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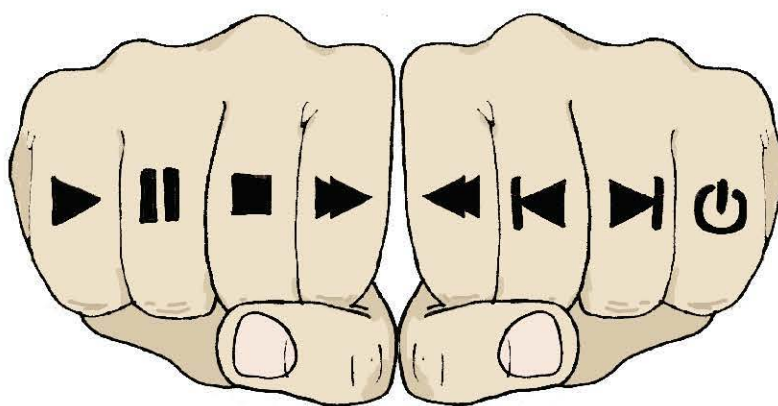
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Deeper Than Ink

The Cybernetic Augmentation of the Human Body



Written by Russell Jaffe
Illustrated by Beatrix Parola

I have always really liked the idea of tattoos. Ever since I was a kid, I've felt just a little out of place in my skin; so, naturally, I was drawn to anything that could make my body feel more fitting. Tattoos were the first step of my self-expression. Through them I could wear the image of my soul, allowing symbols and colors to mix with the contours of my flesh. My parents, being somewhat conservative, were less than pleased by this. After several years of disagreements, they made it very clear that as long as I lived under their roof, I would not be able to try anything deeper than occasional sharpie drawings on my arm. But even then I knew that ink would never be enough for me. Some people see their bodies as sacred temples—I prefer to see mine as a kind of high tech power armor, ready to be customized like a videogame character. I wanted something more than tattoos could offer, but I just didn't know what else I could do.

Tiny implanted signalers that can start a car, unlock doors and allow the user to control the technology around them with nothing more than a gesture.

That was when I discovered implants. I'm not talking about the kind that make your boobs bigger or help you get back on your feet after hip surgery — these were a new kind of body modification altogether. RFID tags are one example of such devices: tiny implanted signalers that can start a car, unlock doors, and allow the user to control the technology around them with nothing more than a gesture. Another augmentation takes the form of a tiny neodymium magnet, smaller than a dime. The specially coated magnet

is permanently embedded under the skin, invisible until it picks up nearby paperclips and other small, metal objects. Honestly, just being able to do a trick like that would have been cool enough, but that isn't even the main purpose of the device; while under the skin, the magnet still has the ability to detect nearby electromagnetic waves. As I read the reports from various biohackers (essentially DIY transhumanists), I imagined what it would be like to open up a whole new spectrum of senses. The signals of TVs, computers and cell phones — normally invisible — could suddenly become very real and tangible forces.

Every year the list of new implants grows longer, from subdermal LED lights and pockets in the skin to navigational aids that can point you north from anywhere in the world. Elon Musk even recently announced an upcoming plan for a “neural lace” enhancement. This ultra-fine mesh would be injected into the bloodstream to allow the brain to seamlessly connect to (and control) various electronic systems through wireless signals. Each time a new implant is created, I am reminded of the fact that we are not chained to the bodies that we are born with. The most extreme modifications even stand at the border of what is currently considered legal. Advances in neuropharmacology, for example, have led to the development of nootropics, which are also known as “smart drugs” or “cognitive enhancers.” This field is extremely experimental, meaning that many of the drugs have not yet been tested for their long-term effects. However, it is also arguably the most promising avenue for radically altering human existence. We live in the future, and through the technology of the present day, we have access to powers far beyond the imagination of even the recent past. My advice? Take your body apart and put it back together just to see what it can do. Change the parts in and out like a mechanic fixing up a high performance engine. In the end, it's your body and nobody else's; that gives you the right to transform it into anything and everything you can imagine. ●

