IP 2008
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La Vie En Robot

Roughly 19 years ago, I was exposed to two examples of "pop culture" that would affect my Integrated Project deeply. The first was a WWII propaganda poster, which sat above our microwave, that declared : "Save Waste Fats for Nuclear Explosives: take them to your local meats dealer." Hours spent staring at this poster, and quite possibly the microwave, developed a great love of propaganda, and subsequently advertising. The second example, no less powerful, was "Star Trek" in all of its various forms. It started as a weekly ritual to spend time with my father, but as I got older the notion of inventing a future such as Gene Roddenberry had fascinated me. Little did I know that these two examples would stay with me for so long, and alter my project.

My goal with this project was to imagine a future where everyday objects, would become fused with the human body. I chose advertising as my vehicle, as Kim Toffoletti cites: "The role of advertisements in establishing a relationship between the viewer and the image is conventionally understood as follows: 'advertising images are central to the constructing cultural ideas about lifestyle, self-image, self-improvement and glamour. Advertising often presents an image of things to be desired, people to be envied, and life as it 'should be,' (Sturken and Cartwright 2001: 189)" (*Cyborgs and Barbie Dolls* 2007). Traditionally advertisements tell us a great deal about the culture for which they were made, by providing cultural/pop references, and how the culture views success. Using this, my promotion of integrated technologies makes the claim that this is what the people of the future will want. I created these posters to prompt viewers to think about such a future.

However when I first started out the year, my ideas were not so well defined. I initially wanted to take on the task of exploring the world's obsession with achieving ideals of beauty. As the world is many millennia old, and filled with hundreds of ideals of beauty, this became a rather daunting task. I had wanted to create my own company that would offer the ability to change parts of the face and body as often as fashion dictated, but I ran into several problems; the least of which being that beauty ideals, when involving facial structures, do not change with the seasons, unlike fashion. At the root of this idea, was the desire to advertise such a product, and use those advertisements as the vehicle. As difficult as that was to explain, it was harder to achieve and inevitably I hit a creative wall.

Upon the suggestions of my professors, I started creating collages in order to help define what I wanted to do, allowing me to play with pre-existing images and products and generate my ideas quickly. I started with creating a menagerie of "Frankenstein"-like bodies, compiled from celebrities bodies, but always having an ever-present technology, integrated into the collage. These images transformed the idea "body," but not in any new way, "prior to the advent of digital information networks, and well before Baudrillard assessed the impact of technology upon the human subject, Freud addressed the changing status of humanity in an age of industrial and technological progress," (123). Questions of what is "human" have been around for centuries,; the introduction of plastic into the human body causing a new re-evaluation as to what constituted "human" when it started

replacing joints, valves and limbs, (69). However unlike Freud, my purpose was not to solely question how the idea of humanity would change, but to advertise such a change, and elicit reactions.

From these collages, I made advertisements for pre-existing products and companies, taking them and pushing them into such drastic measures as fusing them with the human body, questioning the extent to how far humanity will push their obsession with consumerism and improvement of the human body, or to achieve the perfect human body. It was easy to imagine a market for such surgeries, as the 8th century BCE, surgeons in Ancient India were making use of skin grafts for reconstructive surgery, (Wikipedia *Plastic Surgery*). Since then, humanity has always tried to find different was to alter his (her) body, though not always surgical. Be it corsets in Victorian England, codpieces in France, neck rings in Africa, and foot binding in China, we have created and developed new ways in which to fit into given aesthetics for the time. Cosmetic surgery became popularized after the First World War, when soldiers came back with injuries the likes had never been seen. These first attempts at facial reconstruction started less as man's attempt to morph himself (herself) into the better, but merely to change him (her) self back into the category of "acceptable in society." But from this attempt to normalize atrocities, both human scarring and the effects of the war in general, spawned an artistic movement, surrealism, through which minds could rationalize what had happened. Max Ernst's nightmare-ish scenes, along with his character of "lop lop" exist in this post-world war chaos. With surgical advancements, we have taken an art technique and allowed it to become a reality; the addition of "cybertechnologies afford to people an opportunity to experiment with various versions of individuality," (Schilling *The body in Culture, Technology, and Society* 187).

This history being set, it seems natural that art would continue to follow the tradition, to use new materials and new media to help up understand the world around us; to help rationalize the irrational and to help point out the ridiculous. Orlan uses her own body, undergoing many cosmetic operations to combine characteristics of beauty from many ages, exaggerating the ridiculous by playing upon subtle changes, that once combined look ridiculous. Stelarc goes one step further experimenting with the cloning of body parts, and playing upon the interactions of the body with machines. "He [Stelarc] envisions the kinds of formations of the body and the self that can be made possible by the techno-human interface. Stelarc's fascination with challenging the physical parameters of the body and interrogating the limits of its capabilities was evidenced by his early body suspension performances of the seventies," (Toffoletti 126). I propose to take Stelarc one farther, and imagine a world where we are becoming machines. Where the obsession to continuously improve upon our own bodies has gone so face that we feel the need to alter or bodies, so that they can interact with technology on a moveable, permanent basis. That possibility is entirely in the future, if we choose to let it happen. Technology itself is guiding us in the right direction, whether it is blue tooth headsets for phones, or even as humanitarian as new prosthetics for those who have lost limbs. But as Rick
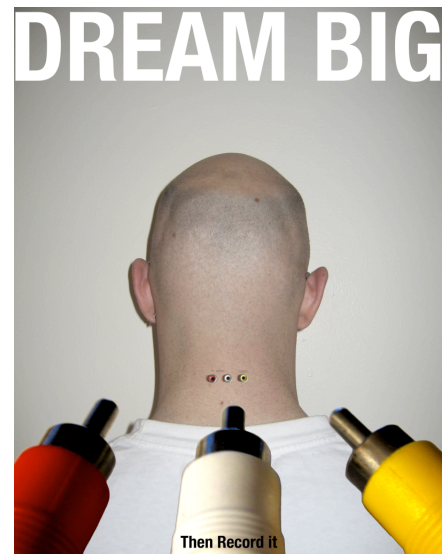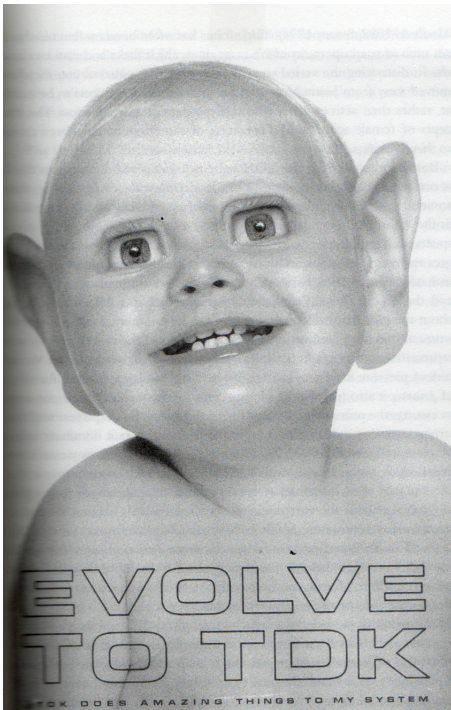
Deckard says in Phillip K. Dick's classic *Do androids dream of electric sheep?* "A human robot is like any other machine; it can fluctuate between being a benefit and a hazard very rapidly," (41).

  I decided to change the body with the addition of technology, in lieu of replaceable body parts, due in part to all of those years watching "Star Trek". Perhaps what I am most influenced by would be the Borg culture, and this idea that there is no one race behind them, the things that makes him or her Borg, is that they are part machine. There is great power and appeal in that it rids their world of racism and differences. But it takes away their free will, and everything must be done in terms of the collective, the main thought is the idea of taking a human, and improving upon it by making it a machine. I have never heard how the "Borg" came to be this way, but I always imagined it to have started out with small adjustments at first. In regards to my own project, I set the Borg on the other side of the spectrum from humanity, and I view my project as the point where the two meet.

  My process had started with making collages in order to fine point my agenda, however it did not end up as my final presentation of my ideas. As my collages progressed, I became more and more aware of the interaction of layout, as well as content. What had started as a mere way in which to organize my ideas and my agenda, had evolved into the way in which I chose to experiment and organize the layout of my ideas. After I am satisfied, with the way that the collage layout looks, I then used the ideas from that in order to take photos, and manipulate them to combine the human body and the technology that I have chosen for that particular layout. As my ideas changed and mutated, I stopped needing to collage in order to organize my thoughts and ideas for my posters. I still collaged after I took photos, to experiment with layout, but no longer was this act part of my brainstorming process. The posters, with an advertising feel, then became the main focus of this project. This mode of showcasing my concept was still greatly important to me, to use commercial and consumer means to sell my idea; greatly similar to art made by Critical Art Ensemble and their company "BioCom" While the ploy of BioCom is creating "designer children" with what we know about DNA and cloning, they still use the media of advertisement as a structure and vehicle to show their art to

the public. In an actual ad by TDK "Evolve to TDK," the question of humans evolving in order to fit technology is brought up. Though a tongue in cheek ad, it approaches the topic in a similar manner, bold and straight to the point. But While TDK imagines humans evolving to fit their technology, and "BioCom" is designing people, I want to present the idea of integrating technology into the body. With such precedents, one can see how the ad poster as a media, would be affective at attracting attention to an issue.

While my first inclination was not to collage, it did allow me to move faster and save time before shooting my own photos. It allows me to combine my love of appropriation and advertising, creating new pieces and exploring the frontiers of technology and the human body. While the audience at the gallery only sees my destination, it was the journey that it took to make those six posters, that is the most meaningful to me. This past year I have grown greatly as an artist/ design, toying with the notions of the future as many have done before me.

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