterations designed by professionals. This would be to embrace the mono-aesthetic, the theory that all humans are going to end up looking the same.

CONCLUSION

Fashion houses might apply their design abilities to improve the aesthetics of current body modification fads. Lips by Chanel, a Martin Margiella nose, with Prada eyes, and cheek-lifting piercings by Chloe.

Another potential future of these bodily alterations might be the embrace of the avant-garde body. After years of trying to perfect the body, I don't think perfection is going to remain the main objective. Body modification can almost be seen as the rebellion of the ugly. In this chapter we can see a group rejecting conventional beauty in exchange for potentially becoming more conventionally ugly due to a desire to be different from the stereotypical society; more special; more individualistically true.

With my final chapter in mind, we look at how amputees are using prosthetics to acquire super powers. I think that these heightened abilities and superhuman powers provided by prostheses could be the luxury accessories of the future. If looking perfect is an advantage today it offers few challenges; looking perfect is an easily obtainable objective. Nearly anyone with the required funds can look and dress up exactly like their role model. In this thesis I have established that people want to be more than human. I predict that to acquire super powers will be the aspirations of the future.

The research and the examples cited in this thesis lead to the conclusion that by combining all these God-like powers we have at our disposal, we can really start to imagine the potential materialization of our incessant desire to be more than human - to be super human.

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Image credits

Chapter 1.

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Chapter 2.

EAR ON ARM

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LUCY MCRAE

Low tech plastic surgery, photo by Bart Hess, featuring Lucy McRae.
Courtesy of the artist

Chapter 4.

NIPPLE NULLIFICATION

Image courtesy of BMEzine.com Photographer unknown.

BAGELHEADS

Photo by Ryoichi “Keropyy” Maeda, courtesy of VICE Magazine.

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Wafaa Bilal, Courtesy of the artist website.

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Photo by Lyall Coburn, featuring Leanie van der Vyver.

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WOODEN LEGS

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BIONIC HAND

Image screen grab from news report courtesy of BBC news website. featuring Patric and his surgeon Professor Oskar Aszmann.

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