



POST

HUMAN

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# Frankenstein is the new black

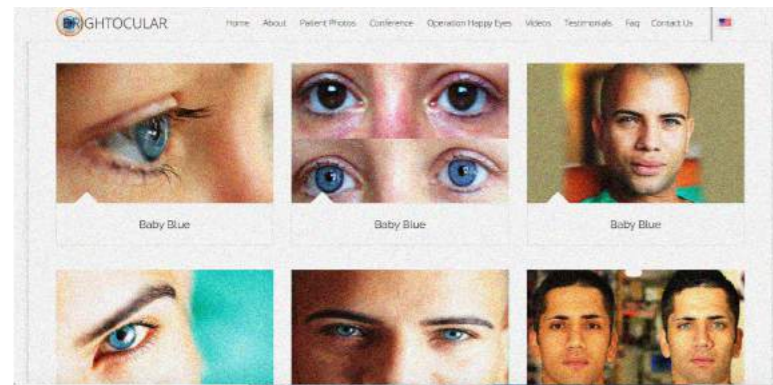
“No ‘originals’ exist, and we live in an endless string of references, discourses and images”.  
(Corker, M. 2002)

With the introduction of wearable technology, body modification and plastic surgery, we have found ourselves in a fast-paced generation seeking fast-tracked ‘perfection. Post-Humanism is becoming an increasingly popular subject for debate: ethically, politically and economically speaking. But what are the implications of these developing technologies? And is it our intellectual duty or moral demise to play ‘God’ with our own bodies?

Anthropologist Mary Douglas theorises that we all have ‘two bodies: the physical body (the biological, individual body) and the social body (the body demanded by our culture)’ (Evans, M. Lee, E. 2002). With this in mind, it would seem our social body is beginning to bleed in to our biological one. As the trend of body modification becomes increasingly technologically (and possibly biologically) developed - through procedures and objects varying from breast implants, to eye colour-changing implants<sup>1</sup> - it seems we may not just be moving toward a future seeking exterior perfection, but also biologically interior perfection. But is this just a new fashion trend in our society, or is it a more damaging interference with our human nature?

Post-humanism’s presumed aesthetic of robots and shiny chrome surfaces is the epitome of how most people assume ‘the future’ to be. So with our cultural desire to stay ahead of the crowd, it’s no surprise why interest in this area has peaked. ‘The rise in popularity of digital characters has coincided with an increased fascination with bodies [from] the medical establishment’ (Mitchell, R, Thurtle, P. 2004); with the media bombarding our generation with images of heroic, perfectly formed cyber characters, such as Scarlett Johansson’s portrayal of Major in *Ghost in the Shell* (2017) or Alicia Vikander as Ava in *Ex Machina* (2015), these new (speculative or real) technological possibilities for the human race are becoming an object of desire. And it’s noticeably relevant how a large majority of these sexualised robots are formed around the female body. As Evans and Lee note, the female body, unlike the male is one that is ‘not absolute and which can change - allow[ing] that body to make much greater use

<sup>1</sup> BrightOcular company offers surgery with an artificial coloured lense to change eye colour permanently  
<http://www.brightocular.com/patient-photos.htm>



[From top to bottom:] BrightOcular patient photos website page, *Ghost in the Shell* film poster, *Ex Machina* film still, Ear pointing body modification

part one.

of scientific technology' (Evans M. Lee, E. 2002). Women's bodies are already a fascinating form, from puberty to pregnancy, our bodies change at an alarming rate while still sustaining life inside, so what better way to test the boundaries of technological intervention with nature than on an already 'hardened' life form?

However, I feel this intervention may possibly evolve in to an infection. By disguising these scientific breakthroughs as an add-on or accessory to our natural form, they are infiltrated in to our society without us even noticing. Centuries past, if you'd told someone who was deaf that we'd one day have a device that could bring back hearing, it'd be (quite literally) unbelievable. So what's stopping us, with our even further extended intelligence as a human race, from creating even the wildest of our imaginations in body modification? And haven't we already started? Waist trainers allow us to modify our natural figures without lifting a finger in the gym. Hair extensions, butt implants and payment through fingerprints means with our 'increasing awareness of the negotiable and changeable possibilities of the body', it is starting to become 'impossible to speak about the 'nature' of the body' (Evans M. Lee, E. 2002), as we stitch together "unnatural" components to make us feel whole.

When do we cross the line from human to modern day Frankenstein?

# Body [Com]modification

[From top to bottom:] Black Mirror 'Entire History of You', Liam becomes obsessed with rewinding his wife's adulterous past through their memory implants and tries to self-remove it, Lara Croft's 2015 realistic development, Ivy Valentine's sexualised character from Soulcalibur V



**“Everything has either a price or a dignity.”  
(Kant, I. 2005)**

Companies - whether technological, cosmetic or medical - are selling us new and improved versions of ourselves at every opportunity. As stated by Braidotti, ‘advanced capitalism is a spinning machine that actively produces differences for the sake of commodification’ (Braidotti, R. 2013); our “imperfections” are being designed and sold to our desire to become the wholly perfect human being. These body modifications of the speculative future generations seldom solve mental, physical or environmental problems for the user, but instead focus on the must have trend of the time. And it’s here that the post-human threatens our humanity.

Coming back to the idea of the post-human as a Frankenstein or “zombie” figure, stitched together by omnipotent masters of technological developments, we begin to sell our natural bodies and be replaced by the designs of someone else. As Prof. Jennifer Fay states, “the zombie, in sum, is a form of possession by one and dispossession by another” (Christie, D. Lauro, S J. 2011). So what are we losing by replacing what’s naturally ours with the artifice of someone’s else’s creation? Here, I turn to the humanitarian effects of the post-human. For example, when undergoing transplant surgery, the patient gives the medical profession the right to replace their faulty component with a brand-spanking new one. Never would the patient assume that this faulty component is now theirs to possibly take back one day. What would be the point? It’s faulty. So what if this filters in to the body-mod procedures that we are now coming in to contact with? If I choose to one day have my natural eye’s replaced by some high-tech eyeballs, I’ve now lost a part of my natural being and bought a new, artificial accessory. I may have bought them, but does that mean they are mine to alter and remove myself, or is that in the companies hands? Most likely the latter.

The problems here arise when these kinds of procedures begin to take over the whole body. Maybe one day, I’ll have my eyes, hands, internal organs all replaced with technological objects that offer a range of capabilities not possible with my natural bodily components. But does this now make me human, or robot? And what price will I pay if the latter? As Mitchell and Thurtle state in their 2004 writings, ‘the human body and human life are

represented as possessing an innate dignity that is threatened as soon as a part of the body is assigned an economic value'; we will not only be letting technology invade our bodies, we're letting corporations profit from them.

And that seems to already be happening. As I stated previously, a lot of these post-human theories are based around the female form. Not only seen in futuristic films, but in the creation of "digibodies" too. Creators are designing digital female characters with the aim of blurring the lines between what is real and digital. But there are claims that these digibodies, because of the ethereal qualities they possess 'are not really like real women [and] do not have to be taken seriously' (Mitchell, R. Thurtle, P. 2004). If we allow people to hold this point of view, while developing ways to make this aesthetic a possible reality, do we not risk the chance of allowing post-humans to have this view of their fellow post-humans in the future? Will we not value the life of our fellow post-human as they do not seem "real", because we're so far detached from their living, breathing, natural selves.

With the removal of our human exterior, I feel we may slowly lose our human instinct, feelings and moral compass. 'Living matter [...] is intelligent and self-organising, [...] because it is not disconnected from the rest of organic life (Braidotti, R. 2013): we are beginning to lose sight of what makes us human, and instead being sucked in to the new and exciting world of technology, which is not ours to live in, but to admire from the outside.

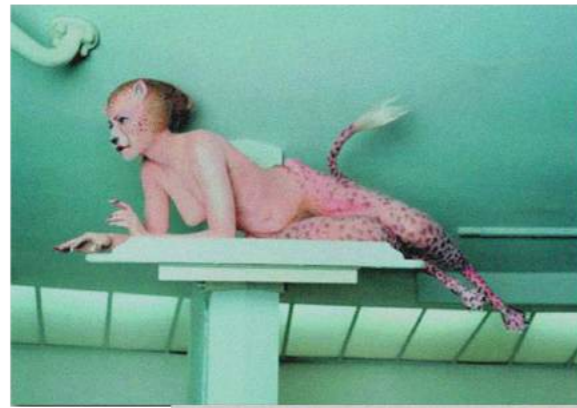
**"We did not fight the enemy, we fought ourselves and the enemy was in us"**  
*(Platoon, 1986).*

# Medical Aids as Fashion Statements

“It was beautiful. We were selling rich women their own fat acids back to them”.  
(*Fight Club*, 1999)

When looking at examples of post-human intervention in the present and near future, I find it interesting to see how opinions change on what is considered “post-human” for different generations and cultures. I start by looking at eyeglasses. As I have noted previously, the thought of hearing aids centuries past would be considered a post-human object, however, it seems spectacles are going through a cyclical stage of surpassing their “magical” qualities, have gone through the normative, appliance stage, and are transitioning into a previously unseen post-human development. ‘In 1930s Britain, NHS spectacles were classified as medical appliances, and their wearers as patients’ (Pullin, G. 2009), however these days, a large proportion of brand glasses bought by the public are non-prescriptive and instead sold as a fashion accessory. And while there is still a market that needs glasses for their visual enhancement purposes, even buying a new pair of prescription glasses is now an addition to your style and not just your eyesight. This shows us that wearing eyeglasses has become an ‘aspiration rather than a humiliation’ (Pullin, G. 2009). And while this is a success for the field in changing perceptions on what was once considered a disability to an accepted part of our society, it also brings questions about the implications of using disability as fashion.

In the 1998 September issue of the magazine ‘Dazed and Confused’, Alexander McQueen and photographer Nick Knight worked with model Aimee Mullins (who was born with a medical condition that resulted in the amputation of both her lower legs) on the series titled ‘Fashion-able’. This was a pivotal moment for the representation of disabled people, with Aimee showing (with her selection of designer prosthetics) that disability wear does not have to be bland, but can be a part of your personal style: ‘her wardrobe is made up not only of different clothes that can make her feel a different way, but also different legs’ (Pullin, G. 2009). But is this the next step on from eyeglasses? If we are designing disability wear/objects to be more of an aesthetic product, does that mean they become an object of desire rather than aid?



part two.



[From top to bottom:] Aimee Mullins' leopard legs in the film *Cremaster 3*, *Dazed and Confused*'s 'Fashion-Able' cover, DailyMail story of women with BIID pictured in the wheelchair she doesn't physically require

This is not saying that prostheses and medical aids should not be designed beautifully for the wearer to be proud of and comfortable in. It is simply asking the question of whether or not by doing this we are creating a new market for capitalistic gain and societal trends to follow for those who don't "need" it. There are already many cases of Body Integrity Identity Disorder (BIID) in which people are born feeling they are disabled – like transgender people feel they are born in the wrong body – and have undergone surgery to allow them to live in the less-abled body they feel they should have. So with people starting to deliberately damage their sight or amputating limbs to become who they feel they were emotionally and psychologically born as, will the near-future bring opportunities for us to amputate our legs in order to own the latest technologically advanced or stylish pair of prostheses, just because we feel "behind the times"?

If this opinion does integrate itself in to our society, it's yet another sign that the 'human body is [being] decomposed within the fields of capital, only to be reconstituted, and sold, under the aegis of money' (Mitchell, R, Thurtle, P. 2004). We're allowing ourselves to be sold an idea under the illusion of a fashion statement that was initially designed to give people back the independence they had lost. We are going backwards by giving our control to those who sell them.

## Human > Humanity

**‘We are all humans, but some of us are just more mortal than others’.  
(Braidotti, R. 2013)**

This brings me on to the speculative outcomes that have been portrayed in the TV series *Orphan Black* (2013) and *Black Mirror* (2011), that allow the viewer to question what the future could look like after biological, medical and technological interventions.

*Black Mirror* explores a wide range of possibilities, from memory implants to life decisions affected by your social media ranking, and the issues that follow. However, my main focus for this writing is on the episode ‘*Men Against Fire*’ (2016), in which members of the military are implanted with a MASS device, which enhances the processing of their senses in order to make them the ultimate soldier. The story unravels to show the device is actually used to change the soldiers perception of the enemy– known as roaches – into “pale, snarling, humanoid monsters” (Wikipedia, 2017), when in fact they are a regular humans suffering a Holocaust-like ethnic cleansing regime. Here, body modifications are used unbeknownst to the subject by the military to provide them with the violent results they desire, in an efficient and immoral way. While this is a dystopian story for the viewer, it has recognisable links to our version of the post-human today. As stated earlier, in “designing” ourselves to look less and less human, we give way to the possibility that we will not see each other as emotional beings, and instead as autonomous robots. This allows us to commit crimes against people we daren’t dream of now, but could become reality with our shift in perception what it takes to be human and the rights that come along with it. The upcoming ‘tech- and bio-zombified state of the body’ may produce ‘the dehumanised person who has lost meaning or a sense of self’ (Christie, D. Lauro, S J. 2011), consequently eradicating humanity altogether.

This theme of dehumanisation is similarly represented in *Orphan Black*, a story that follows two groups of male and female clones, who were produced as a kind of “experiment”. This experiment takes a turn for the worse however, when the clones become self-aware of who/what they are, and when organisations with different intentions for the clones fight for ownership of the science behind it. The clones are effectively “reduced to the less than human status of disposable bodies” (Braidotti, R. 2013) through the push and pull by the organi-



[From top to bottom:] How the soldiers see ‘roaches’ in ‘Men Against Fire’, One soldier suffers the psychological consequences of learning the truth, Orphan Black clones, Rachel tortures her “sister” and adoptive mother



sations to own their DNA. This results in the murder of several clones, whether to protect the secret of the science, stop the other-side gaining information, or simply due to the defects that were mistakenly given to them during conception.

This series cleverly explores the implications of using our natural, human bodies as experimental grounds for the development of future generations. The “greater good” having prevalence over ethics is encapsulated perfectly by the clone Rachel, who has been self-aware since childhood and becomes the head of one of the organisations fighting to harness the science. Rachel sees her “sisters” as nothing more than a product of the experiment, and ruthlessly kills, torments and experiments on them, all in the quest for power. By effectively destroying herself for her controlling desires, Rachel becomes the ultimate ‘zombified soldier [...] altered through technological, biochemical, or psychological invasions, [s]he is neither “fully alive nor fully dead” (Christie, D. Lauro, S J. 2011): her DNA (which makes her human) becomes her greatest weapon to use against those “inferior” to her, which in turn strips her of her humanity.

## Conclusion

As our 'bodies evolve into datasets' (Mitchell R. Thurtle, P. 2004), we are focusing less on the ethical implications of our advances and instead on how we can develop more efficiently as a human race. And behind it all, we are effectively being bought and sold through the commodification of our bodies, disguised behind the veil of fashion trends. The post-human is an interesting but dangerous figure, at once showing us the advances of our intelligence and the inevitable demise of our humanity: posthumanism 'provokes elation but also anxiety about the possibility of a serious de-centering of 'Man', the former measure of all things' (Braidotti, R. 2013). So as our measure of what it means to be "human" shifts, and the post-human becomes more and more real, we must seriously consider whether it's all worth it. I feel we should limit access to these technologies to only those who need it to survive, as allowing it to effectively infect our natural bodies gives chance for people to manipulate it into a means for power and control. Let's leave the Frankensteins, cyberwomen and digibodies of the world to the movies, as allowing this dream to enter the real world may be an interesting experiment, but it's certainly not one we will be able to destroy (or even notice) quickly enough if it all goes wrong.

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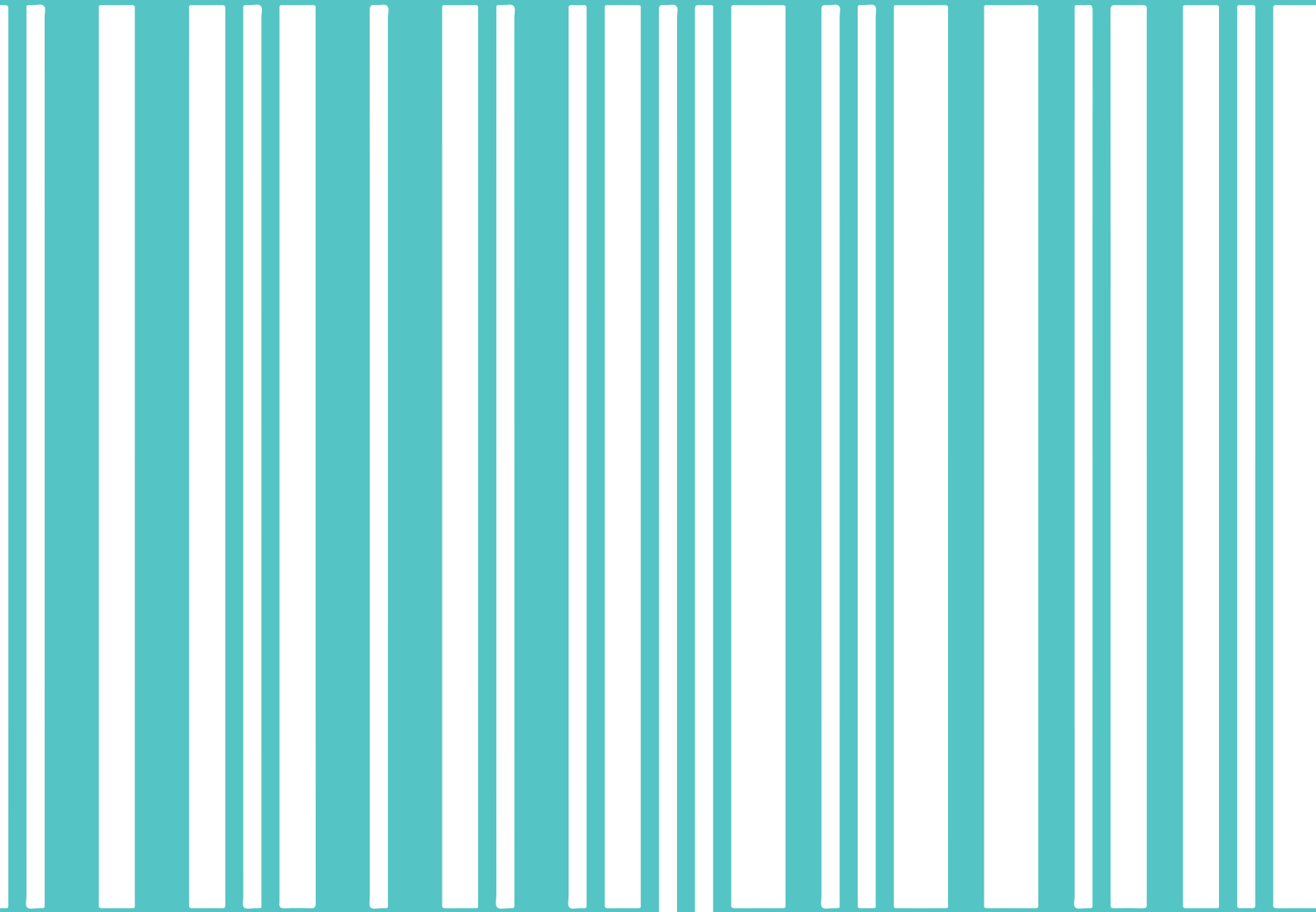
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**[DISCLAIMER: All images were purposely pixelated by the essay author]**



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