

# fringe**core**<sup>R</sup>

beyond transgression

## The Techropolis Issue

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### MELTED MEN - SPITCUP

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Grainy stuff with a smell. The MELTED MEN represent the explicit performative, ritualistic and non-theoretical part of DE PLAYER as a mental space. Rituals and psychoses are their main themes. SPITCUP has a handmade chewing tobacco cover with sparkles and collage on the back. Inside a square 8" lathe cut disc plus photo and poster. The guiding text is "The Strange Territory of the Body" by bart plantenga about extreme body culture and how entertainment took over.



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# The strange Territory of the Body

By Bart Plantenga

**"...over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign."  
- John Stuart Mill, On Liberty, 1859**

**"What was once taboo becomes another form of entertainment."  
- Ru Paul, drag queen entertainer**

**"Vanity has its roots in insecurity and its crown in greedy dreams ..."  
- Candice McWilliams, Vogue, 1990**

Some aspects were lifted from TYRANTS IN OUR IRON SKIES, which first appeared in NOZONE: The Extremism Issue, later re-edited for Fiction International.

This document, describing the body as battlefield/canvas, recognizes that one culture's vanity maybe another's defiance. Lipstick applied in the West conforms to its aesthetic parameters of vanity. While for Moslems it may be an act of defiance against a "holier" oppression. One thousand "isms" do battle here: eroticism vs puritanism, catholicism vs paganism...

It also recognizes the great disparity between our presumed polemics of nonconformity within the realm of body alteration and the overwhelming desire to conform within that very gesture. Taboos and ritual are conforming mechanisms societies employ to ensure survival. They offer individual distinction within a greater cohesion just as easily as an individual conformity in the name of societal distinction. But even more seamlessly, taboos can cut and fold into consumable entertainments (see Jerry Springer, or WWII video libraries).

In the beginning tattoos conferred status, distinction; Maori men tattooed exposed flesh while women preferred tongues and labia. Tattoos were decorative garments, skin obscuring skin. What Paul Valery said rang true: "Nothing goes deeper than skin." The Kalinga add a tattoo for every enemy killed. Polynesians had a formula: the more prestige, the more tattoos, the more sexually attractive. Japanese tattoos distinguish occupations; firemen, carpenters and Yakusa gangsters all have their own. Flapper-era girls tattooed their lips red hoping to assure a permanent comeliness. Tattoos set humans apart from nature - the beginnings of vanity and alienation.

Tattoos as an individualistic badge for outsiders - drifters, sailors, prisoners, bikers prostitutes - comes later. Anti-social tattoos - swastikas, devils, bullet holes, Charles Manson - express graphically the nihilistic swing of distinction into alienation. Tattoos arrive with pain and highlight worldly pains already suffered, conferring the tattooed with status. But today, at the edge of the millennium, tattoos are no more expressively extreme than say, Girl Scout merit badges, Nike logos or a Norwegian's winter tan. The slow fade of tattoos is matched by rock and roll's slow ooze into Muzak, the very aural wallpaper it supposedly despised.

Piercing too has become this or that year's accessorized marginality - mix and matched with our Dieselwear. Since we control so little else in our environment we can at least feel meekly empowered knowing we can still alter our physical selves with impunity and excess. Each larger-gauged puncture is meant to jumpstart the listless heart and inspire new shopping adventures. The neo-primitive weekend pagans' only transgressive behavior is spending beyond their credit card limits; with S&M as last season's Vegas theme, dominatrices have theorized and therapeuticized themselves into acceptance as talk show faith healers. This is the tension of faith that hovers between empowerment and vanity.

The days of transgression carried out in the name of others (war or torture) are gone but then just as quickly return. In 1431, one of Joan of Arc's crimes was that she dressed in men's clothes. Although transgressions during ancient Germanic festivals allowed half-naked women to wear fake penises while men wore women's clothes and offered their backsides as hypothetical vaginas, obscuring one's gender remains a fairly universal taboo. Mali's Dogon perform clitoridectomies to ensure women don't remain partly male while circumcision ensures that males don't remain partly female. Western pink-blue demarcations make decisions binary and binding. In the Bible, *Deuteronomy* fulminates against crossdressing. Obscuring gender was a punishment in ancient Rome where criminals had radishes forced up their rectums, symbolically rendering males passive, more female. Meanwhile, gender distinctions blur into ironic illusions among the absurd butcheries of body builders, who cheat nature by pumping iron and injecting steroids, willingly suffering its temporary glories. These bloated caricatures of male virility soon swagger into side effects as muscle-bound, extrapolated steroidal representations of uselessness. They suffer shrivelling (raisin-size) testicles, low sperm counts, hair loss, breast growth, erection dysfunction, irrational belligerence, liver tumors, and heart attacks. But what can one say about Cindy Jackson who "branded" (extreme product loyalty) herself to the point that she had 19 surgical operations to sculpt her into a living Barbie Doll?

So, whether it be in the name of border, racial or gender disharmony, mortifications of flesh or fashion, acts carried out upon the body transform its psychotopography and how this topography is viewed. The ingenuity and scale of the transgressions humankind has perpetrated on humans or individuals have perpetrated upon their selves in the name of whatever has not become more dastardly creative nor more horrendously assive since the beginning of mankind. The body has always been, according to Michel Foucault, "invested with relations of power and domination ... and becomes a useful force only if it is both a productive body and a subjected body ..." I think quickly of American Indians taught "their" trademark scalping techniques (removal of skin from skull with hair attached) by warring Europeans who demanded proofs of their mercenarial kills. Or the redundant time and humiliation hyperextrapolation of torture: Foucault mentions a victim's flesh being torn from the body with red-hot pincers and then having molten lead, boiling oil, burning resin, wax and sulphur poured over the body as open wound.

This broad survey gathers a modest, personally poetic selection from a limitless archive human body transgressions.

**This is dedicated to self-professed "semi-doctor," Bart Hughes, who in the midst of the intoxicating Provo activities of Amsterdam in the ludic '60s pressed a dental drill through his skull while a photographer documented it. Hughes not only believed in auto-trepanation's physical benefits (more oxygen to the brain) but in its political and spiritual benefits as well. He was sure that eventually his brain would regain the fresh precocity of childhood, and the tranquil insight often associated with mystics who spoke of third eyes (see Fringecore 3).**



### Head

Huges' operation-performance has historical precedents. Medieval doctors "cured" various ailments - from devils to headaches - using trepanation. South American Indians considered trepanation a spiritual inauguration. Tibetan monks bored holes into their skulls while Hieronymus Bosch's paintings portray examples of trepanation. We begin with that abode of great powers, the head, because it houses the very notions of body alterations, violations and subsequent justifications. Mind is the product and the body its billboard. That's why New Guinea men bleed from their noses when their wives menstruate. Or perhaps mind is the tyrant and the body its battlefield. That's why enraged nuns went on mad rampages, lopping off male genitalia and female breasts of public statues and sculptures, filling the Vatican's archives with censorial booty. And yet, through all this, bodies remain the venue of escape for minds preoccupied with imprisonment inside that body.

### Body

Bodies house orifices and pores, the metaphysical escape hatches through which the soul must come and go, propelled by pain and ecstasy. As the enemy of spirit, the body remains the target. The eroticized loins are often a primary (vaguely-demarcated) target for religious flagellants. When in 1580, a Florentine nun being flagellated to free her soul from the confines of flesh, began feeling the onset of orgasmic ecstasy, instead of pain, she declared, "This is not the death I long for. It comes with all too much pleasure and delight." In the 1800s, French female Protestants were beaten with a board into which nails had been affectionately driven in the shape of the monarchist's emblem, the *fleur-de-lys*, so that every whack would leave a flowery nationalistic puncture pattern.

Saharan Nubians still practice scarification rites, carving elaborate cicatrices into flesh and rubbing their wounds with ashes. The fibrous tissue contracts during healing to form a permanent raised scar (keloid welts) as body adornment signifying beauty or clan membership.

### Arms

Arms are gawky limbs synonymous with the very tools of destruction they so gloriously take up - arms. Arms are used for embracing and transporting weapons. It's easy to see why in a world dominated by realities defined by perfected illusions (advertising) many Americans have silicone injected into arm muscles so they can appear more toned and virile without all the time-consuming exercise. Meanwhile, Indian Fakirs employ opposite strategies; holding their arms up for weeks until their muscles atrophy.

### Ears

Ears are the vortex of balance and hearing, converting ephemeral sounds into bio-electrical impulses. But they're also spiritual gateways - hearing voices in one's head, an imbalance between reality and illusion now called psychosis. Van Gogh heard these voices the night intense neurological pain drove him to cut off his ear and offer it to a prostitute as a physical manifestation of his imbalance.

### Eyes

Eyes are windows to the soul, and the larger the window, the more that's revealed. Women used to drop deadly belladonna into eyes to dilate pupils, dilation being a physiological sign of arousal or attraction. By seeing something attractive we become more attractive - and available. Meanwhile eyebrows, the eyes' elaborate frames, have always had fashion dictate their dimensions and contours. In the 1780s, women actually hid eyebrows by stretching patches of mouse skin across the forehead.

### Nose

Noses serve as temples to the most primitive (and most fanciful) of our senses, the one least beholden to rules of time or logic (see Proust). And yet, noses sit dead center on the face. There's no way around an unattractive nose except nosejobs which require removal of cartilage from the bridge. The old saying "cutting off one's nose to spite one's face" is most dramatically illustrated by the English nuns who in 875 cut off their noses and lips to avoid being raped by approaching Danish invaders who were so enraged they tied the nuns together and burned them at the stake.

### Neck

Necks are the slender isthmuses that connect head to body. Holding the head up is the neck's job. Decapitating the head from the body symbolizes their interrelationship. In ancient Mediterranean societies, parents guilty of murdering their own children were punished by having the corpse tied face to face around their necks and then forced to lug it around for 3 days.

### Face

The face is often described as heavenly body or a luminescent beacon of human character. Its brightness is dictated by notions of eternal youth. The first facelifts (late 1800s) utilized paraffin injected into the face to eliminate sags and wrinkles and recoup lost illusions of youth. But body heat made the wax lose shape; faces literally melted like candles. 1920s facelifts required that surgeons cut a fleshy swath away from the temple to above the ear. Skin was then pulled up and incisions closed with rows of tension buttons or snaps. Historical revisionism in the name of vanity compelled certain 19th-century German men who craved the status that accompanied scars acquired in sword duels to scar their own faces.

### Stomach

The way to a man's heart is through his stomach. Especially via *hara-kiri*, Japanese ritual suicide, an honorable way of saving face via disembowelment. Africans employing the cauldron torture knew another way through the stomach: a basin is turned upside down over a bound victim. Mice were released onto victim's stomach. Heat applied to the cauldron drives mice so crazy they burrowed through victim's stomach to escape. Central Africans offer a similar torture: naked victims tied to the ground have a metal box filled with ants turned upside down on their stomachs. The ants eat their way through the stomach to escape.

### Chest

The chest is the site of both bosom and heart. Breasts are erotically-charged organs. Capitalism markets their anxiety. Yet odes to their intangible abundance. Some anthropologists believe society's fixation on breasts is an echo of woman's sexually-aroused, swollen backside. The (Wonderbra) enervation of cleavage presses breasts upward producing a pseudo-buttock operation. Darwinians believe enhanced bosoms make women more competitive in the mating market.

### Mouth

Because mouths are "gateways to the soul" various customs dictate that people kiss a dying person's mouth. Others cover their yawns because vestigial beliefs dictate if left uncovered, the soul escapes or evil spirits enter. This is how red lipstick became fashion; red was regarded as a protective color capable of preventing devils from entering mouths. Queensland natives used to believe babies sucked a mother's strength away. Thus mothers sometimes devoured offspring to assure that stolen vigor was returned to mother's body.



## Hands

Hands are tactile centers of arousal. Hands pump rifles as easily as they offer handjobs - one's easily confused for the other. Eroticism leads to morbidity when biological signals are mishandled. Within the handshake, symbol of trust, lie the germs of deceit and manipulation. Molestation on Japanese trains is a major problem. Men engage in a variety of abuses: hands caress hips, breasts, crotches, hair, etc. They often expose or rub their genitals against women. 1993 saw 33 reported cases of men ejaculating onto women while on a train, 294 men prying women's closed knees open; even cases of men licking women's hands.

## Buttocks & Anus

Buttocks are a central erotic focus. But humans through the ages have employed anal rape to render victims more helpless, humiliated, less male, more female. You name it - pipes, screwdrivers, fists, cucumbers, bats, eggplants - they've been used as prostheses of power but also as sexual aids. That American soldier in Vietnam proudly wore amulet necklaces strung with the assholes of dead Viet Cong has always left an impression on me.

## Penis

This central masculine lynchpin of prowess, pride and angst, lies deep inside every brain like a knife in a drawer. It's fallibility leads to myths. Roman authorities tried to prevent the penises of wrestlers, boxers and actors from being exposed by tying the foreskin with a string or a metal ring pulled through it and then pulling it back under the scrotum. Removable penis sheaths were also common. Jewish boys have their foreskins removed on the 8th day of life as a rite to honor the religious covenant between God and Abraham. In Christ's time, priests ritualistically sucked newly circumcised penises clean with their mouths. Some Arabs push circumcision even further: loins are flayed of several layers of skin, peeled away from the stomach, pelvis, penis and inner thighs. If grooms so much as flinch or whimper brides can refuse them.

## Vagina

Because vaginas house the clitoris, fount of limitless ecstasies, in mysterious crevices, vaginas have always been prime targets for awe-struck men who need to control women. Thus vaginas are portrayed as toothy carnivores devouring vulnerable penises. Clitoridectomies were perfected by an English doctor in 1860 and were performed to "cure" women of various nervous disorders such as hysteria. Some Africans and Muslims continue to perform clitoridectomies. Somalians perform infibulations or surgical removals of the labia and clitoris as a rite (of passage or patriarchal control?) to defend against evil spirits and ensure chastity. After infibulation, the girl's vagina is sewn shut with thorns. At her wedding she's partially opened up and again reclosed after she gives birth. Many believe the obliteration of pleasure's source makes for more compliant workers.

## Legs

Legs are prime tools of mobility. When the mobility of legs are constricted power relations shift and intensify. Restricted mobility fetishizes helplessness. The only way 19th-century women could exhibit their legs was to appear at men's balls cross-dressed as men.

## Feet

The foot's power derives from its being covered; the more unexposed the more prone to rhapsodic fetishisms. In the Middle Ages the ultimate favor as for women to allow peeks of their exposed feet. Chinese footbinding is an extreme body alteration. Young girls' supple feet were tightly bound with cloth so that toes eventually curved inward into the sole, eventually approximating a perverse fleshy high heel. Blocks of wood bound to heel limited the gait to "gracefully" constricted steps. The 8-cm. foot remained bound at all times except when it was unwrapped as a "lotus flower" to satisfy foot fetishists. Men caressed the foot for both their own and women's pleasure. The narrow furrow created by the severe fold also served as an alternate vagina. Spike heels are its pale echo.

## Part 2: Futures

Past exploitations of anxious vanity in children, undergarment and pet markets have fallen flat. Doggie diaper sales are down. Underpants as outerwear now seems a ridiculous rumor. Body canvases, hung from sales racks, camouflage souls in allusive bohemian tics and MTV gestures. Each soar and piercing must dig deeper into flesh to reveal truer, yet blurrier selves. Human endeavor lies seething at the delusional margins, pioneered between folly and greed. New capital strategies to colonize the flesh and spirit are absolutely necessary.

\* Introduction of Mattel's Family Piercing Kits leads disillusioned extremists to ever larger-gauged punctures. One "Debbie Donut" had her entire intestinal system wrapped like a wreath around the bowling-ball-sized hole in her abdomen.

\* Mannaknoashi, Japan: Young aspirants are injected with phonograph needles that once purportedly cut into the grooves of old Sun 45s, including Elvis Presley discs. The promise is that these "aural tatata" or injections of vocal abilities via points that pierce the skin will make stars out of them.

\* Funghum, Idaho: Skinheads wear special-ordered shadow-tinted swastika contact lenses.

\* Chiapet, Nevada: Dramatic war wounds can now be enhanced with Wush™, "blush to accent the old pride of war wounds."

\* Karkasona, Kansas: Punctograf™ manufactures do-it-yourself gunshot "wounds" (chest rugs resembling mangled pizza) also surgically-implanted gunshot "wounds." Look real. Includes "authentic" hospital records. Also available: Foetal tattoos, tie-dye placenta, *tromp l'oeil* ax wounds.

\* Cellulita, California: Bored fulminator severed his right ear to wear from the pierced lobe of his left.

\* Dhang, Bangladesh: Successful implant of toys under human skin. Start of new adornment rage. Some doctors worry about hygiene. First toys implanted: yo-yo and Barbie dollhead. Patients ecstatic with new-found attention.

\* Glossolabia, Illinois: Gameboy tester severs right pinkie, dries, pierces & grommets it to wear around his neck as memento to a lost sense of self.

\* Carconama, Japan: Former Yakusa trade minister has own testicles grafted to earlobes.

\* Lummoax, Mississippi: singing group, Three Poor Boys, upon advice of father-manager, have testicles removed at age 13, to become castrati, fulfilling lifelong dream of hitting highest notes of music known to human ears.

\* Jaundicia, Mexico: Man with bifurcated penis establishes 2 independent erections and performs in first bifurcated porn video.

\* Buxomia, Alabama: Ex-Marine splits penis into 3 distinct trifurcated lengths, each tentacle with its own predilection. Like the 3-headed Japanese monster Gydra? His body becomes a site of commerce that generates \$300 in a 4-hour side-show shift as "Gydraman."

\* Fjosnnsk, Finland: After failing to qualify for Olympic team in 5000-meter run, Hakki Gabbagabbastron has legs amputated by paramedical "friend." In no time he has legs replaced by wheels and begins preparations for 2002 Special Olympics qualifications.

\* Chuucha, Argentina: Prisoner "volunteers" donate skin to graft onto fruit and vegetables. One has an eggplant implanted under skin. Putrefaction is documented.

\* Dürthsberg, Germany: Spleenographer has epidermis and pectoralis major removed from between clavicle and rib to expose her most intimate fibrillations of heart. To become marketable she has Plexiglas platelet inserted for easier viewing.

\* Smirsksk, Russia: Diva understudy installs miniature x-ray machine inside pantyhose so she can light up her entire body to reveal who "she really is."

\* Brisstopia, Connecticut: Rechanneled internal organs of trophy recycler are colorfully dyed with bio-luminescence extracted from tropical fish. Highlighted intestines look like an artistic tangle of neon tubes.

\* Bacon Vista, Saskatchewan: Ice sculptor has radical surgery to remove portion of skull and install a Plexiglas insert, allowing views of synaptical action firsthand.

\* Scoponavia, Kumberstan: Body-artist replicates above procedure but with funding, has a digital display ticker installed (miniature version of one in Times Square, information constantly updated, wrapping around a building). It's linked to certain sectors of the brain so that - better than tee shirt or bumper sticker - his thoughts appear as digital readouts on slender screen implanted behind Plexiglas.

\* Noxia, Italy: Woman discovers method for projecting thought onto the now so-called "Scopozipper." She claims it is first instance of "internet thought telemetry." Calls her form of telepathy "virtual psychogramography." Her first successful transference to Scoponavia is a quote from Seneca: "I come home more greedy, more cruel and inhuman, because I have been among human beings."

\* for sources and more information please contact the author at: [ninplant@xs4all.nl](mailto:ninplant@xs4all.nl)

Bart Plantenga is the author of *Wiggling Wishbone: Stories of Pata-Sexual Speculation* (Autonomedia). His novel, *Confessions of a Beer Mystic* will appear in 1999 (Autonomedia). He is currently a writer and DJ in Amsterdam.