

Opening Up: Body Modification Interviews

1995-2008

Shannon Larratt

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Me in 1997, having my implants removed by Jon Cobb at in the kitchen of our Philadelphia apartment. At about this time, BME had changed from a hobby to a full-time business, and, the rest is history!



Introduction

Between 1995 and 2008 I had the opportunity and the honor of interviewing a great many exceptional individuals involved in body modification, body art, and body ritual for the website I'd founded in 1994, BME: Body Modification Ezine. One of the purposes of this website was not only to inform readers about body modification subjects, but to do so in an in-depth and compassionate manner in order to "normalize" the activities that at the time many thought were, for lack of a better word, "nuts".

I think that on the whole, this mission was successful. Perhaps a little too successful, as some of the mystique that made these activities even more appealing has become a thing of the past. It's interesting reading some of these interviews now and seeing what seemed so strange and exciting back then has become so mundane today. After all, in 1995, piercing and tattoo studios were still rare.

Some of the people interviewed here were well-established when we chatted, and others were very early in their lives and have come a long way since. Others have left the industry entirely. Some of the procedures discussed have changed or even become discarded. Some of the individuals have had falls from grace, and others have become celebrities. Reading things over there are so many questions I wish I'd asked, and some I wish I hadn't. It's been hard resisting the urge to update these interviews with new materials and corrections, but I am presenting them as they were originally published, and I hope readers will do their best to not just enjoy them now, but appreciate them in the time period they were written.

The people inside these pages were my friends and my teachers, and I hope that readers grow as much from reading them as I have. Thank you to everyone here, and of course to the many supporters of the website and my other ventures over the years.

Shannon Larratt
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Jon Cobb (I)

Jon Cobb is singularly the reason I got excited about piercing. At a time when body piercing was dominated by a sort of “basic ten” mentality about what could be done, Jon pushed the boundaries farther than anyone had considered possible, and did it in a well-reasoned and responsible manner. I remember excitedly bringing a print-out from rec.arts.bodyart describing his uvula piercing to Stainless Studios, and being inspired to see what else was possible. An early BME contributor did a short interview (in 1995) with Jon a short time after his notoriety began. Jon felt he was misquoted in this interview, and in order to mend bridges with him, this interview was done by phone to New York City. This is the first interview I ever did for the site.

Tell us a bit about your background — your piercing is 100% self taught?

I’ve gleaned information from others but the techniques that I’ve had until I got to Gauntlet were strictly mine. And you could say self educated — you can’t really teach yourself, but you can study and learn and think. — That way you’ll learn. I started in little towns out in North Carolina where I grew up. Until you get told that your ear is different than your forehead, nipple, nose, whatever. You don’t really know.

You were just piercing on yourself then?

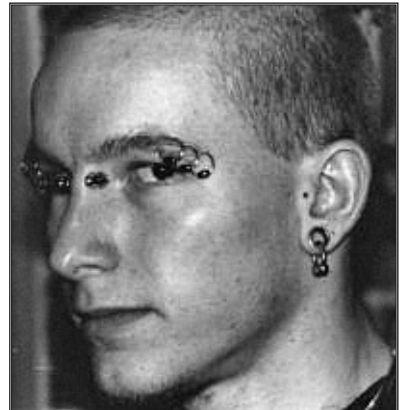
It never even struck me that I could go any further than myself. The idea of working on somebody else’s body actually threw me for a loop for a long time. I just didn’t like the idea of causing somebody pain, but if you think about it in terms of you have done everything in your power to make the pain minimal, then it’s no longer a part of your experience, because it doesn’t help you to feel that — you just minimize it, and be there to soothe them and don’t feel it yourself.

What was the process in realizing you could do it professionally?

I was actually told to do it. I was stationed at Fort Gordon in Georgia and my tattoo artist went, “You know, you watch me a lot.” This was just some guy that ran needles through people — I mean really, really poor hygiene, and I was just watching — as much as you can just watch something, you should at least learn something. He said, “Well, how are your skills?” I said “You know, I don’t know. well, I work on myself” “Well, hell, that’s all you need.” And of course I didn’t stay with that idea, but it did get me thinking. “If this guy’s doing it, he’s not doing it right, I can certainly do a better job than that,” and it just took off from there. And when I saw what it did for people — the change it made in them.

How old were you then?

About eighteen. And it just went from there. I had the basics from working on myself. Not technique-wise, but the knowledge end of it, the sterility needed help to be sure, but I learned that from some tattoo people, and just went from there and became an all-en-



compassing obsession. I just stopped everything — the school work, and just studied, and then took off with it.

So you worked your way through various tattoo shops and then ended up in New York?

I went on the tattoo circuit and pierced all over the nation for about a year and a half, and then talking with Paul King at Gauntlet, and we corresponded a couple of times, and got together a few times. I told him “I’m getting ready to open a shop.” Instead, Gauntlet made me a sweet deal after the article came out with PFIQ. And I said all right.

When Gauntlet first heard about me they were sceptics, and I don’t see why not — You get someone that’s that young, that works that hard for it, with ways you’ve never seen before. If I saw that I’d probably be flipping out too. But the first thing I’d do is go down there. If they’re dangerous I’d want them shut down and if they’re together you need to know that and make that go further or at least understand it and respect it and nobody ever did that.

I guess when you first came into the public spotlight is the whole uvula thing.

That did draw the most attention, the fact that it was even done — whether it was for bad or good wasn’t analysed — Just oh my god, someone’s crossed that line. And then a few people started going back and looking at it and going, he did that, he got it right, and he got it on himself. And then where’s he from and it started going from there.

At this point Jon emphasized to me that he didn’t consider the uvula a “safe” piercing, although he felt he was within his own safety limits doing it. He wanted me to mention that it is extremely difficult, and carries many hidden risks. Still, in the years to come, many people would perform this piercing, and it became a sort of benchmark of technical piercing skill, something that made Jon very uncomfortable.

You hadn’t even been piercing professionally for that long at that point?

It’d been maybe two, two and a half years.

It was done in Columbus, Ohio. They had a sort of tattoo, and on the darker side, biker-esque tattoo show. Gauntlet was there, and Hellion House was there, and it was actually a pretty good gathering for piercers. There were some other shops that were there that were smaller and not as well represented. It was sort of an interesting thing to see the cream rise to the top and also get a handle on what people here are really about and I’ll tell you, it was pretty scary. As well you can imagine.

There are quite a few big-name shops that I’m assuming got that way by being in the right place at the right time.

And because they did it on a big enough scale. I mean check Christine Brief’s [of *Rings and Things*] interview in *In the Flesh* they said that 316L stands for Lead. They’re morons — You can print that. I mean, you’ve got a body jewellery company, you’re selling things to people and you’re not even aware of the proper metallurgy of what you’re supposed to be selling. They’ve got a piercing studio, a wholesale supply company, and they don’t even know that 316L stands for low carbon and not lead. What’s in their jewellery then? This obviously is not quality jewellery. High carbon jewellery pits over time — that’s why you can’t use welding rod — that’s 316L, but not enough. That’ll heal, but six months down

the road the jewellery's just going to look terrible.



Also discussed was one of Jon's more recent projects, what could be described, visibly, as a very deep pubic piercing, or even a base-ampallang.

I actually cut the lower portion of the erectile ligament away from the bone because it's about two fingers wide and maybe a quarter of an inch thick but there's only maybe 1/16th of an inch frenulum that anchors it down to the cavernosum. The part that attaches to the pubic bone is where it's wide — it's like the floor of a tongue. And I just made an incision with a scalpel on the side and just felt behind the spot and sliced away from the bone a little bit and came out the other side and threw in a piece of nylon and stitched it up a little bit. Took two days to get comfortable because when I'd walk the stitches would get pulled and then when I took them out — boom — it was like it was always here. And it's fantastic — I mean, it's just beautiful.

It's really doing fine, and I stretched it to a 6ga and it just stopped completely, just — boom — done. At the rate it's going I only give it a couple of months to be fully healed. I thought it was going to be like a year, year and a half project to tease that last little bit to grow through the middle without backing up secretions.

That's impressive that you've got it healing that quickly.

Well I don't know if it was so much I got it to heal that way through just soaking it twice a day and cleaning it, as much as it just had a place to be. It had a nice little socket for itself, that very few piercings do — it's usually through something or around something, but it's not usually given its own pocket. This worked out great.

One thing people say about you is how much attention you pay to cleanliness and sterility. I'm sure that has a lot to do with it too.

I hope so. [laughs] It's a passion. That's all I can really say about it. I can't even put a coat down for too long, I have to put it up somewhere. It's an obsession, but for once it actually helps.



Even a lot of what you're doing, many people consider that moving very much into the medical area. Doctors may see what you're doing, and see that you're doing it successfully. And that makes them think, "These guys are doing what I do and charging a fraction of what I do."

And maybe a bit more than that. It's harmless as long as no one can seriously get it to work, because that would deter people. When they see these people starting to get it to work, then Pandora's box is opened, and that's really a problem.



Jon Cobb (II)

A few years later I lived with Jon while we were both in Philadelphia. By then not only had he continued to open Pandora's Box, but he'd reached huge mainstream popularity, becoming a poster boy for body piercing — well spoken and good looking, magazines such as "Interview" featured him prominently. He'd weathered his detractors, and had become the piercer most young aspiring modification artists of the time wanted to be. Still, even though he was continuing to innovate (pushing "pocketing", which foreshadowed microdermals years before everyone else caught on), he was starting to become disillusioned with the industry, and not long after we did this interview, he left the industry with mixed feelings. We conducted this chat around his kitchen table, and it was a somewhat disjointed series of profound thoughts on body modification that I still think are some of the most important things said on the subject. This interview shows Jon Cobb for what he was — the reluctant shaman.

It's never been just about doing a "technical piercing". There had the fundamental drive for getting it in the first place. If it's a stupid human trick, I'll leave that to Letterman. I was driven to have the uvula because it reflected the mind. When you put a pair of forceps on a uvula, it feels like you've grabbed the center of the mass of the inside of your head — If you cough up a piece of rice and it sits in the back of your sinus passage, you understand that spot. Psychologically it feels like you're getting the center of your head pierced. That is so live, so real, and the risk inherent only added to the psychological imperative, and I was just driven to have it. Again, not a rational action, but that's not the point. The technical aspects were just a necessity, but of course I tweaked and got into that. But it was never the motivation. It was never enough. Do you need it? Is it supposed to be there? Yes, then we're going for it.

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People see my Om neck brand and they understand they aren't dealing with something from their world, in the sense that when an Indian woman walks into a deli with a large nose ring and a bindi, most Americans aren't going to walk up to them and say "didn't that hurt? what's your mother think?" Intuitively they know that she is not from around here. We are not cut from the same cloth.

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Hair, nails, body language, body shaping — that's all body modification. To a large degree, when a woman gets up and "puts on her face", that becomes her face. You are speaking volumes about yourself, whether it is to embrace as one more facet of the business suit the po-

tential for going farther down that road, so in a sense you're trading yourself in, or to beautify yourself just for your own sake... that's modification.

Body building is extremely dramatic — It changes your entire structure and must be maintained diligently or you will lose all that. It's an enormous commitment. A body builder will move 10,000 pounds of weight in one work-out and do it again the next day, year after year. That's an amazing amount. Those people that are that large have problems moving through their own range of motion. They have to have special clothes. Is that any better or worse than a woman so corseted she can't bend over? There's a certain amount of grace to someone corseted or in high heels or with long nails — to be that fragile and carry it with such poise and power, that is the truly sexiest thing about the modification, not even the aesthetic.

Wrestling was also my first contact with absence of self, which has proven to be the biggest spiritual facet of my life, and for millions of years before, to many others. For the entire time we've been walking upright, every single living being has had to listen to what you could call conscience — the voice inside.

Western culture has made it so that in order to get ahead, it's screw unto others, or let us prey, and that's P-R-E-Y. What's wrong? You get gray hair, you trade in, and you get your Volvo. Men haven't been like that until the past two hundred years. We spent the previous years being mysticism and faith based and listening to that, because if not we'd be eaten in the wild, we'd get lost, any number of things. Instead of the house payment, the Volvo payment, the nine to five job, we spent a lot more time being creative, dancing, sharing, communicating.

I do need to be at work, but I've chosen to be where I am and I'm not trading myself in. I help people find themselves, decorate themselves, and embrace the one thing you get in a culture where you are what you do — the body. And people don't even realize you can do that any more, and that's a very natural human thing — to decorate and cherish. You are your own medium and it's the only thing you're going to get to take with you.



What if we all knew there was no point in selling your soul and working for twenty years, that there's no pension plan because the Earth's polarity is going to flip and we'll all be under water?



The most beautiful thing is the natural self, and I try not to think of it as enhancement so much as an extension of self, or a trade for an image that is representing something that was worth the trade. It's a very big deal to me to trade in self, and it will not be taken lightly.



Everyone that I know that gets a neck tattoo that's not a spider web, that means something to them, has found a way. Because if you don't eat, you will die, and if you are working and eating with a neck tattoo, you are working for yourself, doing something for yourself. It

commits you to you, absolutely. If you're not prepared to walk a very hard road for the rest of your life you shouldn't do it — Not everyone is on a spiritual plain high enough where they are able to struggle through those hardships. What do you do when you have a face full of tattoos and not even MacDonalds will hire you? The nice thing is, you will never be able to work at MacDonalds. As Jimi Hendrix said, "Hey there businessman, you can't dress like me". It's a very tough road and you'd better be prepared to make sacrifices and not value material things, but people.

There is a security possible. You invest in happiness and you invest in people. All other things will crumble in time.



Any moment of perfection — when I'm piercing, as soon as I pick up the forceps, from then on the ritual begins as it has for thousands of people for me now... three full breaths between us and the lines dissolve. Something comes through me, and I never notice if the person laughs, flinches, occasionally there's a scream. I don't even know. We just get in sync and I go away, because it's a moment of clarity. It's not supposed to be a state of doing all the time. If you are doing, you're not able to take in all the things around you.



I have met energy vampires that pull the energy out of everyone in the store, and they scare the hell out of me and it's very real. You can look in those eyes and see a thousand yard stare that you don't want to look at... you can be a baby snake or you can be a demon. It's all up to you.

Civilization does create some radical circles of insanity.



Even if you decide to trade yourself in and go to college — and that's not to say that going to college is trading yourself in, but to do it in the name of money when you don't even know why you'd be doing it is. People are going, "why am I trading my soul in?", and they're coming in for ERLs, neck tattoos, large scale work, finding themselves and seeing the bigger picture.



I feel that some piercings reflect the personality, and those are more like haircuts or styles of clothing that you embrace. Other piercings are supposed to be there. When you look in the mirror you don't look different so much as same somehow, as if it has been there all along.



In piercing it's not the navel I'm doing that keeps me there. Obviously that got old a long time ago. It's that I get thirty minutes with people from all walks of life to possibly learn something and definitely to teach something. They're awake — they're afraid, it's a moment where their physical body is jeopardized in a culture where everything is soft and all you have to do is trade in your soul. When we come to grips with pain, that's a new thing for a Westerner. Our rites of passage are getting drunk, going to college, getting laid... But this is a moment where you really do have to earn it. This is going to hurt. Why am I doing this? And get to maybe help you see that you aren't what you do, and maybe it is alright that you want something for yourself, and maybe it would be OK to tell work to stick it this time, and if it doesn't work out I'll find a job where I can be me. So many people are starting to touch on that because we've set our world up to fail and I've got a chance to let them know what else can be. I've had a woman trade in a \$50,000 job over her labret. It was symbolic of the bigger picture — as soon as she did it, she cried, and realized that she only needed \$50,000 a year because \$40,000 of it was paying for her huge house and her Jaguar that all she did was look at and cruise around in... and now she may be walking down the beach and eating oranges that cost a couple bucks a day. You want to tell me who's having the better time? She's living as a human, as part of the Earth, and not as an alien on it.



I have no third eye so to speak — I don't see pictures when I dream. It's more emotions, feelings, smells, flashes of images yet no specifics — It's irrelevant. I don't wear the work that I want, I wear the work that is supposed to be on me. And consequently it's taken me years and years to get pieces because it has to be revealed to me by myself, through my mind so to speak. I don't feel tattooing or piercing or scarification or any modification is a beautification for me so much as a trading in of me.

Tom Brazda

Along with Jon Cobb, Tom Brazda was the most influential force in shaping how I thought about body piercing. I had the good luck of getting a job at his studio “Stainless Studios” in Toronto in 1994, and was a part of the development of modern surface piercing technology. Tom was the quintessential “piercing nerd”, and we spent enormous amounts of time making our many thought experiments and discussions at Stainless real. Almost all of my piercings were done by Tom, many of them experimental (many surface piercings, early large dermal punches, a uvula, and more). The first part of this interview was done in the spring of 1996 (and was published in abridged form in Tattoo Savage — my first print published article), and the second portion was done about a year later.



Like most people, Tom got interested in piercing for reasons that are impossible to verbalize — “I just wanted it”.

That was about 6 years ago. “The only person I knew of who was doing piercings in Toronto back then was a nurse. I checked it out, didn’t feel comfortable with the aesthetics, and ended up doing the piercing improperly on myself (taking stupid advice from friends who had it done with ear piercing guns, safety pins, etc.). I learned very quickly that what I did was wrong — It just didn’t feel right. I took the piercings out

and tried to find a better way to do it.”

Over the next two years he began learning to pierce by educating himself and piercing himself and his friends. “I am fully self educated and learned through careful thought, research and action, not random experimentation. In a perfect world, as well as the real world, apprenticeship is the best way, but at that point in time, it simply was not an option for me. It’s better to take your time and learn something with guidance and have somebody there to correct you along the way and make sure you don’t develop bad habits. The hardest thing to learn is crisis management — What do you do if somebody starts having a seizure on you and you have never experienced this before?”

After two years of learning he felt comfortable enough with his abilities to open a studio named “Rite of Passage” with a friend. Two years later they relocated and changed their name to “Stainless Studios Body Art” since they felt that the term “Rite of Passage” had become far too trendy. “When you start hearing things like ‘Bungee jumping for the first time was a real rite of passage’ you know the term is being over-used.”

Stainless is located in a great section of Toronto — Queen St. West. The studio has a professional appearance, without looking too much like either a hospital or a jungle “since both of these looks scare off some people”. Basically it looks like a really nice apartment. The person that owned the space before Stainless moved in was an architect, so they inherited his nice spiral staircase, skylights, and other perks. The comment they get most about the studio is, “I’d love to live here”.

Tom is the “senior piercer” (for lack of a better term — he says), and the full crew is com-

prised of one other piercer and two apprentices. They also have two tattoo artists and a small jewelry manufacturing department, which allows them to make the range of custom jewelry required for the many specialized piercings that Tom does. Tom's favorite piercings to do are the ones where people leave with a smile. "It is fun doing extreme piercing, but not for the sake of the piercing itself. Piercing isn't just about the technical aspects... You could be an evil troll and figure that out. Piercing is first and foremost a service industry — We are one part counselor, one part doctor, and one part technician."

Tom has perfected techniques for doing some very unusual piercings. When I asked him about these signature pierces he said "First of all, it's important to note that no piercing is really a "signature" — It's a safe bet that someone, somewhere has done it before, but when it comes down to it, who does it first isn't the important thing. What's important is giving a client the piercing they want (both extreme and standard ones) in the safest and most well thought out way possible. And that includes not doing the piercing if it's not safe, and making sure they understand the implications and risks."

Probably the most popular extreme piercing that Tom does regularly is what he calls the "spinal piercing", which is one or more (usually two) piercings situated at the base of the spine, horizontally, just above the pant line.

"What's important about this piercing is not technique or placement, but jewelry design. The problem with most surface-to-surface piercings is rejection, where the jewelry is slowly pushed out of the body. In the subcutaneous layers of skin, blood vessels run parallel to the skin, and above that they sprout up like grass to "feed" the skin above. When a piece of jewelry intersects these blood vessels it reduces the blood supply to the skin above it, which slowly dies and the piercing grows out. So with the spinal and forehead piercings (and many other surface piercings) what we do is make jewelry that goes straight down into the skin, then straight across, and then straight out, causing the least possible stress. Using this technique we've had excellent long term results, far better than other surface piercing techniques such as nylon and curved bars, which are not generally viable in the long term."

The scalpeled Madison was done with the idea that a large clean cut would allow the body to place the jewelry where it wanted, with minimal stress, and then heal very quickly since a scalpel cut is so clean. This theory turned out to be true. "The initial healing was finished very quickly, with the large cut closing fully within days. Throughout this period the jewelry lay comfortably flat on the body without pushing out on the body and leading to migration. The scalpel has the added benefit that while it makes a large hole, it removes no tissue whatsoever and makes a flat cut, unlike a large gauge needle or dermal punch."

The knuckle piercing was done as an alternative piercing to the handweb. "A handweb piercing is high maintenance and high stress, and therefore most people are unable to keep them in for long, so we looked for piercings that wouldn't reject in this way. On some people's hands this knuckle piercing passes through nearly parallel surfaces, and since the blood circulation is quite good there, a skin tube forms very quickly. This knuckle piercing is lower stress, and allows for full freedom of movement without pulling on the piercing. The difficulty with this piercing is that it is exposed to a very large amount of foreign bacteria, which makes cleaning of exceptional importance."

When I asked Tom if he worried about people without adequate training doing these types

of piercings he responded “I worry about people WITH training doing these piercings. It’s not the training that’s important — it’s their ability to think clearly and be able to plan what they are doing and understand the potential problems.”

“Over-training can be a problem. Some people make the mistake of taking what they are taught as gospel truth and never really understand it... It’s the understanding that’s important — Where the information came from (teaching, apprenticeship, self-discovery, whatever) isn’t really important — but it MUST be understood.”

Since extreme piercing has gotten so much exposure recently in the media, the process is snowballing and more and more people are trying to do and get more and more extreme piercings. Most of these piercings themselves are not dangerous if done properly and an intelligent piercer should be able to tell what is dangerous with a little planning. “Look at some of the photos of extreme piercings that have appeared in magazines lately — Take a close look and you’ll realize that these are fresh piercings — It’s quite rare to actually see them healed. And this is because they aren’t being thought about... If a piercing isn’t viable, unless the client knows that and wants that, the piercing shouldn’t be done. It’s not worth it.”

Tom feels that the real risk isn’t people trying to do these piercings, it’s people trying to do them without thinking about the consequences. He also notes that “many of these piercings require very specialized jewelry, made to size for the client in very unusual shapes. Most studios simply do not have easy enough access to these jewelry types and resort to using inadequate jewelry.”

[Anti-eyebrow] “If the jewelry is in the wrong place, it can pull on the skin causing irritation or tearing, leading to either migration, keloiding, or at best greatly lengthened healing. Many piercers make the mistake of trying to learn proper placement from a magazine. Everyone’s body is slightly different and without an understanding of the underlying anatomy and healing processes, it’s all for naught. Gauge is important in that it must be large enough to allow for proper drainage, but small enough to avoid excessive weight on the fresh piercing. Although in some cases taping the jewelry down during the healing process can eliminate the weight, as can alternative materials such as nylon and titanium. And as far as diameter, it is primarily important in that too large a diameter can cause irritation from getting caught on things and leverage from twisting. Too small can pinch the tissue (restricting necessary blood flow, or causing tearing, or trapping secretions resulting in abscess) or even sink in if the piercing swells.”

Usually bad jewelry choice simply results in harmless migration and scarring, but as Tom points out “even that is unacceptable when there is a better way to do things.” Getting the piercing is only part of the procedure — aftercare has equal importance. The most common problems are irritations resulting from everyday cleansers like soap and laundry detergents (which your piercing will come into contact with unless you’re always naked or don’t wash your clothes). “Ever seen the detergent commercials where they show the engineered enzymes breaking down blood and food proteins? Imagine what these can do to the proteins required for healing inside your piercing. People tend to underestimate the importance of hypoallergenic products during the healing time.”

Tom also points out that “many piercing problems stem from the fact that people often

think that once the initial healing period is over, that they can stop the aftercare, and let other people play with their piercings. While your body has little difficulty dealing with its own local bacteria, which it has been existing with on a symbiotic level since birth, it does not have this “familiarity” with foreign bacteria from other people’s bodies.”

So how does one choose a piercer, especially if you’re considering getting an extreme or odd piece? “That’s a very difficult question. Even for a client who knows piercing well, it’s hard to tell. Since there have been some excellent interviews with artists and thinkers such as Jon Cobb recently, every scratcher out there knows exactly the right things to say. All they have to do is repeat the interview — It’s very easy for people to get fooled. “

“Probably the best thing to do is to look through their portfolios. Do you see many versions of the same piercing, consistently well placed? Do they also show healed piercings? Especially with extreme or surface piercings, it’s easy to do the initial placement — it’s getting it to heal that’s the trick.”

“Another way to tell is their aftercare sheet (although they could have just copied it from another piercer). Does it give good advice? Are the healing times realistic? I’d be worried if I was told my navel would be healed in two weeks, but also if I was told in two years. In the first case you know that either they are either lying or stupid, and in the second they are either doing something wrong or trying to cover themselves in the case of bad healing.”

Tom’s own piercings “and I have less than you’d think” include moderately stretched ears, labret, frenum, nostril, and tragus. He has no favorites — “I like them all... They make me feel more like who I am.”

Future plans for more work? “I am very particular about getting piercings and who does them, so I haven’t been in any kind of a mad rush to get them all. I do have plans for more, but I have a lifetime to get them. But I’ll soon be getting a trans-scrotal piercing, courtesy of Jon Cobb, which I’ve been looking forward to for some time.”

And what does Tom do for fun when he’s not poking holes in people? “Nothing. I walk my dog, Lobo, but it’s pretty hard to drag me away from my work.”



Tom, you’ve been a proponent of large gauge initial piercing for quite some time now — Why start large? Why not just stretch?

First of all, the initial question is, does the customer want jewelry, or “hardware”? For some people starting at a smaller gauge is not the best option. For people who are rough on their piercings (SM, sports, or damage through everyday activity), starting at a smaller size is more dangerous for them. The larger gauge piercing actually has a faster healing time than a smaller gauge piercing.

Why does it heal faster? Wouldn’t a larger wound take longer to heal?

The larger gauge piercing provides for better drainage of the fluids that build up inside a piercing. Consider what those fluids are made up of. The main example I use to explain it to people is rotting meat. The cells that have been damaged are not repaired, but are gotten rid of. As these decompose, their byproducts are toxic to our systems, so it is very im-

portant that we facilitate the removal of these fluids.

A larger piercing also has more opportunity to breathe, allowing more oxygen to enter into the wound. (This is not accomplished by using a larger gauge needle in relation to the jewelry — This would simply result in bleeding until the tissue shrinks around the jewelry). A larger piece of jewelry also provides less stress (PSI) on the surrounding tissue due to its surface area. The only issue here is weight. The jewelry must not be too heavy, as the motion of the jewelry rocking back and forth can rub on the healing tissue and damage it. For some piercings the simple solution is to tape down the jewelry during healing. In other cases, smaller diameter jewelry or lighter weight materials may be used.

A small gauge piercing puts a lot of stress on the surrounding tissue because of its small surface area — Any little tug or bump is constantly cutting into the tissue, thereby slowing down the healing process.

Also, your body recognizes a larger wound more quickly than it does a smaller wound. Your body's defense and healing systems kick in much stronger and more quickly. With a larger wound the initial stimulus that it produces on your immune system is much greater, so the initial healing is much faster, whereas a small piercing is recognized more like a splinter by your body.

With a large gauge piercing you must consider what is the maximum size a piercing can be done in for a given body part — What is the most damage that area can receive and still heal itself properly? (You're not going to do a 10ga eyebrow, but you can do it in a 14ga, whereas a PA can be done in a rather large size and still heal well and quickly.)

Why use dermal punches or scalpels... Aren't needles good enough?

The basic rule for anything you are doing is use the right tool for the job. Just because something does an OK job does not mean that there isn't anything that can do it better. This is the whole premise behind the Industrial Revolution — Take any idea and improve on it, and then improve on that... etc. etc.

A needle works by making a cut, not a coring out tissue (the coring out of tissue only happens when a cork is used too tight with the needle). The cut is made the width of the needle and then the cut is stretched up to the diameter of the needle. This produces a lot of stress on the edges of the cut, which are the weak point. In stretchy tissue, this is not a major problem. A dermal punch cuts a perfectly round hole (it does remove tissue). Therefore, the stresses on the tissue are lessened, because they are equally distributed in all directions. This also produces a stronger initial hole.

The problem with the dermal punch is the fact that it does remove tissue, not just cut. Whenever using a dermal punch this fact must be considered in relation to where it is being used — For example, someone with rather large earlobes this does not pose a problem, but for someone with small, almost nonexistent, making a cut is a better option.

As far as scalpels go, they cannot make just small wounds as a needle would. In many ways, a scalpel and insertion taper work in the exact same manner as a needle does, but in a larger scale. But by using a scalpel and taper, the piercing can be done in a less painful way. Imagine using a 4ga needle as opposed to making a 3/16" cut and inserting an insertion

taper. A scalpel also offers a slightly higher degree of control than a large gauge cut. Multiple incisions can be made to avoid damaging sensitive tissue.

The problem with scalpels is primarily the large size of the cut they make. In using a scalpel to do a piercing, there must be a lot more thought put into the piercing, strictly in the size of the piercing.

Some piercers have made the statement that surface piercings are the sign of a time when aesthetics are absent. What is your response to that?

The reason that you're seeing more surface piercings (and unusual piercings) nowadays is not due to a change in aesthetics and fashion, but due to a change in knowledge — They are a more viable option nowadays. Previously we did not know enough about the way the body worked with piercings to heal them successfully.

We are not in a time lacking in aesthetics — Look around — we're in a time of change and aesthetic diversity. People have more aesthetic options nowadays than they've ever had before.

Fifteen years ago if you looked in fashion magazines, they were all showing you a similar look. But now, when you look in those same magazines, you will see pages and pages of different looks, all in the same magazine, and all "correct". We're going through a period of diversity. Instead of complying to one aesthetic, we now have the option of many.

We have opened up our eyes to many other cultures and accepted their ways even though they were strange to us, and through this we have learned to adapt our own values of aesthetics (outside of our own cultural context).

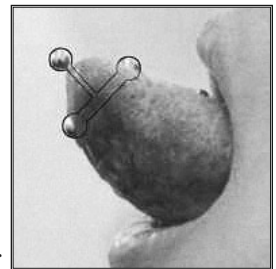
What is it that defines the line between a medical procedure and an advanced piercing procedure?

Nothing. All piercing procedures should be looked at as a medical procedure in that we are penetrating layers of tissue, even with the simplest of piercings. The same precautions must be taken no matter what we are doing.

That's really a loaded question — a lot of the same issues come up in our industry as in medicine. However, what we're doing is not practising medicine, in the sense that we are not treating people's disorders and medical problems. We are like estheticians; we are practising beauty.

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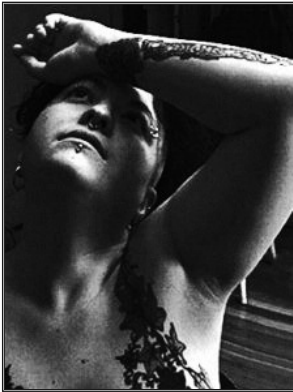
The "Xenn" piercing, a t-bar tongue. *The Xenn piercing is a three bead tongue piercing; one on the top and bottom, in forward but traditional locations, and the third on the top of the tongue. This piercing is done in several stages. First a vertical piercing is made, which is then stretched to at least an 8ga. When this piercing is healed, a second piercing is made, going from the front of the tongue and out the bottom of the first piercing. For a few days a temporary nylon retainer is worn and is then replaced by the final metal jewelry. Because the client was used to wearing a circular barbell in the tip of their tongue, there were no difficulties with teeth or speaking.*



Anne Greenblatt

Anne Greenblatt is one of the most under-appreciated voices in body piercing history. As the maintainer of the Usenet rec.arts.bodyart body piercing FAQ, her influence on thousands of body piercers and even more piercing enthusiasts is immeasurable. Her work in sharing the piercing knowledge of the day was an important precursor to the web and sites such as BME. This interview was done in 1996.

Anne Greenblatt is the Piercing FAQ maintainer for the Usenet newsgroup rec.arts.bodyart, as well as the owner of Piercing Exquisite. She describes herself as an “an eclectic, married, bisexual bodyartist” born Anne Ritsuko Duvall (hence her online and college radio alias “ardvark”) to conservative parents (father Irish American, mother Japanese) on February 21, 1971.



Her first exposure to bodyart came when she was twelve years old. After much begging she convinced her parents to allow her to pierce her ears. Shortly thereafter she repierced her ears herself with a needle and an ice-cube. While in high school, listening to the Sex Pistols, goth, and Britpop she dreamed of a lip ring but since she was living at she home never had the freedom to do it. However, once she left for college these restrictions were lifted. She moved to Harrisonburg, Virginia with her husband

Dan where she discovered the internet, and, with Dan, piercing through the now-retired Washington piercer Logger and a friend who prefers to be known as R.I.P.

At that time the rec.arts.bodyart FAQs were being maintained by Paul “Synthetic Man” Davies. Anne recounts how she came to take over that role: “I emailed ‘Synthetic Man’ with Gauntlet studio address updates, and he responded that he hadn’t had much time to devote to the FAQ. I suggested that I could help update it, we discussed the state of the FAQ openly on the group, and Lani and I ended-up taking over management of the FAQ (she volunteered to manage the Tattoo section, and hence it was split between tattooing and piercing).”

“To maintain an FAQ means to be responsible for posting it to said group on a regular basis. On RAB we chose to post the FAQs monthly.”

“In addition to these basic duties, I update the FAQ in some way, shape or form monthly. Usually this involves including new Piercer Reviews in the directory of studios, adding new publications of reviews in the resources list, and updating or adding to the informational texts when the need arises.”

Since Anne is a professional piercer as well as the FAQ maintainer, I asked her if it ever put her into a difficult or “conflict-of-interest” position. “Exactly the opposite. Because I manage a non-profit publication, I am considered impartial. Because I do not work for a jewelry company, I feel I am impartial in my jewelry reviews.”

“While my studio is listed in the directory, I do not include recommendations of my serv-

ices. Hopefully this will prevent people from accusing me of maintaining the FAQ to benefit financially from it (no one has accused me of that yet, but with the change in climate on the 'net in the last year, anything is possible)."

What is that change? Anne sums it up as "Spam spam spam spam spam spam eggs sausage and spam..."

"The readership of RAB has grown to include a broader range of people in terms of age, occupation, sexual proclivities, and bodyart / bod-mod interests. For example, 5 years ago branding was considered very 'extreme' and was rarely mentioned." (Anne herself was recently branded by another rec.arts.bodyart regular).

Anne says that the biggest difference between the online and real world (F2F, 'face-to-face') bodyart community is that when you're discussing bodyart, you can't usually see the bodyart in question. "Introductions are made opposite than how they occur in real life: on the 'net people come to RAB to find others interested in bodyart, while in the real world many times it's the bodyart that speaks first and starts conversation."

Women, especially women with piercings have traditionally faced discrimination and harassment. This manifests itself on the net in the same way that it does in real life. Anne points out though, "many people who harass me online ('You're fucking sick!') would never, ever harass me in public. The 'net offers some sense of anonymity, a kind of firewall that people take advantage of. They think, 'Well, this bitch will never see me in real life, so I can get away with it.' Little do they realize that I will not hesitate to report them to their ISP and have their account cancelled for sexual harassment!"

"On the 'net, people can harass you from any geographical location. In real life I've lived in small-town Virginia and now in the San Francisco Bay area. In Virginia, I was harassed or assaulted with endless questions on a daily basis, nearly every time I was out in public. In SF, people ignore you or they admire you for your style."

The combination of the FAQ and her web page showing pictures of her piercings (all of them) exposes Anne's name to a wide range of people. Every other month (posting) she says she receives some stupid message in response to the FAQ. For example, in response to the sections addressing genital piercings, "Why the hell would you do that?"

"I've experienced more harassment in response to my webpage, which I installed almost exactly a year ago." Dan, who maintains her page pipes in the exact date, March 14th, 1996. Anne is as out and outspoken on her webpage as she is on RAB, visually as well as verbally. Because of that, she gets a few emails a month commenting on either how sexy her genitals are or how disgusting they are! She says, "I feel more threatened by the 'I want to screw your pierced pussy' messages than the 'You're gross' messages for obvious reasons."

To females approaching the net Anne suggest that they educate themselves of the "risks". By that she doesn't mean risks that are inherent to the net, but risks that become "more prominent or in-your-face" due to being on the net. She says, "the dangers of 'net have been hyped in the media during the last few months, all about seduction (seduction of children by pedophiles, or seduction of unwary customers by MMF ['Make Money Fast'] schemes). There are assholes everywhere. The 'net is just another venue in which they can operate, unfortunately. As in the real world, one is responsible for self-education and awareness. Luck-

ily, the 'net has many sites and resources to draw from (like [news.newusers.announce](#)).”

Although piercing is a largely male-dominated career, Anne has had the advantage that she has a predominantly female clientele. Just as there are women who would rather visit a female gynecologist (herself included) because they feel that a woman will have personal insights and empathy that a man could never have, there are also plenty of women who would rather visit a female piercer.

Later I asked Anne what she thought about all the media attention piercing and more extreme modifications have been getting over the last couple of years. Would it have a positive or negative effect? Could it act as a unifying force inside the body modification community? Anne pointed out some of the rifts inside the bod mod community. “There will always be people for whom any piercing is considered unhealthy or a sin. There are people with facial piercings who are not interested in genital piercing, and vice versa. I’ve heard that many tattoo conventions discriminate against piercing or piercers signing-up for a booth!”

“In terms of mainstream culture vs. ‘underground’ culture and governmental interests, the more extreme modifications may scare a lot of people into seeking a ban on all bod-mods. But this highly personal reaction of the conservative quarters is always voiced in terms of ‘protecting our children.’ In the eyes of conservatives, anything aside from one hole in each lobe is unacceptable, and ‘By God My Child Won’t Be Doing It, Because I Won’t Let Her.’”

Although many body artists would disagree, Anne warns that some bod mods are already illegal in terms of medical malpractice. “For example, use of a scalpel or a dermal punch by a non-physician is malpractice. And a few industrialized nations are passing or have passed laws banning female genital mutilation which, in some cases, are worded to include voluntary piercing!”

Recently Anne has developed an interest in female circumcision — Not the involuntary kind she’d just described, but a voluntary splitting of the hood with the purpose of exposing the clitoris to additional stimulation. She clarifies, “I’ve always lived by, ‘To each his/her own, as long as he/she is not harming others.’ And of course I’m against someone being forced into piercing, cutting, or even eating spinach if he/she does not want to. The stories I’ve heard of forced circumcision turn my stomach. But so does infant male circumcision, now that I’ve seen and read how the procedure is done; no anesthetic is used, the babies are restrained by all four limbs and scream themselves unconscious. This, in a country that prides itself on basic human rights. While I am in favor of parental control in terms of educating a child about the world, forced circumcision and physical punishment are unnecessary and contrary to educating the child to respect others’ bodies.”



CM Hurt

Cynthia Hurt lives in a house with two dogs and a white picket fence. She also rides a 750 intruder and is a sadist... Cynthia was one of the first people I got to know well on the S&M side of body modification and body play, and became one of BME's first writers as she put together a series of articles on saline injection, sounding, and other play subjects. I talked to her about it all in this 1996 interview.

Professionally I got into body mods through body play (bdsm) — I got into temporary and permanent body mods about 5 years ago, when it was called extreme play, :)

I have always been dominant in my personal relationships, even before I knew what it was. I have to laugh when I look back and remember trying to get my needs met in a vanilla world. More than one man was surprised by my foot in his mouth during sex! I always wanted to tie my partners up and give them intense sensations — I was a sensualist long before I knew what bdsm was. I date my serious interest of bdsm back to my sobriety, as that was when my clarity and focus shifted. It became more than just “kinky” sex.



I was so fascinated with the physical, mental and spiritual aspects of play piercing that I decided to study Permanent Piercing. I apprenticed in LA at a studio that I won't name as the owner didn't approve of my art beyond piercing.

The funniest thing that ever happened to me in play was that I got stuck performing an anal double fisting. It wasn't funny at the time, but I have come to appreciate the humor in it...

What type of apprenticeship did you do?

I started out cleaning the studio, tools, etc and observing the techniques. I was marking and assisting by the end of the first week. I did my first permanent piercing on my own in the second week and was hooked. The arrangement was never for money, it was about learning and the experience. I wanted to do it for the rush, the creativity, and the thrill — I ever thought about it as a profession. I like to experience things.

I stayed there about 4 months — The owner had a problem with where I was going with my piercings. My interests were not limited to “straight” piercings and he wasn't impressed with my being a Professional Dominatrix or what he called “mutilation” of the flesh — aka Body mods. I stayed as long as I could, but I was looking to work with someone closer to

my area (LA is an hour away). I soon found out that most of the piercers in the area were located in trendy retail shops, and piercing young people as a fashion statement. I also found them to be, for the most part, inexperienced, doing a “job” and not compatible with me. I am very opinionated and I know what I know.

I studied everything that I could get my hands on, videos, articles, etc. In 1995 I started on my own, and opened my studio, CM Hurt.

What was the environment of the studio? “Typical”, or BDSM-leaning?

The studio, CM Hurt, was a straight, typical studio. I would do most all types of piercings there, but made arrangements for body mods and body play for after hours and elsewhere. People would come to me for a straight piercing and in the course of conversation, would disclose enough about themselves for me to determine their headspace. I was actually surprised at the number of middle aged people that would come for a piercing and we would wind up talking body mods and play. It was so refreshing to be able to assist them in their journeys. Most of them have become friends. When my oldest son was apprenticing with me, he would primarily handle the young crowd, the fashion people, etc. I had a steady flow of clients from bdsm circles, and they were typically older and into more “advanced” piercings and mods.

Are the body modifications that you do almost always in a scene, or do you have more “normal” clients and piercings as well?

[Laughs] Normal is relative. Right now about 75% of the piercings and mods are done in a scene setting. Maybe 15% are bdsm/fetishists opting for a non scene setting, they are usually unpartnered. The remaining 10% haven’t a clue about me and my world, they just want to get their tongues or navels pierced because it’s “cool”. I believe that only 5% of them will progress further into piercings, mods or play.

I own three autoclaves, ultra sonic and so many tools and toys that I have collected. I have been seriously studying aspects of body play for several years, making it a point to search out and research prior to practicing anything. I have to be totally in control of the situation and technique or my conscience prevents me from doing it. I have been practicing temporary body mods as a Pro Domme for quite a while, :) I learned much of what I know about male genital modification from my gay leather friends, I just took it a step further. Much of what I have learned was through studying on my own and common sense.

I have always been fascinated with the pain/pleasure concept and I suppose that I am quite adept at applying it, I work a lot. I found others with an interest in body mods, mostly temporary, within the local bdsm community but no others with real skill or experience. It wasn’t until I started searching the web that I found that I was not alone, :)

Have you also made contacts online?

Most definitely, I spent quite a bit of time surfing for info. I would have to say that I even learned a lot from online, the people and things I found were so exciting — I would browse the newsgroups but they were close to impossible to keep up with. I didn’t use my name at first... I used a screen name. I was up in Sacramento presenting a program on Play Piercing to a bdsm group and one of the people there steered me to BME. I was home :) — I

found people that didn't think I was "extreme". I like knowing that there are more people like myself, fascinated with the manipulation of flesh. I have such high regard for many of the others that have work displayed in the EXTREME section. I would love to spend time picking the brains of people like Steve, Keith, Patrick, Todd, DocF, and a few others for the techniques they have pioneered. (Why are they all men?) As far as clients, I have met many online. I seem to be able to facilitate acquiring items needed for mods, and that is nice, it helps pay for the website (Check out my web page at <http://www.cmhurt.com/>) and it gives me the opportunity to be certain that these people fully understand the procedure and are being as safe as possible to themselves. Lastly, online contact made me cognizant that in some areas of mods, I had gained more knowledge and experience than most others.

I didn't realize that things I love to do were abnormal for perverts. I have a fascination with body mods, it is an art, I create and recreate. I love to manipulate flesh. I love to enter the bodies of others. I love the energy that passes between us. I love to see the glaze in their eyes. I love what I do.

Besides many piercings, my experiences in body mods include scrotal and labial saline inflation (which are displayed on BME), advanced piercing, beading/pearling, urethral stretching, scrotal lengthening, anal stretching, infibulation, vacuum enlargement, foreskin stretching, frenulum removal, partial circumcision (male and female), labial trimming, branding, scarring and lots of cutting and suturing.

What do you mean by advanced piercing?

I classify advanced as procedures such as beading/pearling, implants, transscrotals, designing multiple pierce projects, deep shaft piercings, cosmetic piercing (I recently performed a female piercing designed to hold excessive tissue covering the clithood back away from the clit. It is holding and healing quite well at this point), piercing based chastity devices, traditional surface piercing, etc.

I am very apprehensive of giving people just enough information to damage themselves or another. I almost prefer saying nothing at all over saying enough to lead someone into thinking that it is a simple thing, without risks. I am also quite concerned with opening myself up to possible investigation by nosey authorities.

The male circumcision was so intense, it was done in a partial fulfillment of a castration fantasy, he did not want a castration. In all honesty it was partial because I was concerned about taking too much off the top, so to speak. I was unfamiliar with Tara Klamps and other tools, so I went with what I knew. Clamp, scalpel, suture. It took a very long time and it was successful. I did not cut or remove the frenulum. He would like more skin removed and does not wish a different procedure. It's a possibility. I am interested in studying this further and certainly do not claim to be an expert. I research and go slowly when cutting away is involved.

The female circumcisions were different, one involved removing a V-shaped piece of tissue at the top and pulling the remaining skin together and suturing. The point was to remove excessive tissue — kind of like a nip and tuck. The other required trimming a small amount of tissue from both sides and above the clitoris. This one involved cauterization

rather than suturing. Both women had requested this from their doctors, who had declined, not seeing the need. They did not recognize the women's rights over their own bodies.

The labial procedure only required trimming on one side, to even out the lips. They were grossly out of proportion. Again, a situation where the doctors consulted thought it unnecessary. I am known to have a thing about symmetry, :))

I practise both temporary and permanent body modifications and teach them also. I practice, obviously, on both males and females, straight and otherwise. I consider my art and play as pansexual. My experiences in play are quite extensive as are my interests.

If doctors refuse to do it, then you're not practising medicine without a license, right?

Shannon, I am not nor have I ever claimed to have any medical experience or training. The things that I practice are not practicing medicine. I do want to stress common sense and safety. I know that there are people out there doing very risky, probably very dangerous things to themselves and to others. I really want for everyone to be safe and sane. I want people to check out anyone that they are considering allowing to do body art or modification on them, whether it's a tattooist, piercer, top, mod practitioner or shaman. Interview them, check out their workspace, equipment, health certificates, emergency response certification, and their headspace. I urge anyone considering mods to/on themselves to be sure that they are not mutilating or killing themselves.

I don't want anyone to think that these are things they should or could rush out and do. I have consulted with sympathetic medical persons and I go to great lengths not to damage anyone's genitals. Safety is my first and foremost concern.

Are you always on the giving end, or did you go through a period where you were on the receiving end as well?

I made a decision in very recent years to "submit" for the experience. I discovered what I already knew: I am a Dominant, a sadist, a Top. I have had one "Top" in my adventures. It never has involved pain or submission... I took some pain to experience it but really couldn't appreciate it. I have allowed myself to be put into restrictive bondage and receiving intense, almost unbearable erotic sensations for hours. [Laughs] I am not much of a masochist or a submissive and I am accused of topping from the bottom, but as long as he and I agree to it, it works for us. I look at masochists I am playing with and marvel at the head space they are in. I love masochists and I love submissives, they give me what I need.

I find bondage frees the spirit, sensory deprivation focuses and pain transcends. I practice Power Exchange, I am the guide, the manipulator, the facilitator. Some of the cutting and suturing techniques I have learned were taught to me by a pet of mine, a dental surgeon.

How (socioeconomically) would you characterize your clients?

My strictly piercing and permanent mods clients tend to be upper middle class, between 25-55 years old, college educated, involved in the bdsm community, male and female. There are a few that are younger and less economically stable, but they are not the norm. The bdsm clientele, which almost always involves temporary genital modifications is over 30, male, middle to upper class, and not out in the scene. I have never pierced anyone

under 18, except ears and I won't do genital mods or piercings on anyone under 21. I prefer people that have truly considered what they are doing and are not doing it to be fashionable. I want it all to have some purpose and meaning for them, whatever that might be.

I have studied anatomy and continue to do so. The more that I learn, the less that I know... This coming year I am studying further in branding and tattooing — I don't plan on being a tattoo artist, I just want to be better at it. I have stopped working in outside areas in order to devote myself to my studies this year. I am fortunate that I can make a living doing what I love. I have a desire to meet and learn from the others that are Body Modification Practitioners, they amaze and astound me. I have given many Presentations and teach within the bdsm community on various areas of body play and modification. I make it a point to always stress safety and sterility, and I will not show certain aspects of how something is performed in a public setting. I accept many individuals and couples for training in these areas, where I can have one on one contact. This allows me to be comfortable that they fully understand what they are doing. I have clients from all over the country and have the opportunity to engage in the most interesting, fulfilling and outrageous experiences. My use of mods as a form of advanced body play seems to be a bit out of the norm, whatever that is. To enter another's body through these ways is as, or sometimes even more, intimate than sex. I take it as an honor when a person allows me this privilege. I feel the same about play, I value the person that submit's and turns over the control of their mind, body and spirit to me.

The most spiritually intense piercing I have done was a nipple ring bonding ritual with 2 gay men, both HIV positive. The ritual was done in a private dungeon and extreme caution was observed. The energy between the 4 participants, they invited a guest, was overwhelming as was the love that the two men had. It was so intense that I was barely able to complete the closing of the rings for the tears in my eyes. There was an energy among us that overwhelmed us all, as I looked up from the rings, I saw such clarity through the tears of us all. We were all speechless and we all felt the same connectedness. Amazing.



I am originally from the east coast and have been in CA for 22 years. I am 41 years young, a mother of 3, and my oldest son (25) apprenticed piercing under me for a year and the youngest (22) is apprenticing with him in Alabama. They plan to open a CM Hurt Alabama this year.

Wow. Do you think that it's genetic, or the way they were raised, or what?

[Laughs] Maybe both, but probably due more to the age group they are in and the degree of acceptability that accompanies that group. They both had tats and piercings before me. They were into the "punk" scene and ran around with safety pins in their bodies. My sons' environment growing up was not "normal" by any stretch. We did many unconventional things and they basically grew up in the rock music business and were exposed to many things that other young people weren't. They were raised by me so that must give you some idea they were raised in an alternative environment. However for the most part they also were involved in "normal" childhood things like team sports and all. The most important thing that I ever wanted to teach them was to be true to themselves and to be responsible for their own happiness. They are fine young men with very nice manners.

Are they also BDSM dominants?

I am sure that they wouldn't like me to discuss their personal lives in a public forum!

Both are into tattoos and piercing but consider my interest in mods and play a bit extreme, I have pierced both of my sons and their wives, we are multigenerationally pierced, :) My daughter(7) is way to young for any knowledge other than that I am a Piercer. I am going to be a grandmother in July.



I am not married, and I am a lifestyle Domina.

I dropped out of high school at 15 as I was an unwed mother. I enrolled in college at 19, with two kids and graduated magna cum laude. I majored in Behavioral Science — it comes in pretty handy. I am a past member of Mensa. I worked in the bar and music business to put myself through college. I booked R&R bands in the 80's. I worked in the corporate structure for a while, always in management. I have been self employed, one way or another, for over 10 years, I make a lousy employee.

I have practiced a 12 step spiritual based program for over 13 years. That means clean and sober.

I have a tattoo of 2 roses on my butt cheek and I am looking for a fairy sprinkling stars on my breast for the next. I pierced my nipples (ouch), and my son did my navel and we both contributed to the 6 piercings in each ear. I want a Triangle but am waiting for the right person to have it done. I plan to take a brand in March. But as much as I love doing mods, I feel tis better to give than receive.

Is it going to be a bit strange receiving the brand, branding being a very “bottom” sort of modification?

I have given brands in the past, but do not consider my studies complete. I seek out teachers for specific things I wish to learn... I am required to take a brand in order to study with a specific person. I have put it off as long as I can — if I want the knowledge, I have to do it. I wouldn't do it for a long time, but now it's time. I view taking a brand the same as I do a piercing or a tat, it's an expression of ones' self. It is art and I am the canvas. People are marked in the scene as “property” by piercings, cuttings, tats, branding, etc, so I don't consider it only as a bottom thing.

It will be my choice of design, location, and time. I believe that I will create a unique brand for myself, a design that I may eventually give to my slaves. It becomes very meaningful.

I devote 10-15 hours a week working with women recovering from alcoholism/drug addiction and other life abuse issues. I teach a spiritual and soul cleansing process in order to recover their spirits. I also advocate abstinence from all mind altering substances not produced by your own body. The body is quite capable of producing the euphoria that we seek.

I do these things to share the knowledge and processes that I have learned and experienced. These women are awesome powerful beings. They can do anything that they want, they need to undergo a process first and remove barriers in the mind, body and soul. They run the gamut, women that have been to prison, lost custody of their children, been abused,

broken in spirit, homeless, addicts/alcoholics, real women with real issues trying to get better. The ones that stay are miracles and I get to be a part of it. It's very gratifying. Sometimes they leave and that can also be devastating. So I focus on the winners...

You live off of your modification career I assume?

[Laughs] Does the IRS read BME? "I am not employed."

I believe that chemicals, natural or manufactured, in the body, cut us off from the spiritual aspects. This is based on my own experiences as a drug user for many years. I find that I became much more open to the positive energy in the world and to a higher power when my body became chemical free. I prefer not to work with people not in touch with themselves naturally.

BUT... The endorphins and "natural drugs" produced by intense ritual activities and extreme play are very analogous to externally produced drugs. Why is one OK and not the other? How do they differ?

I do not advocate complete abstinence for all people. Many are quite capable of occasional use of mind altering substances, recreational or otherwise. That is fine for them. I enjoyed many years of drugs and alcohol and if it hadn't escalated to addiction for me, I probably still would. I do not have the ability to use occasionally, so for me, complete abstinence is necessary. Having been clean and sober for a number of years, I have found a connectedness with a power source that is truly awesome. I believe that using can cut me off from that, I see it happen all the time to others. Perhaps it is because I do not stay "under the influence" of the body producing chemicals or "high" produced from bdsm, piercing, mods and sex for any extended period of time that they do not cause me to be blocked from the spiritual energy that surrounds us. I don't work or play with people that are under the influence of drugs or alcohol because I want them to have the full benefit of the high that these activities can bring by themselves and because I want them to be fully "with me". Maybe it's a control issue. I want them controlled by me, not the substances they have ingested.



Piercers “Behind the Scenes”

In early 1998 I did a series of seven anonymous interviews with piercers, revealing their gripes and sometimes dark secrets.

Tell me a bit about yourself..

I’ve been in the industry for four and a half years now. I pierce, I work counter, I ***** all the other crap jobs associated with a studio. When I first started I was just happy to have a job to make a bit of money — I had a few piercings but it wasn’t a “lifestyle” — I had been working at a ***** which of course didn’t allow piercings. Now I think the industry is staffed with — and caters to — small people trying to make themselves feel better about themselves. It’s full of piercers trying to out-do each other so they can be the best or most “extreme” — just one big ego stroke. No one wants to admit that all they do is install earrings.

What bothers you most about piercers?

They’re backstabbers, have huge egos, and they all think they’re God’s gift to body modification. We’re all in the same boat... Implants and everything along those lines is crap — there’s nothing fashionable about those mods... it’s just oneupmanship. Like I said. We’re here to install earrings. That’s all. We’re not doctors, we’re not cosmetic surgeons, and we’re sure not rock stars — except that guy in Twisted Sister, he really is a rock star. Anyway, we’re not even as big a deal as hairdressers.

What bothers you most about piercing clients?

For the most part they’re naive children, and the rest are dirty old men looking for thrills. That’s not totally true of course — some clients are quite nice and treat you with respect and get treated nicer than other customers in return. A lot of people think we’re trying to rip them off, when they can get it done by some jerk-off looking to make a couple extra bucks, saying things like “you’re gonna hafta take your shirt off to get your navel pierced”. I’ve got patience for neither these piercers, nor the idiots that go to them.

What bothers you most about the body modification industry as a whole?

Everyone wants to complain about everyone else’s practices but keeps their eyes closed about what happens in their own shop. The piercing industry has become the coolest place on earth to work and young kids say they want to be piercers when they grow up which is ridiculous. What kind of career choice is that? Also, the industry has become filled with piercers and tattooers with no piercings or tattoos — how can you instill confidence in your clients when you can’t share the experience with them? Let them know that you know what they’re going through?

What mistakes do piercers usually make?

Piercers think they’re working in a sterile field — let’s face it kids, as long as we do everything as clean as possible, sterility isn’t something we need to worry about. New needles, new gloves, and tools from an autoclaved pack — then it should be OK. Infected pierc-

ings are for the most part clients not following instructions.

What mistakes do clients usually make?

Ask the wrong question: price... they'll go to whoever has the best deal and the fanciest slogan. They never ask to see an artists portfolio, but just walk up and down the street asking for a price on a portrait — even though not many artists are even capable of pulling off a decent portrait. I've seen piercers at conventions with no photos of their work, but some very nice pages ripped from magazines of supermodels. People fall for it every day. "You work in a shop... You must know what you're doing, right?"



Tell me a bit about yourself..

I've been piercing professionally for about five years in a high-volume big-name studio in ***** ** ****. I've touched the lives of probably 10,000 people.

What do you think of your clients?

When I first started, and probably even still, I tried to teach every person who came through the door something about themselves — that's what I was there for. No matter how much they didn't get it, I tried. I guess eventually it started to wear me out. I still care, and there are a lot of good people out there who I love deeply, but I have no patience for the vast and ignorant majority. It would be accurate to say that I've even gotten to hate them.

How does this affect their piercings?

It doesn't. I'm a great piercer, and they'll get the piercing they ask for, perfectly placed. I just won't give them anything of myself spiritually. If they're really horrible people, and are rude to my other customers and staff, I'll ding the needle on the table before piercing them to dull it — the piercing is still perfect, but it'll hurt more. I've only done this about ten times though. I don't think it's that uncommon — I know other piercers who do the same.

Is that the worst you've done?

There are times that I want to take a used needle out of the biohazard and pierce with that. There are some people that if they get AIDS or Hep-C, I'd be happy... they don't deserve to pollute the planet. But I'd never do that... would I?



Tell me a bit about yourself..

I've been a body piercer for six years and own my own studio. At first it was just something that I did for myself. While it has become a business and a career, I still don't see it as a lifestyle. It's just something that I do.

Has your clientele changed over your career?

The only difference is that there are more of them now. It's the same kind of people, but because it's more acceptable, those that were held back by their lifestyles in the past aren't

any more.

Why do people get pierced?

Usually to look cool, and sometimes just because they like the experience. People need to think more about why they're getting it done. A lot of people that come in that are really terrified, and are still terrified up to the piercing, but they still do it. While it's really good to overcome your fear, there's also a point at which the fear is telling them something! Not that it's going to be bad, just that they're not ready yet — people need to think about it and prepare themselves more. For a lot of people it's too much a spur of the moment thing.

How does it change a person's life when they get pierced?

Some people just aren't responsible enough with themselves to handle piercing — to look after it properly. The worst problem is when the client's friends think they know more than I do. So they don't listen to my advice, don't keep the aftercare sheets I get them, and they listen to their friend's advice. But then when the piercing gets infected, who do they blame? Me...

The other big problem is that half the people think piercing is a simple, simple thing — that no matter what, it can't be fucked up... that anybody can do it. The other half think the opposite, that we're trained professionals, like doctors. We're neither one — we're somewhere in between. There's knowledge you need to do the job properly, but there's no licensing or certification.

What do people need to know before getting pierced that they don't usually get told?

You might have a harder time finding a job and fitting in — it seems obvious, but not enough shops tell people this. People should consider these things. The decision is for the client to make, but sometimes we need to inject a dose of reality.

What's the biggest problem with piercers?

Too much ego. We're here for our customers. This is a service industry. It's not to get some cool pictures, it's not to be famous, it's not to get chicks, it's not to be rich. If you're not a piercer because you like people, then you shouldn't be a piercer. Too many people become piercers to be cool. We've got a lot of piercers who don't know enough about what they're doing and are more concerned about how they look to people than their skills.

What's the biggest mistake that clients make?

The walk into a place and assume, just because it's a piercing studio, that they must know what they're doing. Unfortunately, that's not always the case. Clients need to inform themselves. If I could change one thing about the industry, I'd get rid of all the horrible piercers — the biggest complaint that I have is when I hear about someone getting pierced at another studio and they tell me "the clamps hurt more than the piercing". The number one sign of a problem piercer is cranking the clamp on too tight — there's no need for it to hurt. I wonder: are they covering up other problems, are they sadistic, or do they just not know what they're doing?



Tell me a bit about yourself...

I'm a professional piercer (female), and have been for about three years. I've pierced in studios in *****, *****, *****, *****, and *****.

What's the biggest problem in piercing?

Quality of jewelry. Most places go with cheap jewelry to increase their profits. They're skimping on supplies and cutting corners everywhere. I'd say that happens more in Europe than in North America — North America is a lot more aware. The quality of the people working in the studios is no better. In every European country, there are a small number of excellent studios, but all the rest are really bad. There's no in-between.

What do clients need to think about more before they get pierced?

They need to know how to look for a good piercer. They know what to ask — “are you sterile?” — but they don't know what to look for to find out for themselves. A lot of people are satisfied just to hear “yes”.

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Tell me a bit about yourself...

I've been piercing professionally for about five years. I've worked at *****, *****, and *****, both well known international studios. As well as piercing I have also worked as, and currently work as a professional dominatrix.

As a female piercer, what difficulties have you had with male clients?

Some male clients see female piercers as prostitutes I think. They're not there for the piercing — they're there for a hand-job. Some guys just call and ask questions about genital piercing on a regular basis — you get to recognize their voice after a while. A small number of them are brave enough to come in. Before I started working at *****, the only other woman working there was not a piercer, but these men would always insist that they “needed” her to do the piercing.

I'd like these guys to know that WE know, and we all think — the entire industry — that they're foolish and pathetic and should go back to calling 1-900 numbers. Leave us alone.

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Tell me a bit about yourself...

I've been piercing professionally for about four years. I've been getting body modifications, including tattoos and scarification, for about seven years. It's a lifestyle for me. It's what I think about pretty much 24/7.

What bothers you most about the industry?

I think the one thing that bothers me most is that people don't really understand the concepts of sterilization and cross-contamination. They know they have to ‘lave their stuff, change their gloves, and all that, but they don't really know why. I've seen people from all different shops... they do it without understanding — I see them scrub their instruments wearing gloves, but then move them to another room without gloves. Or they'll touch

cupboard doors and other things. They'll set up for a piercing and get the tools out without gloves, or looking for beads through public jars wearing gloves during a piercing. Piercers have a responsibility to have a complete understanding of what is sterile, and too many don't. You have to assume that everyone that comes in your door has Hep-C, Hep-B, HIV, and God knows what else! Piercers are more worried about being cool than being sterile. Sterilization has to be the first concern.

Do clients make these mistakes too?

Yes, clients seem to think that as long as the needle comes out of a package that it's OK. It's not. If the piercer touches all his bottles after the piercing, then they've been contaminated. And then the next time around, you've got cross contamination. It might be a brand-new autoclaved needle, but it can be contaminated. Customers are way too trusting. Health officials are just as bad. They walk in, see you have an autoclave, and walk out again. Any idiot can have an autoclave, all you need is the money — but you need to know more. In tattoos, does the tattoo artist bag his tools? If he does, great, but when he's tattooing, does the clip cord drag across the tattoo? If it does, you've got blood being passed between clients. I've seen tattoo artists even laugh about this — I don't think that tattoo artists worry as much about the client as about the art itself.

What mistakes do customers make?

They want everything for cheap. They worry about cost first, and then quality and safety.

The navel crowd doesn't understand the concept of body modification. My walls are completely covered in photos of different tribal peoples and cultures — I continually get "those people are so fucked up" or "that's so sick" or "what the fuck were they thinking when they did that". I try to tell them this has been around for thousands of years and it's not that different from what they're doing. Then they pretend that it's OK. I've had people say about a guy on the wall with a septum piercing "he's fucked up... but your's looks fine" when they realize that I have one. That's insulting me... that "...but your's is OK". They don't understand that it's the same thing. If anything, it's less sick that these tribal cultures do it, because it has a lot more meaning to them. We just get it done because it's cool.

Do people realize the change that piercing makes in their appearance?

People will come in and say, "I want this really cool eyebrow piercing", but as soon as the jewelry is through they'll say "I don't think it looks right". Even though I've put it right where they wanted it, with the exact jewelry they wanted. They have an image in their mind, but not on themselves. Usually I can see this in advance, and do tell them, but they never listen.

How does it make you feel when you do a piercing on someone, and you find out that it was the wrong thing for them, and you've been involved in causing them mental pain?

A long time ago I would have felt guilty, but now I understand that it's their responsibility to feel guilty, not mine. I'm there to facilitate a piercing and to make it a good experience. But I can't plan their life for them.

What's the worst that you've seen happen in this industry?

About three months ago the police interviewed me in the course of an investigation in another ***** piercer. They talked to me since they knew I wasn't biker affiliated. They asked if there was any kind of drug or solution that would alter the client's mind — to numb them out. I showed them benzocaine, and lidocaine, and topical prilocaine, but that isn't what they were asking for — they specifically meant mind numbing. The police told me that there'd been a piercing party and the client was numbed out — the piercer was fondling them and playing with them, and they were aware that they were being molested, but couldn't move and had no control over it. I told them that's nothing that we'd normally use as piercers. That's the last I heard of it.



Tell me a bit about yourself..

I'm an ex-piercer. I started piercing at **** ***** in 1994. I was totally into it. It was fun, and I really wanted to do it. When I left college, I decided to do it. I didn't want to be stuck in something I hated, so I thought it was the perfect job, even though I knew it wouldn't make me much money. We were all just there because we loved it. After working for free for eight months, ***** offered me \$300 a week. I thought "\$1200 a month! What will I do with all that money?"

But later money did become an issue...

I think the first time I realized that it wasn't just for fun was when ***** would say "This is just a fad, and when the time comes I'll move on to the next money-making fad." I was there for four or five months, and we decided to add tattooing. We opened a new studio named ***** , and our competitors also opened a fancy new location. That's when the scene changed — money became an issue, and all the shops knew that there was a lot of it to be made. We were all guilty, but for me, and for ***, it was still for love of piercing. Eventually it got more stressful and I moved downtown, and I asked for a bit more money. But I still loved piercing.

As time went by I ran got into conflicts with *** who didn't appreciate the people working for him, and became increasingly unhappy working at ***** . I was at another studio, ***** , and they offered me a sweet deal making far more money, and the opportunity to set up my own studio however I wanted (since I was the only piercing). Needless to say, I took it.

Everything was great at first. I got to be part of a world tour, all my supplies were always stocked, and more money flowed through that studio than anywhere else in ***** . I thought this was my chance to finally really make it. But the clientele had changed — when I first started, people got piercings because they were really into it. But now, people were just getting it because they'd seen a really cool poster. I did my best to make the people who didn't care, care a little bit more, but my selling out had already started. I started realizing that things were getting extremely perverted — the attitude of the shop was "just shut your mouth and poke the hole". At that point I was still into piercing, just not into piercing there. It wasn't until a year and half into working at **** ***** that I actually wanted to quit piercing. I thought I'd always do it, for myself, just not as a business, but in the last three months I was so disgusted with it I couldn't any more. I'm at the point now

where there's a piercing that my girlfriend wants, but I can't pick up a needle again. It's weird for me now. I used to love piercing...

While you were piercing, did you see other piercers mistreat their clients?

***** at *** *****'s clients would come in and complain all the time. They'd ask me questions like, "is it normal for the piercer to play with your clit before doing your hood piercing?" I'd ask them, "what do you mean by playing", to make sure they weren't talking about marking or anything like that. She said "I KNOW what it feels like when someone plays with my clit — he wasn't doing any marking." I've had lots of girls tell me that they've had to take their shirts off, and even their bra, with the explanation that it was needed for sterility. I've never made a girl take a shirt off for a piercing. I've heard from about ten different clients over the last year.



Photo: Barbara Nitke

Keith Alexander

In late 1995, body piercer and scarification artist Keith Alexander was one of the first interviews I did for BME. Keith would continue to be influential for years afterwards, and was a strong voice for safe but forward-thinking body modification. I first met him via the rec.arts.bodyart Usenet group, and Keith's interest in technology would eventually take him out of the industry when he left to pursue a new media career (as well as playing guitar in Dee Snider's SMF), before an untimely death in a biking accident.

"I have a recording studio in my home and record all types of stuff. At the moment I am working with 'found' sounds. Using all manner of wireless transmissions. Just pulling shit out of the air. Very spontaneous."

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Many years ago, after reading about the great sensations a PA adds and speaking with a number of people who had PA's, Keith Alexander drove 100 miles to Par's Tats in Woodstock NY and had his penis punctured for a Prince Albert. Shortly afterwards he self-pierced both his nipples. Then a frenum. Then an ampallang. Then a guiche (which rapidly stretched to a 4ga, but is now gone), septum, labret, and multiple nostril piercings. He currently wears seven frenum barbells ranging from 0ga to 10ga and 8ga nipples (which were once at 2ga). At this point Keith was working as a sound engineer at a NYC nightclub, mixing all types of music — he has been a commercial artist and has released records with Carnivore and Primal Scream NYC, both of whom he toured with, along with Savage Grave. He currently plays with Dee Snider's Sick Motherfuckers doing all Twisted Sister songs.



By this time Keith was getting pierced regularly at Gauntlet in NYC, and was spending thousands of dollars on jewelry and publications, both for himself and as gifts for family and friends. One day, the manager asked to speak to him privately. He thought that they were about to offer him a wholesale account, but instead of the wholesale account, he was offered an apprenticeship.

"When the actual apprenticeship took some time coming, I jumped ship and applied for and received a job at Venus Bodyarts. After three weeks working there, Gauntlet called again and asked me to return. I did so after explaining my reasoning to the owners of Venus."

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"It took ten months before I earned a Piercer certificate. That day was one of the proudest days of my life."

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"I had been supervised on practically every procedure I had done. I had gone so far as to

single-handedly paint all three Piercing rooms. I would come in early and clean all the piercing rooms. Any time a request to do a piercing clinic (Piercing at another location) came in, I volunteered. No matter how far away or sparsely attended, I was there. It wasn't long till I began handling most of the Media that requested our time. I loved it then and I love it now. It is of vital importance to correct the general public's misconceptions. I put in my time and then some. Above and beyond the call of duty as they say. I avoided all the political bullshit inherent in those types of situations. My teachers were wonderful, if a little different in styles. Compensating for their differing requirements was the most difficult part."

"Each piercing session was an exercise in patience. Here's how it worked: There are at least thirty different safe places to pierce the body. Aside from some basic procedures, each piercing has its own tricks and techniques. You qualify on a per piercing basis. When the senior piercer feels you can perform that particular piercing from start to finish. Prep, pierce and insert, then you are permitted to perform that particular piercing unsupervised."

"After fully understanding sterile techniques, proper placement and appropriate jewelry types and sizes, you proceed to actually piercing people. The client is given a choice between a fully qualified piercer or a supervised apprentice at a substantial discount. Apprentice piercings differ only in the amount of discussion between Senior Piercer and apprentice. This can be a learning experience for the piercee as well. Subtle differences that would not be explained to a piercee are fully explained to the apprentice."



"When someone walks into my shop, I already feel a great affinity with them. It means they are interested in adorning their bodies. A good sign. A pursuit close to my heart."



"95% of my clients ask about the (supposed) pain factor. No matter how much reassuring I or their friends give them, they usually remain unconvinced, at least for the moment."

When I asked Keith what differentiates a great piercer from a good piercer, he replied, "Experience with all possible problems. Smoothness. A caring heart. Foresight. Discretion. Love of Life. Training. Education. Passion. Confidence. An inquisitive mind. LOVE AND LIGHT."

"My shop is designed to induce a deep state of relaxation. Enchanting music, soft colors, candles and well placed lighting help. A small altar beckons the spiritually aware. Already half the battle is won. In almost all instances, the actual piercing takes one quarter of a second. That is no exaggeration."

"When a client looks up and laughs, that is the greatest reward a piercer can ask for. You have helped a person cross a threshold. They will never be the same. One hopes the piercing experience will teach them a lesson about confronting fears and unknown situations with courage and confidence."

I spoke briefly with Keith about some of the new, more extreme, and in the eyes of some, even experimental piercings which have attracted recent media attention. While he feels that in general those piercings are not worth the risk, he does concede that "If you only do

these piercings on clients who understand what to look for in healing it, that of course helps. I'll tell you though, Jon Cobb is a dear friend of mine and having seen the video of how he does the Uvula piercing, it's pretty flawless. I'm all for extreme mods, but I look forward to the day when surgeons are cool enough to provide us with what we want. I just don't want to see Piercers experimenting on anybody but themselves."

"We are limited by the anatomy of the human body. I prefer to work out multiple piercings. I think genital piercing is really where my heart lies. They really do add an incredible amount of new sensation to sex. I think a row of 5 to 10 8 gauge frenum piercings, topped off by an ampallang, apadravya or PA is as good as it gets. Throw a guiche in for good measure! The same rationale applies to female piercings. Nipples without rings look naked!"



As well as being a piercer, Keith Alexander is also an accomplished branding and scarification artist. When he started, he was getting so many requests to work on people that he was honored, so he read and practiced, and practiced and now he has a good body of work behind him, and a lot to look forward to.

"I don't really charge any money for those services. I only work on people I feel can share their soul with me. It gets pretty intense. Alex Binnie said "when you open the flesh you let something in." I try to let in my good wishes for that person — for them to get from life what they seek. I try to associate with people who can help me with my Journey.

A great example is the man whose spiral cutting we are working on. I didn't know him one month ago, but now he is one of dearest friends. He comes from an authentic Warrior Tradition, and it is a true honor to work with him. I learn so much about life every time we meet, which isn't often enough. He travels to a very special place when we work together. He tells me he projects to a clearing in a village in the bush, and watches me teach young children languages and religion as he sits on a rock. I become the blade. Sometimes when every thing is right, the mood, lighting, scents and music I feel like I am painting him with Red Ochre. Deep Black skin with swirls and swirls of Red."

Being a proud APP member (whose role in piercing he says is to raise awareness and set minimum standards), I asked him what role he saw them (or another organization) playing in the scarification industry.

"We all have businesses to protect so anything that might cause undue scrutiny is shunned. There are definitely issues to address if you pierce and brand in the same space. Air-borne pathogens are released with a brand. Proper ventilation, HEPA filters, covering your work station, and wearing masks all help. I wouldn't want this to happen, but if we decided not to allow branding on the premises of APP shops, I would comply fully. Cutting is not an issue. If you use universal precautions and proper disposal of biohazardous waste, there is very little risk. But I emphasize, you must understand cross contamination prevention and blood-borne pathogens."



What were the most common misconceptions you found yourself correcting (while you

were at Gauntlet)?

That anybody who is “into” this is dirty. Amoral and unintelligent.

How have the public’s conceptions and misconceptions changed over the time you have been involved?

The people who didn’t get it then, don’t get it now. It does seem however, that everybody knows someone who has recently been pierced. Usually they have horror stories. I have a list of clients who allow me to give out their phone number to any body that wants to ask about my skills.

Where do you see the piercing industry going over the next, say, twenty years?

It will be as accepted as ear piercing is now. I’d like people to realize this whole phenomenon is basically due to a small, small group of people. Jim Ward being the most visible. Sometimes after piercing a navel I say to myself “If they only knew”.

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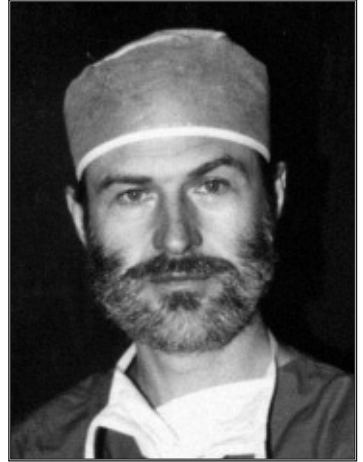
“You can’t Legislate Ritual and Soul Searching, so as long as Men and Women seek themselves, our Bodies will bear the marks of this Search. An outer manifestation of the most personal, inner thoughts and desires.”



Dr. Robert Stubbs

Dr. Robert Stubbs is a progressive cosmetic surgeon with a practise in Toronto. He brought penis lengthening procedures to Canada, having gone — and I kid you not — to China to learn penis elongation procedures from a Dr. Long, whose client had his penis bitten off by a pig. While Dr. Stubbs does not do “BME type” procedures (although he does reverse them), he was very willing to open a dialogue, and I continue to value the insights he gave me. This was our first interview, done in 1996.

The reason that I said, “come on in, and I’d be glad to answer your questions,” is these are all excellent questions, and times change. When I went to med. school, back in ‘73, cosmetic surgery was a bad word. It was something that respectable doctors didn’t do, because as a doctor you’re trained to help sick people; it wasn’t seen as healing. It was an aberration and was seen as a money grubbing business type of thing that doctors who weren’t good enough to make it in the real system (the academic system) did. But by the time I finished, we realized that by modifying or improving the body, it could make a tremendous difference in how people perceive themselves (in their self-image). This is so much so that some illnesses are created by the constant worry about one’s body image. But as with most things, most things that are different, it takes time for acceptance, or it goes away in time and it’s considered to be a fad. Many of the professors that taught me at the university would say, “oh no, cosmetic surgery is bad,” when those same professors went to private little places and did it on the side, but no one knew about it. I knew about it because I was asked to assist you see. So there was a certain element of hypocrisy.



You’re probably stretching the limits of what North American society finds “tolerable”.

Yeah, that’s a safe assumption. But these things are acceptable in some places. Subincisions for example — They are accepted in Australia.

By whom?

Well, Aboriginal people.

Precisely. But we’re Judeo-Christian... although in the Old Testament there are passages that say if a woman can be beautified, in that it helps her find a good match, and reproduce, and be a productive member of society, then that’s OK to do an operation on her body, the “sacred temple”.

There’s a good chapter in *Concepts of Beauty*. The author is a professor at Cornell University, and not only is he a professor of plastic surgery, but he was one of the first to specialize in this area. He starts off his book with what cultures consider attractive. I had a lady yesterday here who was tattooed all over her hands. She was Pakistani. I’ve had three peo-

ple today with piercings in various areas. I went to China. They used to put things on women's feet to make them smaller. So what you see in this book, one of the bibles, or more reputable books of cosmetic or aesthetic plastic surgery, is really a lead-in to "beauty is in the eye of the beholder", and there's a cultural aspect.

So beauty is on a cultural rather than personal level?

A cultural, societal, and maybe a personal level. You're coming to a surgeon who is a bit eccentric, pushing the frontier of plastic surgery, because I've been around the world, and I've seen many cultures. I don't know how long you have been in my office, but every ethnic group is seen here, and so I have to appreciate what people want — What they consider acceptable, and what I consider safe surgery.

But the subincision destroys a certain element of the penis, the spiral valve, which allows you to urinate properly.

But what's wrong with urinating lower down on the penis?

It sprays.

Well, people can sit down.

Exactly.

You don't need a penis. These days penises are redundant! You can have needle aspiration of sperm from your testicles, you can have your child by artificial insemination of your female partner, and in a sense, you can do away with the penis.

Well, the motivation behind a subincision is that it opens up the urethra to more stimulation; it feels better. That's why — people who are doing them are seeing them as enhancing procedures.

No one has come and asked me for that. In this society, if someone did ask me for it, I wouldn't do it, because I would be judged by my colleagues. The College of Physicians and Surgeons are fairly — radically — conservative.

If a surgeon did go ahead and do subincisions, what sort of professional risk would they be at?

They'd lose their license probably.

If you went to them with the idea of a subincision, and said, "here's this procedure, I think it's a good idea for these reasons", what would the steps be for getting "authorization", since you went through a similar process with the penis lengthening surgery?

Precisely. With that I showed through a twenty five year search of medical indexes (Med-Line), that this operation had been done in North America for thirty five years but for different purposes. So the operation was not brand new. I also showed them what's called an informed consent, a list of potential risks that could occur, and I told the first two hundred patients it was experimental. The fee I charged was about half what was being charged elsewhere in the world, so it was not perceived that I profiting substantially from it.

But I can show an equally long history of subincisions, albeit not a medical one.

And you know what would happen? The person that did that, if there was an infection, because there are bacteria out there that we don't have antibiotics for, or some complication such that the individual that was having it performed died or developed severe complications, the practitioner would be charged with manslaughter or assault. The laws of the land are here; they're in place.

Most of the people doing it are doing it on themselves. I can walk into any drugstore and buy anaesthetic, scalpels, and anything I need to do surgery on myself.

Well, you can also buy a gun and shoot yourself! You can also go to Canadian Tire and buy a nail gun. You can basically do to yourself whatever you have the intestinal fortitude or the imagination for. When there's another person, if it's a medical professional, you're asking someone who is following the rules of the land to do something which is, if it's brand-new, has to be authorized by committee after committee after committee after committee and whatnot so he doesn't get charged with manslaughter or assault and doesn't lose his license.

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Let me ask you your opinion on something. This is Steve Haworth, and artist in the states. He's made implants coming out of this guy's head, he's put implants in his wrists, he's using a cautery laser for scarification; what position is he in, doing this, not being a doctor?

I think he's probably at high risk, because in our society, certainly here [in Canada], only nurses, dentists, and doctors can violate the skin into the deeper layer (into the subcutaneous). That's a boundary past which the law starts acting. You can be tattooed because it's going into the dermis. You can have hair removed by electrolysis because that again is in the skin, but you go under the skin, which is what some of these things are, and you're into that grey area.

But piercing goes under the skin in some cases.

It goes under or through the skin, but because it has been socially acceptable to have pierced ears, and you can go to a department store where they'll put a stud in your ear. It's one of these that's been "allowed", but if people were all getting HIV or hepatitis through a common piercing then you know what would happen: Eaton's if they were doing it would be sued, and lose, and certainly if the Blood Commission, or Red Cross here is going to get nailed, and they were trying to do it professionally, then a retailer that's doing piercing is going to get nailed.

At least professional piercing studios have got autoclaves and operating at some basic level of sterility.

Maybe they do, maybe they don't. These people that have the autoclaves, are they checked routinely? We have special tests that we send off and they're checked to see whether it's reaching the right heat and actually killing organisms. People who are not terribly ethical can decide that they're not going to put distilled water in, he'll put tap water in, and everything calcifies and the heat's not high, and a few of the bugs survive. Maybe these people are going and putting themselves at risk.

A woman, one of her tests came back Hepatitis C positive, and I had to turn her down for surgery.

Why is that?

Because we have no cure for HIV and Hep C, and no immunization. I'd be at risk, and my staff would be at risk. We test people beforehand, and I don't think piercing or tattoo parlors test their clients before to see who may transmit something.

When you're charging forty dollars for a piercing, that's not really an option.

That's right. Nor are they able to draw the blood to send it to the lab. Nor would the public lab accept something from a layperson. In a sense, doctors have a monopoly on a certain element of care, protection, treating people. The monopoly was given to them on the basis of thirteen years of university education, and an element of trust, and an element of responsibility.



When I do labia reductions (labia minora reductions) on women, it involves in some who are very grossly redundant, going around the clitoris and down the other side, simply because the redundancy heads around that way. The word circumcision is synonymous with what's done in Africa, to actually remove everything, and I don't think you're associates are into that extreme...

It's certainly a very small subculture.

That's like taking the penis off — You may split the penis, but removal is beyond anyone's acceptance of modification. That is basically amputation and you lose the function that goes with it. To get back to the female circumcision, what I was doing, the cutting around (circum-cise), because that word signified what was being done in Africa which was an ablation, I had to send the college some pictures and say, "here's a mature lady, she works in a medical facility, she's grossly redundant, very unhappy with her appearance, the things are too floppy, and I am taking them off but I don't want to be caught up with the laws of the country that say that female circumcision is a criminal offense."

That's not a law that doctors passed, that's one that society has passed and doctors are expected to enforce. Any woman that comes to my office and has had an African circumcision and it's done in Canada, I have to report that woman to the Officer of Health, the College, and the Police. Just like if you have HIV, I have to report you. Or if you are sexually abused I have to report you.

Right now, that "line", as far as operations go, is drawn only at female genital mutilation?

Well, each sex has its own limitations, but I think the only legal one on the books is female circumcision in the African style. Male circumcision is actually something that everyone's still debating, whether it should be done or not done, but because we are so steeped in Judeo-Christian history and no one wants to take that one on. They're not going to put doctors in jail that do circumcisions. They're not even going to put lay-people in jail that do them because in the Jewish community it's often a Rabbi or a Rabbi-type that comes

in and does it with an old rusty knife. Scary, but it's done.



The College of Physicians and Surgeons licenses doctors, but they also have the power to put people in jail that are doing things that doctors normally do. So in other words, they are there to protect the public, whether it be from a bad doctor, or someone else.

Like if I started doing surgery out of my home.

Sure. If you buy a cannula and a vacuum machine, you can start sucking some fat out, then these are the guys that are going to come and say, "I'm sorry, you just don't have the training for public safety, and come down to Kingston [Penitentiary] for a while and we'll pay for your room and board."

I know there are people (not doctors) doing castrations in Toronto on a client basis.

I did one on a chap who's testicles were non functional because he was born with a condition where they weren't producing anything anyway. They're done if you have a disease, but you do them on a normal healthy male, again, that would be crossing the line.

But there are some people (in the US) who have managed to convince their doctors to perform it for psychological reasons.

The laws are slightly different in the States. Criminals can have it done. I think there's legislation where someone who's a sex offender or obviously high testosterone output can have it done.

In most of the cases it's done in a fetish environment, or because the people feel out of control due to the testosterone, or due to fear of various cancers.

You appear to be mentally competent, realistic, and part of a subculture that is pushing the boundaries of what one can do based on expression. But there's a whole group of humanity who's brain doesn't function adequately, and they will gravitate towards what you're doing, and they gravitate to what I do.

Do you get a lot of people coming to you with unusual requests?

I've had unusual requests, but I get people who know what a plastic surgeon can do, and come with unrealistic expectations. And so therefore I have to segregate those that do have a psychiatric problem, or what's called a "dysmorphophobia" where their body and their mind are not matched and never will be matched. They'll have procedure after procedure after procedure, never getting satisfaction. What I do is more of a one-shot deal in a sense. Someone comes in with a specific problem, I fix it, and they're happy... goodbye.

As far as evaluation, I've been a doctor for longer than twenty-five years. It's almost like a driver: He knows when that person's going to pull out in front of him — You just know it's going to happen, so you turn. I can get a pretty good clue beforehand which patients I feel comfortable accepting for surgery.

I was asked recently about penile reduction. Is that an option?

One request in over two thousand patients. It was a request of a young chap that wanted

a smaller penis, and because it was so unusual, in that where most men would agree that bigger is better — not most women, but most men — we felt that he should definitely have psychiatric counselling.

He was within the range of normal (normal is a bell curve). I turned him down. The risk is too great. When you do a surgical procedure, there is risk there. The patient has not got enough education, experience in life to understand the limits of that risk.

To make one smaller, I'd just reverse the process of the lengthening. There many operations that accidentally make the penis smaller. One is putting rods in it; there's fibrosis, there's scarification. But I did not want to do an operation which in a sense I felt was too risky for someone that was within normal limits. But you can turn around and when someone else comes in, and they have small breasts, but I think the risk to benefit ratio is better in their interest. There's no black and white — If there was, it wouldn't be a very interesting world.



[Showing photos of genital beading]

Probably long before they did that, the Orientals were into that. I'll show you. [Shows me a C-shaped piece of a rubber- like substance]. There. That's what I took out of one man, and that goes around the neck of the penis. That was put in in the Orient. Just a standard thing they do over there.

And that's something you could only get away with there?

Yes. It's not available here. As a society we've said it's OK to put that in a nose [showing me a blue rubbery bridge- piece, looking very much like the genital implant] to build the bridge of a nose up, but to put this in a penis is not. Same substance.

If I put the genital implant in here, and he developed a complication, I would probably in a court of law lose, and I might have a problem with my license.

Could you even refer someone to a doctor in Asia that could do it?

I wouldn't do the referral because the referral means a certain level of acceptance and responsibility. That's normally for specialists, it's the family doctor that refers someone. If I refer to someone else, there's a certain amount of feedback and collaboration. If I knew there was someone in the Orient that was doing something that over here was not entirely acceptable, I would not feel so comfortable in referring someone. I even have difficulty referring to doctors in Toronto if I don't know the quality of their work.

Four or five years ago I had men calling me that wanted penis enhancement and I said that I was not aware of anyone doing it, I had never been trained in doing it, and I certainly wouldn't feel comfortable doing it without adequate training. But I had access to the medical literature and I looked it up. There are two things that I felt might help people, and one was girth. And because I'd been aspirating fat out for many years and injecting it back in women's faces and other areas to plump up things. I told one patient who was crippled by the size of his penis that this might help, but he'd be the first. I didn't feel that putting part of his body back in his body was a major risk and he accepted and the result

was good. But with others we found the fat might shift, or wouldn't live, and there were irregularities and unpredictability. We have an improvement on that now called dermal fat grafting. So that area there hasn't been much of a kaffuffle about.

Penis lengthening, that was another matter. I went to another country to see it being done because it was a professor of plastic surgery at an academic hospital and he'd initially started it for trauma, but he got into doing it for normal men. I never thought there'd be a demand here. I never dreamed that every man from every ethnic background and sexual orientation really would have thought bigger was better...

I was told that it's primarily average or larger than average men coming in?

The average length in the first two or three hundred was about five inches, which may be slightly less than national average, but you know, what's national average? If you look at the United States, a group from Washington DC, they may be 80% black, and black guys are a bit bigger than Europeans, and Europeans are a bit bigger than Chinese, so your statistics are skewed. Some of the men that we've seen have been on the small side, but some have been on the bigger than average side. I have men who's father was one race and mother was another, and the brothers were a mixture, and one brother got a bit more African in him, and the other brother's got a bit more Asian in him, and they're very unhappy because of the discrepancy.

Plastic surgery traditionally has been a problem solving speciality. When there is a problem out there, but no one seems to know what the solution is, or a complication, then there is a group of artistic, creative doctors that say, "OK, my training is a broad basis of things. I'm not just a bone doctor, I'm not just a kidney doctor, I'm sort of a doctor that's been trained in all those specialities, and looks at problems." Plastic surgeons seemed to be the group that during the war, guys would get pieces shot off, and we've saved their life, but how can we integrate them back into society? In come the plastic surgeons and they take a piece here, a piece there, they put the person back together with a result that does not look too bad.

[At this point Dr. Stubbs shows me a portfolio of photographs — the following comments were in regards to those photos] For ten years I taught academic plastic surgery, which was trauma, reconstructive, and cosmetic. Here's a drug addict that shot up in the wrong vein; that's gangrene. He got the boots put to his face, broke all the bones. He got his hand in the machine that makes the shingles for the roof and couldn't find the off switch — That's his groin [grafted onto his wrist]. In the past, his hand would have been cut off. There's no way of saving that when you've got no coverage. Chainsaw that jumped back. More cancers. The scars are there. His scar is better because his skin is looser. He's got sun-damaged old tight skin, but just the same, he can now go out in public, whereas that fungating cancer there certainly gave people a bit of indigestion at the meal table. Dog bite — now he could put a ring in that, but again, his mother wasn't happy about that.

Worst skin cancer, melanoma. Ear. Now you see, some of the things that your group are doing would be considered by Western standards deforming. And a plastic surgeon looks at something which is a cancer which to you looks like a little scab, but under a microscope this eating well away part of his ear. I could just cut it out and it would leave a hole. Now, if that was someone from your subculture, they'd be happy with that. But 99.9% of the

people in North America would not be, and so they ask me, please, can you make my ear look acceptable again? You see, you disturb a lot of people. I don't have to tell you that.

That is the basis that I had. You can look at a breast and say you've got normal breasts, nice normal breasts. But you want bigger nice normal breasts, and you want to take the risks of putting a bag in there. I don't think the bag's harmful. We agree that the cost benefit ratio is ok, and society has said that that's ok.

You see, some of the risk of what you're doing, or what people similar to yourself who are fully aware of what they're doing at a time in their life that they think that that's great and a form of expression, later on their circumstances change, and then they ask me for help. I had a man who was a genius, he dropped out of school early, he ran with the drug culture, he was in a motorcycle gang. He just didn't find enough stimulation in life, except sort of on the wild side, and then he realized that there were other things that were equally stimulating, and that was academic pursuits. He went to university, did well, and got into medicine, which is an unlimited field as far as stimulation. Unfortunately he had "69" tattooed on his earlobe. I cut it out because in those days we didn't have a laser that was specific for that pigment and I took some skin from behind his ear and put a patch on it. It looked a little bit like a burn but that was socially acceptable. He was fully aware that that tattoo, in that location, would severely limit his advancement in now his new profession.

What you do is irreversible. You can never make it normal again. You can try and put it back close to normal, but you can never make it normal again. Some of the things I worry about, the sterility and the transfer of disease, that can be circumvented with the appropriate precautions. But other things are permanent that may become a problem later in life you have to seriously consider.

I have a patient who is an executive, he was a handsome guy. He looked mesomorphic, fit, tailored suit, Armani, the works, everything. When he was on the football team, they were drinking and he decided to get his ear pierced and although he did not wear anything in that and hadn't for five years, he now had short cropped hair and was moving up the ladder in the corporation, and he was bright and they were wanting to move him along, but was entering the rooms and talking with his head turned a bit because he was very self-conscious about these two little holes. I cut them out and patched them up. Now it blends in. Some people have a crease in that area, fortunately, so it looks more like a crease. If someone really looked, they could see something had been done. Even the stigma of having had a pierced ear was more than he could tolerate in his ascent up the corporate ladder.

I think that's a very important warning for people.

Sure. [Showing me an extended consent form] I'll show you what I warn people about. Start off at death and move down.



In a lot of cases piercing makes people much more comfortable with their bodies. There body might be fine, but a little thing makes them feel better about it.

It's a form of adornment. But just as what I do can be carried to an extreme, and I'm the only one that can determine the limit, because I have the right legally to do that. I can re-

fuse a patient. What you do, or the body modification subculture does, could be carried to an extreme to the detriment of the person. And I don't know where that limit is. In our society, it's over there, and in other societies, it's way over there.

Time will tell. (Five years from now...) I sort of joked to one of the staff here, maybe we should open one of the rooms for piercing and tattooing so at least we can supervise the sterility and how it's done. It's like abortion — if it's being done to the detriment of people, that they're dying of haemorrhage and infection, it was legalized and then done in hospitals.



Medicine has come a long way because of certain anaesthetic techniques. Prior to anesthesia, the things that I do would be just incomprehensible. Because we have LSD which is what we use to dissociate the patients mind from their body and then use freezing on them that lasts up to eight hours.

What's the difference between street LSD and medical grade LSD?

Street LSD is produced in an illicit lab somewhere, and may be impure. Anything that's produced in a non-controlled lab may have impurities.

Medical grade LSD can have the same psychedelic effects, or it can have bizarre effects if it's a mixture of things or impure. We use pure grade LSD. The patient is floated out for five minutes so we release their mind from their body and freeze the area we're going to work on with a local. They drift back into awareness, but now they're frozen. The LSD is a quick trip out and back and by then they're frozen. The freezing is painful — the long-acting freezing is unpleasant and may involve a lot of needling or needling in areas that people aren't accustomed to. This allows us to get a part of the body numb so that things can be done to it.



Obviously you wouldn't (couldn't) recommend this, but a person who does want to get some of these unusual surgical procedures done, is their only avenue going to Mexico or India or places where the doctors can get away with it?

I would think so.

Outside of just saying "don't do it" about warnings would you offer? If it's something that they really want, and there isn't a mainstream medical avenue for achieving it...

The risks that I tell people for my procedures probably apply to many of the things you're talking about. [Reading from his consent form] Death, swelling, bruising, no guarantees, infection, sensation, function, late healing, revisions, healing process, bleeding, blood clots, skin loss, chronic persistent problems, asymmetry, complications, and unpredictable problems. So if you're going to cut off a piece, or cut into a piece, those same problems can occur.

In all the people that I know, I don't know of any serious medical problems arising directly from one of these procedures.

You wouldn't know. How could you know? You only know if they die, because that's what hits the paper. But you don't know if they had a massive haematoma or some other complication and then went to a hospital. That's privileged information.

All the doctors in Toronto knew when I had a massive complication because I personally went with the patient from here to the Toronto General when he returned the next day with a huge haematoma. He was a Chinese chap that took oriental medication that was probably spiked with Aspirin or something that caused a bleeding problem and didn't tell us. But there was obviously something going wrong when he came back the next day. Everyone in Toronto heard about that through the medical grapevine, and if they hadn't heard, I publicized it, as it was totally unexpected. Patients now are grilled, we ask them now about garlic, because there's a component in garlic which may affect bleeding, we ask them about ginseng, we ask them about high dose vitamin E.



[Showing photos] This was done in Mexico. This is a silicone injected castrated scrotum. Silicone is "gone away" in North America?

Well, liquid silicone is uncontrolled. It was never approved for general use. It was authorized among ten or twenty doctors for experimental purposes so they could follow it over a period of time but some people got hold of it and started injecting it for the purpose of building up chins, lips, or noses, and because it had impurities in it, it caused phenomenal allergic fibrous reactions, which literally destroyed the tissues that it was put into.

Since that was due to impurities, if you got pure, medical grade silicone, would these problems go away?

Not even the pure substance was relatively safe because you could never purify that particular synthetic totally. It's a chained molecule which has impure chains in it. It's the same thing as gasoline. When oil comes out of the ground, you can distil it into kerosene, benzene, gasoline, naphtha, all sorts of things.

So basically for safe implants in polymers you're limited to Teflon?

No, Teflon's not even all that safe. It has limitations, but there's a whole field of implant science that people with PhDs and MDs go into. Solid silicone which is polymerized with tighter bonded molecules is considered safe for the majority of people. Liquid is a different polymer; the chains are looser. Not even if it's medical grade, made to the purest they can make it, if it's injected it may move and then you have no control over it.

It doesn't bond to the tissue?

No, it moves through the tissues, and that was the big concern. The silicone that was put in breast implants was a medical grade but, when the implant broke, what happened to it? That's where you got all these gooey pictures that were on W5 and Connie Chung. They weren't actually necessarily causing sickness in the patient, but they were certainly were dramatic. [showing me a photo of an inflamed face] This was sickness — it was done just with the stuff you buy at Canadian Tire for caulking windows. There's a beautician just across from Canadian Tire that uses it.

The problem is we can't catch them in the act usually, and it requires a person to complain. Often the person who's had it done feels somewhat responsible because they said all right and feel terribly foolish. If someone dies then the coroner, society, takes over. If the person stays alive, very few will go out and turn it into a big court case because they are partly responsible for their own illness.



The “horns” are beads under the skin that are periodically stretched with larger ones.

It's called skin expansion. We do that to cover defects. It didn't take a genius, but the guy that discovered it I guess watched his wife get pregnant and said, I need to close a defect from a burn patient, and if my wife can stretch her skin over nine months, maybe I can do the same thing.

Right now those are Teflon, but he's planning on putting in coral to have it bond to the bone.

It will. Coral is a biological hydroxyapatite crystal which is similar to bone, and I believe purified coral has been used for bone replacement with some success.

Sometimes bone spurs creating horns occur in humans through accident?

Sure, I've taken them off. It's called an exostosis. They form by chance sometimes, or after trauma. You get some blood collecting there, and the bone in its attempt to heal produces more bone.

I'm not asking for instructions, but is that something this guy could do?

It's not controllable.

Implants have been put in the scalp before by people that want to hold a hairpiece on, and they invariably get infected. The scalp is one of these multi-layered tissues that if you get infection in one of the layers it spreads.

Dr. Anthony Pignatora, a doctor in New York is putting titanium snaps in to hold on toupees.

That's called osteointegration and there's been a lot of research done in that. Most of the research was done by dentists because they want to append dental implants to the bone, but they're not foolproof and unfortunately in the scalp.

Do they offer a direct line for infection into the skull?

Yes.

[Showing photos of the “Metal Mohawk”] He's successfully healed and it's been about a year now.

You can heal, and then it can flare up. You're taking something out of time or context, and saying “here it is.” Medicine looks at thirty or forty or fifty years. This is why for the breast implant procedure, where they took some individual who had problems, then society, who doesn't analyse things statistically and scientifically, said, “aha, cause-effect relationship, all women with implants are going to be sick and obviously we have to compensate these peo-

ple because there was a legal screw-up here.” Doctors took those women, and took the general population. They said, 10% of women get breast cancer. The group of women that got implants? Less than 10% had breast cancer. Interesting. Do implants cure cancer? No. Maybe because they had smaller breasts to begin with they had less of a chance of cancer. The media was saying implants may cause cancer. Well that isn’t what we were finding, but that didn’t scare people, so it didn’t get printed. Arthritis and all these autoimmune diseases; again, you take the average population, and say two percent of women are going to get arthritis or scleroderma or something. Take women who get implants; also two percent. Interesting. Implants aren’t increasing the incidence. There is no cause and effect relationship, because if there was there’d be a higher group there. But when you get a hundred women that show themselves crippled like this and they’re in pain every day, and they can get two or three million dollars, because they’ve had some augmentation, wow, but nothing has come of it. We think that there may be implants in some people that have an allergic tendency or may get the disease anyway, it may speed up the process.



When doing implants, do you do something like a spot test, implant a little piece of the material to check that?

It’s a great idea. I offered it to one woman. She didn’t want to do it. I wish there was a legal obligation to do that. In fact, Dow-Corning before they went bankrupt made me baby little implants that were used in animal research because the woman who developed problems in each side who we believe had an allergic reaction, her own body’s intrinsic allergic reaction, just like some people are allergic to peanuts, she was a model, and it was very important to her to have a safe and good result. I said, based on what you had happen to you, people that are high-risk, in the sense that this implant means so much to their career, I would then offer them this test.

Are breast implants your most common procedure?

They used to be. Of course they dropped in popularity, people thought they were going to die from them. It’s come back though, simply because people do read the back page, and read between the lines, and when the Mayo Clinic and Harvard Med. School and U of T Med. School and a number of other Ivy League facilities that were not sponsored by Dow-Corning’s research funding or anything else came up with independent statistically irrefutable scientific evidence that there was no cause-effect relationship, people started saying, well, what was the problem?

But the lawsuits were still successful.

Hey, OJ was found not guilty. There was irrefutable DNA evidence, but because there was a jury of twelve people, non-scientific minds that were swayed by emotions and other factors, because they’re human, they could find someone not guilty. It’s scary. DNA is ir-

refutable to doctors. It's your blueprint. There's no one else in the world that has your DNA. If you spill it around, and leave your semen everywhere, they're going to trace it back to you.



What's your most common procedure?

Liposuction may be the most common. Certainly for women it's the most common procedure I do. As far as the penis lengthening, I've been analysing my statistics since I got back from China and of course when I got back it was a novel and new procedure and men were rushing to sacrifice themselves no matter how experimental they were told it was. That volume went up and came down and now it has probably stabilized at the true need and desire level. We did patient 395 or 396 yesterday, so probably by the end of the month we'll hit 400. I do two or three a week. We're probably closer to sixty to eighty per year.

You mentioned you don't do girth and length in one operation.

Dangerous.

I've seen other surgeons that are willing to do that.

Sure, because it's market driven. It doesn't make sense. If both length and girth are done simultaneously, you're taking a big hunk of the body, putting it in there, asking it to survive, and you're causing swelling because of the lengthening and putting weights and traction on it. It's like strangling a baby who's just struggling to live.



You're descended from George Stubbs, the artist?

He wasn't my great grandfather, but you follow the family tree back, there's old George sitting up on one of the branches. It wasn't anything that people kept saying, "you're the spitting image of that guy two hundred years ago." Art was my major all through high school and I taught it as a summer job.

I guess that gives you an advantage as a plastic surgeon?

I think in some courses in the States it's a prerequisite. If you don't have the artistic background before you come in, they teach it to you along the way. Anyone can stick a knife up a nose and call it a rhinoplasty. That's what's happening in Toronto now with the government squeezing all the doctors. There are many family doctors who have started to do surgery. Anyone that comes to the office you can tell them you're going to make them beautiful if they are gullible, and there's big money, relative to what the government pays to do something there, and so they buy a laser, or ultrasonic liposuction machine, or something else, and put an ad in the paper. Next thing you know, people are trouping in, thinking that they're getting the best care.

In relation to that, how does your Cosmetic Surgicentre serve people?

I turn more people down than I accept. I only operate on individuals who are good candidates — healthy, realistic, and have a good indication for the procedure in question.

Kristian White

The ironically named “Kristian White” was the founder of the San Francisco based studio NOMAD, which focused on the neotribal aesthetic. He had some of the first large scale black-work tattoos and large gauge piercings that people saw in North America, and traveled the world and lived in a variety of cultures, both primitive and modern, which gave him a unique and balanced outlook on body modification and body play. Kristian and I did this interview in March of 1997.



You’ve traveled and lived in a variety of other cultures. Can you tell me a bit about that?

Actually, it started when I was a little kid, seeing pictures of American Indians, seeing how they paint their bodies and put feathers in their hair. I was really impressed with that so it lead on to investigating National Geographics and then it lead to decorating my own body. When I got out of high school, I didn’t want to continue going to school, so I decided to travel. Every year I would take off for two to three months and travel. I’ve been to Africa a couple of times, I stayed with a lot of different people like the Masai...

Do you just sort of show up on their doorstep and say, “here I am”?

You just buy a plane ticket, and you fly there, and you just hitchhike or take a boat to wherever the people you want to see are.

That was pretty much how it worked.

And they’re receptive to your visits?

Yeah, yeah... Of course, someone who looks a little crazy like they do, they totally love it because all they see is missionaries who are telling them they’re going to Hell for having long ears, and walking around naked with paint on their bodies.

And back then you had long ears as well.

Right. But my ears are still half-inch.

What is it that happened to them? You removed them?

I had inch and a half ears for quite a while, for several years and I was working the same job for six years, and then I decided to do a lot of traveling, and I didn’t want to continue with that same job, and I was living in Los Angeles, which is pretty conservative. I was

stretching my ears way before anyone else was, so people were really tripping on seeing them like that. Actually, I was kind of worried that I wouldn't be able to find a job with my ears like that, so I decide to take them off.

So you spent a brief period looking for main-stream work. Did that end up going anywhere?

Nope. Little did I know that I would own my own business and look however I want, and not be at the mercy of other people for a job. Things have come a long way since then and you can look different now.

So did you just cut them off with a pair of scissors?

No, I used a scalpel. I didn't suture them or anything. I just cut them off and let them heal. They look pretty good. I actually had them recut and one of them's a little thicker than the other one. I just wear half-inch jewelry in them now and that's as big as I'm going to take them.

You mentioned you lived with the Masai. Where else have you lived?

I've stayed with the Turkana people in Kenya, Samburu in Kenya, and I've also traveled in North Africa and I've traveled quite a bit in Europe and I've traveled a lot in South East Asia. I've done a lot of trips in New Guinea — I've stayed with quite a few people in New Guinea like the Asmat and the Danni, and I've done some trips in Borneo. I've stayed with Pennan which are a nomadic tribe that stay in the interior, and I've stayed with the Dayak tribe that live in the long-houses. I've been to Indonesia six times, and my wife's Indonesian. I've traveled all through South East Asia quite a bit.

Outside of it being culturally educational, have you learned as well as a body artist?

I've learned practices that they did that are no longer happening because of the missionaries and due to westernization. In Borneo they're actually cutting ears off of the people. The missionaries do it. They tell them they're going to Hell, they're living in sin having ears like that. What's pretty hilarious is they let them repierce them Western-style. I don't understand that. They take their jewelry and they sell it. It's pretty sad.

Are there any groups fighting to stop this?

Not really. In Borneo the rain forest is probably the oldest rain forest in the world, it's probably a hundred million years old, and it's disappearing the fastest. Three quarters of it is owned by Indonesia, which is Kalimantan, and the rest is pretty much Malaysia. Fifty percent, or more than fifty percent of Malaysia is probably logged already and I'd say a third of Indonesia and Borneo is logged. And it's not slowing down at all. A lot of these people are losing their homes and their way of life forever. Like in Indonesia, it's illegal to get tattooed. It's illegal. In Indonesia they don't want to look primitive, they don't want Westerners to look at their country as barbaric or primitive. For instance, they long-houses that the Iban and Dayak tribes live in... the way they work is that all the families live together in these long houses and the missionaries don't allow that any more. They want a regular Western-style family with a mom, dad, and kids, which really doesn't work very well in that environment. Before they had everyone to help each other, and take care of their kids, they overlapped a lot. Now it's really difficult for them. They burned down their beau-

tiful carved long houses and they build single houses (sheds) made out of corrugated tin, which get too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter. The tourists have actually been asking to go and visit long houses, so what they do is they have the Javanese, who are not even from Borneo, go in and build fake long houses for the tourists to visit. It's pretty sad.

Living there you got to see this all first hand.

Yeah, and I've been there several times, so over the years you can see what's really happening. It's really sad.

What can people, as individuals, do to stop this?

Get active with any rainforest group. That would definitely help a lot. But it's pretty bad, and they're disappearing all over the world.

But while it's disappearing there, it is reappearing in North America.

There's a big movement of people decorating their body in Western culture and I think people were afraid before to do anything, for fear of not getting a job, but people now are more willing to take chances.

In my work, as a computer programmer, it's actually been a benefit for me.

Well, people remember you more than they would someone else. I think that people are willing to take more chances and things are relaxing a little bit as far as being able to get a job. People have always been decorating their bodies since the beginning of man. Whether it's western culture with mascara and lipstick, to primitive cultures that paint their bodies and wear stuff in their hair... it's nothing new. Western culture thinks it's barbaric for these people to stretch their piercings, to have huge ears, or lips, but then they'll go and get a face job, or nose job, or boob job and that's totally acceptable in our culture. You can't say that's any less mutilating to your body than stretching an earlobe.

You've done some lip-stretching?

My lip was 3/4" for a while. I stretched it from 14ga. It's a long process. I have a tattoo on my chin that looks better when it's not so large so I let it shrink down to about 0ga. I've actually cut one person's lip (who was featured in PFIQ), and I cut his ears also. He had I would say 0ga holes and we marked up the side of his cartilage and cut up the side. It came out really nice. We put roughly 1" plugs in them right away and he's stretched it from there.

He's the only one you've done such a large lip on?

Right. We have customers who have stretched them pretty large from regular piercings, but nothing to the point of what he's done.

The 3/4" that you had... how heavily does that deform the lip?

It pulled the lip out pretty good. I have a symmetrical tattoo on my chin, so it was starting to stretch it out and not evenly so I decided to take it back down again.

Let me ask you about that tattoo... I remember it was once a Moko-esque design. What happened to it?

I actually had a spiral design when I first had it done, and I decided I wanted something darker and heavier on there. I actually was inspired by the Mojave Indians, and got some ideas and started drawing on my chin, and actually decided to do a more geometric instead of spiral. Since then I've added to the top of my lip and some lines down my forehead and nose.

Are there more plans for that?

Yeah. I'm not quite sure yet, I've been playing around with some ideas but I'm not rushing it. I just let it come to me.

Are you getting tattooed using North American tools?

Yes, Gary Kosmala is tattooing me, just with a machine.

I heard that you were going to be learning to tattoo?

I actually know how to tattoo but I don't do it that often. I was doing some hand-picking work. I know how to use a machine also. I bought a machine to fill in a lot of my black work.

I started getting tattooed when I was sixteen years old, and I wanted big stuff but I didn't know what was available. The big stuff all seemed to be Japanese work, and Bob Roberts was pretty good with Japanese style work, so that's what I went with, but as I get older, and evolve as a person and ideas, I find I'm more attracted to tribal style work. I'm keeping my Japanese style back piece, but I'm really into the Kayapo Amazonian Indians, the way they paint their bodies, so I'm actually tattooing my body sort of the way they tattoo their bodies, but also keeping my back piece.

So it wasn't a personal backlash (like rumor says)?

No. It was just hard for me to keep going to him and finishing my tattoo knowing that he hates queers and hates black people and hates anything that's not white. It's hard when you start a big project with someone many years ago and you try to ignore stuff that they say or talk about because, what are you going to do? They've started this huge piece on you... It wasn't a backlash, but it pushed me to something that I'm going to be happier with in the long run. I just wasn't comfortable getting tattooed by him any more.

With people getting a lot of work "borrowed" from other cultures, what do they need to be sensitive of?

One thing that kind of bugs me is that a lot of people are getting the Maori-style chin tattoos, the Mokos, and Trev Marshall has written a few articles on it, saying that the Maori people are very upset about this, and I think that's really too bad. If I was Maori I would probably be very impressed that my work was so popular around the world and that peo-



ple really enjoyed it so much, and would actually choose Maori designs to put on their body. I would be flattered rather than angry. In that instance I think it's really too bad that the Maori people feel that way.

Was your original chin tattoo Maori inspired?

It was, yes.

Did this influence the cover-up at all?

No, not at all.

When you do this, you see it as paying homage to these cultures?

I just think that these practices are disappearing in the primitive cultures all over the world, and a lot of people are upset that I'm a white person and decorating my body, which is ridiculous. They're like, "why are you doing an African thing, you're not black". The white tribes, the Celtic cultures, they tattooed their bodies and wore piercing. We have just as much right to decorate our bodies as people from Africa or anywhere else. People are just ignorant in certain areas and they don't know. I actually am able to educate a lot of people about what's going on in the world by looking different. It's been a really positive thing in my life. People are curious and they come up to me and start talking and I can tell them about certain parts of the world where they're not allowed to do this any more and it's part of their customs and traditions.

And that brings us to the creation of NOMAD.

Right. I wanted to do a body piercing studio from a cultural aspect rather than a fetish or punk-rock shock-value point of view and I think a lot of people can understand it more from a purely decorating and having fun with your body point of view. Your body is yours to express yourself with and have fun with. We've been doing it since man started and whether it's through Western modification or traditional "primitive" styles, it's all the same.

There are quite a few studios now with a tribal look, but none to NOMAD's level.

And I think we were the first studio to do that. Blake, my former partner, married Maria from Venus and their shop was totally gothic and very much imitated Gauntlet, but as soon as Blake became a part of that they've changed their whole shop to tribal. I feel like Blake thought it was a good marketing thing. The best thing to do is just educate people, and have fun with their bodies. There are clean, safe places to do that.

How does that tribal aesthetic move itself into piercing? Do you do the same set of piercings as another non-cultural shop would do?

We actually just do the traditional piercings. I'd say eyebrows are the only piercing we do that are not very traditional. We don't do any surface piercings. We do the traditional ones people have been doing for hundreds of years and we know people can heal them well and have good results with them. We tend to stretch piercings quite a bit.

And will you do them initially large as well?

We start ears at 2ga or 0ga. We started large needle and taper up afterwards. In cartilage we can use dermal punches, but we actually use taper and needle also. We undersize pierce

and then stretch to the size so there's not a lot of bleeding.

What are your feelings about artists who are really moving forward and trying new things like unusual surface piercings and 3-d implants?

I waiver a bit on certain procedures, maybe scalpel cutting and things like that because we aren't doctors. We might have studied on the side, and some of us haven't and are just going for it which I don't think is right. But there are people who've had a piercing cut and lose a lot of blood or it doesn't stop bleeding and have to go to the hospital. I'm not for that type of procedure. I have performed them on a couple of close, close friends, but it's not something I actually do on a regular basis in the store.

I also meant aesthetically.

I don't condemn anyone. As long as they're doing a clean sterile procedure, and they've investigated enough about a procedure that they're not going to hurt anybody, and the end result's going to turn out good. But piercing's not regulated, and there are people hurting people, and giving them infections and hepatitis and other things because they're not responsible. That's my main concern.



As far as people achieving looks that are unique historically...

I'm fine with that, but it's not where I base my shop.

NOMAD's had a variety of staff incarnations over the years, and I think you're the only original member left?

Yes. Blake and I were the original owners. We opened about three years ago. I worked part time at the Gauntlet and he'd worked at Body Manipulations.

You actually left for a while as well?

Yes, I had a parting with Blake, and we were going to sell the shop, so I came back and ran the shop, since it pretty much fell apart when I left. Now we're doing really well.

Reverend Drew Lewis

Reverend Drew Lewis was the founder, owner, and head piercer at Washington DC's "Perforations", as well as one of BME's first contributors. We knew each other since before BME started, as he was a long-time rec.arts.bodyart reader and poster. This interview was done in 1996, and not much longer Drew faced a number of personal and professional difficulties and unpleasant allegations that caused him to leave both the APP and his studio.



I first became interested in piercing as a young teen — I remember being fascinated by the photo spreads in National Geographic. More to the point, I remember when I was 13 seeing older male acquaintances with pierced ears, and thought that I might like that, and then had a fetish for a nostril ring when I was 16 or so. I actually waited until I was 18 before I started getting pierced, but within 2 years I had quite a bit of work on my ears, and a nostril ring, and then when I was 21 I got my eyebrow pierced. Around this time a lover of mine introduced

me to Modern Primitives (this was in winter 1991/92). A few months later, I had a nipple pierced by Raelyn Gallina on one of her visits to Boston. I thought that she was an amazing woman. By this time I was doing all sorts of research on piercing, try to assimilate as much information as I could.

I was working various odd jobs, honing my computer skills, and waiting to be admitted to Northeastern University. I was researching lots of areas, and for the first time in my life was really on my own without much in the way of guidance. I did quite a lot of learning about myself and life during that time.

Were you in computer science at university?

Actually, No, I was an English Major. I've always had an interest in computers, however. My Father's been in the computer industry for close to 30 years now, and I started programming on a TRaSh-80 around 1979/80 then moved to an apple and so forth.

I first discovered the Internet in 1989. I remember reading through a.s.b. [alt.sex.bondage] on occasion, and knowing people who were on the primitives list who posted to a.s.b. on occasion (this was like '91 or so) and the first call for discussion for r.a.b. I floated on and off at this time, not always having net access, so was by no means a regular contributor, but I do remember that r.a.b. was a fairly good resource from day one, though until Anne Greenblatt took over the duties as F.A.Q. maintainer that information left a lot to be desired. I think that Anne started keeping the piercing FAQ in 1994 sometime, whenever exactly it was, the information available began to be much more reliable (though still, of course, not foolproof... there are many things that cannot be covered or are beyond the pale and should not be open for inspection for those who might try things beyond their skills or knowledge.) The communications possibilities of the Internet are wonderful, being able to send of closed mailing lists, keeping in touch with other piercers and trading information without having to worry if you are calling them at a convenient time, let them answer their email at their leisure. Being able to do the same with clients is also good. BME is an

excellent resource, looking at procedurals, and seeing how other piercers might approach a specific piercing differently, and using that for evaluation. And also just showing the possibilities of what's out there... but then again, that's a two headed coin, because some of the more extreme modifications might tempt people to try them themselves, or have an unscrupulous hack butcher them. Not that this information should be suppressed, necessarily, but rather, controlled, like you're doing with Extreme and its passwords. The 'net makes for a great communication and information dissemination tool, but it does have drawbacks when people are having problems with some of their piercings, because there are times where you just can't whip off an answer based on a typed description of what's happening, you need to SEE it to know what to do.

And how did your personal interest in piercing germinate into a profession?

My first nipple piercing and experience with Raelyn resonated within me, and I thought I had found something that I might enjoy doing. The only thing that I had found in my life that had struck such a chord within me was writing (which I still do to this day, having had a small amount of my work published in small publications. That's where a lot of my focus is these days...I have a goal to be published in Esquire by the time I am 35 — only 9 years left!), and I knew that I had a calling. I redoubled my efforts at research, studying basic human anatomy, and how to keep things clean. And I kept getting pierced. Around August of 1992, I began to pierce close friends, who trusted me to practice on them. And so I worked underground for a number of years, always (and to this day) trying to gain new information and further my skills. The piercer who says that they know all there is to know is a fool. There is always room for improvement, always something that someone else can teach you. There are new ways to do things. Education is a lifelong process.

So what is the process for gaining new information and furthering skills?

The first and foremost and most important part of this is being OPEN to new ideas. Too many people are not. (And I've been guilty of this myself at times). There's a wealth of information out there. Surf the web, and look at other piercers web pages. Call up other piercers and have a conversation. Read interviews with them. Meet other piercers over a beer or coffee and discuss different techniques. Never assume that you can't learn anything else. Always know that you have more to learn. Practice other piercers' techniques, on willing subjects who know your skill level with whom you've disclosed that you are working on a new technique. There's nothing wrong with doing this, if you know it's something that you can handle and you are open with your subjects about it. Maybe you like it, maybe you don't but at least you tried it.

Once someone has reached a level where they are at the “cutting edge” and are using new techniques, how should this be approached, and if and when the piercer “proves” them, how should they tell the rest of the piercing world about it?

I don't think that they should do it in a slashy, publicity driven fashion. That's sure to get people riled up. The entrenched establishment feels threatened when that happens to them, and closes up, they're not willing to listen to the new ideas. Better to bring it up privately, start things circling around through various connections, then, if it is not something that will endanger people, let the public at large see it.

What (if any) is the APP's role in all of this?

The APP exists to bring about standards for all piercers to protect client's health and safety, and help bring about proactive legislation.

Tell me a bit about your role in the APP?

I'm a general business member, helping to raise standards in the DC area, and I am also the archivist, collecting materials on any and all subjects that may interest the APP, as well as official APP materials.

I don't know if this has progressed far enough to talk about, but as archivist how do you see the "trend" of piercing progressing?

Over the last few years, we've definitely seen piercing come out of the woodwork, and become much more visible and a part of people's daily lives. Navel piercings have become mainstream, and many others aren't so shocking. I've seen a lot of kids who want to push the envelope, get extreme work done to shock people from their complacency. That's all well and good for them, but I'm personally more into people doing things for themselves, for spiritual reasons, for healing, for aesthetics, for marking important events in their lives. I don't like piercings that are unattractive. I think now that things are calming down, we're going to be seeing less of people doing piercing because all their friends are, and more because they want to do so. Sure, in some groups, piercing will be part of the group identity (raver-kids, industrialists, Goths) but I'm seeing more and more people who are doing because they've thought about it and decided that they wanted to do it for themselves. I think that's where things are headed even more.



The trend I'm seeing is for people to be doing things to their bodies because they want to do so, not because they are 'hot' or 'in'. So we'll be seeing more of the implants, because that information is more available now, but I'm hoping it will be done in safe and responsible manners. I'm a little worried as piercers get further into gray areas of implants and the like, because the AMA is fiercely protective of non-licensed professionals performing medical procedures. I don't feel that it's an area which should be widely publicized, but be more behind the scenes, so those in the know will have access to it without endangering piercers (and clients) lives and professions.

Do you think most people are missing out or overlooking the spiritual side of piercing?

This is true for many people, in a specific sense, but not when you look at the whole picture. Spirituality is missing from far too many people's lives. I'm not talking religion, but spirituality, being in touch with things. Many people pay lip service to their religion, few people are truly spiritual. It's not even something that I can put into words, really... you just know when it's there. I try to incorporate that aspect into my work as much as possible, when people are receptive to it. I have some clients for whom the energy passing between us is just amazing. I need to take a break after I finish them before I can go on to anyone else. Many other piercers I know are like this... it can be too much to do it all the time, but

I know when I have a client who wants to use some ritual in the piercing, it can make my day. It's a welcome change from routine, and it makes the whole day better. I'd like to see more people interested in the spiritual side of piercing, but our culture doesn't encourage spirituality in general, so I doubt that it will become a usual thing.

We've touched a bit on this already, but let's get back to your professional history...

In the winter of 1994, I moved back to the DC area, with the goal in mind of opening my own shop. In April 1995, this goal was fulfilled, when we opened up Perforations.

It was myself and a partner (Tashi, who is leaving the company), and a few friends who were helping us out. (Randy Musgrove and Michael "Fish" Fisher) They're both piercers in their own rights now, although Fish only pierces occasionally... he's working on his tattooing apprenticeship. Randy's working down in Blacksburg, VA. We hired another full-time piercer last spring (Jason "Spike" Simmons) who's fabulous.

At that time [April 1995] I had had about 1500 accomplished piercings under my belt from my experience of working out of my home and a small shop. Now we began in earnest. In October 95 I took a class with Fakir, hoping to further hone my skills. Nearly half the class had had some extensive experience, so we got to do much more than the basic syllabus covered. And I got to exchange ideas with other piercers, show them things that I had worked out through trial and error that were more advanced than what they practiced, yet made perfect sense. I've always had a strong eye towards keeping things clean, and this helped. It also provided for me a more spiritual background, as I was able to participate in my first ritual piercing, a truly moving experience for me. I continue my education by talking shop with other piercers as much as possible... I have a network of piercers I talk to on a weekly or a monthly basis and we tell each new ideas, or new techniques, as well as exchanging gossip and the like.



Fabiola

Fabiola charmed the body art industry, an exotic and flirtatious Persian/German beauty that looked more like a fashion model than the stereotype of a body piercer. Previously working in Berlin, this 23 year old moved to Toronto where she briefly married Ace Daniels of Way Cool Tattoos and then left for a piercing tour of the world. We did this interview in August of 1997.



I was raised in a very conservative household and started rebelling at the age of twelve. By fifteen I got my first tattoo — a red rose with barbed wire that I designed and had inked inside my bikini line. The rose and barbed wire represented myself: youthful, feminine, in bloom but also dangerous and untouchable. My next tattoo, at seventeen was a large black and gray dragon with wings extending over my right thigh and batting the rose on my groin. This dragon represents my aggressive, masculine side rebelling against my socialization into the cultural ideology of “feminine beauty”. In other words, I didn’t want to be categorized as this “babe” or “cute chick”.

I got heavily involved in the tattoo scene at that point. I started working at a tattoo shop. I got to know a few artists and I started to appreciate the differences in the quality of tattoo art and artists. I met Junior from Brazil and he tattooed my left thigh. I decided that I would not control the artist

— I would take a leap of faith and let him ink a piece of his heart into my skin. I didn’t pre-approve any image, he just started tattooing. He ended after seven hours and left another black and gray dragon on my left thigh holding the decapitated head of the other dragon on my right thigh. This dragon, to me, represents the way Junior saw me now compared with how I used to be — more balance between my masculine and feminine sides. For me, this tattooed marked the recovery from cocaine abuse. I’ve been clean and sober for over two years.

Daemon of Urban Primitive tattooed my upper body, from my left shoulder across my chest and embracing the dragon on my right side. Before I met Daemon in Berlin, I never liked tribal-style tattoos. When I saw his work, it inspired me to get one of his pieces. It was a similar situation as I had with Junior. I gave Daemon all my trust and he tattooed his love, his art into my skin. The only limitations I made was it had to be an abstracted dragon and one claw had to grab my left nipple the sensation of having my nipple tattooed. Once again, the artist was tattooing his impressions of how he saw me — and it was less aggressive, more feminine, yet strong and powerful.

My next tattoo was a hand-done piece on my foot. I ran into performance artist and tat-

tooiist Zed Le Head on a plane flying from Am'dam to Berlin. I wanted to experience a hand tattoo. This time, I had to place a limitation on theattooist because he wanted to ink a swastika on my foot. We settled for Arabic calligraphy. My next tattoo will be an extension of this pice on my foot; Daemon will hand tattoo one of his designs to make the piece more flowing and less decal-like. This tattoo marks another personal transformation that was influenced by my trip to Toronto: working at Urban Primitive, meeting new people and changing my attitude and outlook in many aspects.



All my friends had tattoos. Once I got tattooed, I became interested in other forms of body modification, particularly piercing. I first heard about body piercing at sixteen and I got my nipples and navel pierced at seventeen, on the same day that I got my tattoo — I just started branching into tattooing. I took the opportunity to work at Urban Primitive so that I could be exposed to excellent tattooing, branding and scarification methods. I plan to continue my association with Urban Primitive and my investigation into these forms of body modification. I am also very interested in the more advanced modifications, but it is important to me that I learn and understand the limitations and risks of such procedures by experienced people.

I completed an apprenticeship as a veterinary assistant before I passed my exams and became enrolled in the veterinary sciences program. During my apprenticeship, my instructor was so impressed with my professional attitude and commitment that she taught me how to perform surgery (castrations and others) on animals. Direct experience with tissues, organs, blood, needles, anaesthetics, sutures etc. stimulated my interest. I also gained a great understanding of anatomy and excellent technical skills with needles, clamps, etc. I do not intend to leave body modification for a veterinary career because it is such a large part of my lifestyle. Also I have invested a lot of my energy into learning and practicing body modification and I continue to do so.

Anyway, I was studying veterinary sciences at the University of Berlin and, among other reasons, I needed to find a way to support myself. I became involved with a number of tattooing and body piercing shops in Berlin. I learned very quickly and soon started promoting piercing shows at different clubs and fetish nights around town where I gave seminars on piercing safety, including post-piercing play (for SMers) and I did both permanent and play piercings on stage to demonstrate my abilities and promote piercing safety. Two years later, I opened my own studio, and trained another piercer who is running it for me while I travel.



My tattoos signified not only my personal identity, but my ongoing transformation and growth as a human being. For me they were particularly important markers because I experienced sexual abuse when I was a child. The placement of my piercings and tattoos relate to the sexual areas of my body that were abused. My piercings and my tattoos affirm my courage, power and strength as a woman and reclaim that vulnerable child body. The permanence of the tattoos signifies that no one will EVER have the right to abuse my vulnerable child and body again. My dragons warn people not to mess with me, but because they are also symbols of wisdom, they signify the wisdom that I have gained from my life

experiences.

One of the costs of affirming my Self with tattoos and piercings has been that the Persian side of my family feel that I have dishonored and betrayed them. They refuse to see me or have anything to do with me. This sometimes makes me feel alone.

Many people with similar or parallel issues as my own (sexual abuse, drug addiction, etc.) use tattooing, piercing and scarification to affirm their sense of Self, raise their self-esteem and therefore, transform their lives.

I see my role as a midwife trying to prepare the person for their journey and their transformation. I try to find out my client's motivations for getting the piercing, whether it is aesthetic, fashion, shock value, the ecstatic rush or a spiritual transformation. To avoid being intrusive, I often begin by sharing my personal experiences. If a client's motivation is sexual reclamation, for example, I try to prepare him or her for the intense flood of emotions and flashbacks that often accompany the piercing of a part of the body that has been abused. I remind them to breathe through the emotions and encourage them to release the shame and sorrow without feeling embarrassed. If they are prepared for this possibility ahead of time, it gives them the opportunity to get over the initial shock and use the energy raised by the piercing to release the negativity, gain power over their powerlessness, and raise their self esteem. In these cases, I take extra time before and after the actual piercing to ensure that they are feeling centered, and are ready to face the world. Often an intense spiritual experience creates a bonding between the client and piercer because of the shared piercing experience and the shared life experiences.

With my own piercings, I lost my shame for my genitals. After I got my labia and clitoris piercings was the first time that I was able to look at my genitals in a mirror and play with them. And my nipple piercings changed the way that I look at my body, it is now a woman's body not a juvenile body.



It is important to note that attitude affects healing. It has to do with the body/mind/soul connection and the energy raised during such an intense experience. Emotions can be seen as measurable, physiological responses to certain situations. For example, the experience of fear stimulates, among other things, the adrenal glands to release hormones into the bloodstream. These hormones create all kinds of bodily responses to the situation, for example, fight or flight. Thoughts are energy. When thoughts accompany the bodily response and a trauma occurs, this can create a neural pathway or imprint wherein the thought becomes enmeshed with the response to create a body memory. (For more detailed information you can read the introductory chapters to Raven's online book). Your state of mind before, during AND after the experience affects how your body responds to the piercing. For example, Raven got pierced by someone whom she later felt betrayed by. Although her piercings were several years old and healed, they started to reject and get really infected — the holes actually became ulcerated and bleeding, like stigmata. I had never seen anything that extreme before, but if you knew how angry she felt toward her piercer, you can understand how her body rejected anything that had to do with that person. She eventually removed every single piercing that she had by that piercer — four in all.

To my knowledge, there have not been any scientific investigations into this specific area, but there should be. I have heard, however, that scientists at the University of British Columbia are investigating the effects of Reiki and Therapeutic Touch on patients' healing and this highlights that body/mind/soul connection that I am talking about.



It is great being a woman in this profession. Women generally feel more comfortable getting pierced by a woman because of abuse issues, modesty or because some male piercers forget their professional behavior and treat some female clients like sex objects. For example, the male piercer who pierced my nipples offered to pierce them for free because he fancied my breasts. I would have turned him down except that I had already paid for them in advance and I was in the chair. I also didn't know anybody else and seven years ago I didn't know of any female piercers. If I had had the choice, I would have preferred being pierced by a woman.

Many men prefer being pierced by a woman because: they feel homophobic; where genital piercing are concerned they may feel inadequate or competitive with a male piercer; they may find it erotically stimulating to be pierced by an attractive woman; and they may also feel that they get more nurturing or mothering by a female piercer.

I don't feel uncomfortable if a man becomes aroused during the piercing — it is an understandable response, and they usually are feeling ashamed so I have to reassure them that I am not offended. But if someone comes in with the intention to show off his erect dick, I throw him out of the shop. But as I have a better understanding of male nature, I can usually tell before.

Sometimes clients fall in love with me, as patients with doctors — It happens all the time. Two clients offered to renovate my farmhouse. A few even offered to become my slaves. I pretty good friends with the boys who offered the renovations. They will probably do it when I go back since I have known them for one and a half years. I had a house slave to clean my house but he was unreliable so I got rid of him.

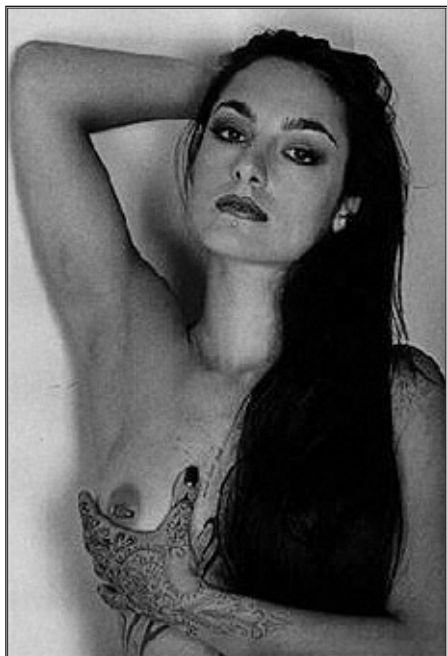


In Europe, more and more piercers are switching over to the indwelling cannula method. It is faster and less traumatic because the needles come laser sharp and sterile right from the manufacturers. An ultra sharp needle minimizes trauma to the tissue because it glides through the tissue with hardly any resistance — like a hot knife through butter. Once pierced, the needle is withdrawn and a very soft, very flexible sheath remains in place. Once indwelling, the sheath softens further and conforms to the body. This makes follow-through with the jewelry faster, easier and less traumatic. I know of some piercers in Toronto who buy hypodermic needles, cut and rework them. This extra handling increases



the risk of microscopic barbs and nicks on the needles. They also bend the needles with pliers which further increases this risk. I know that some piercers in Toronto tried using the cannula method with little success, but that was because they got the wrong needles. There are many kinds of indwelling cannulas — the correct one is critical for this method. I also abhor the use of corks — they can interfere with the placement and I was disgusted to hear that some piercers try to re-use the corks.

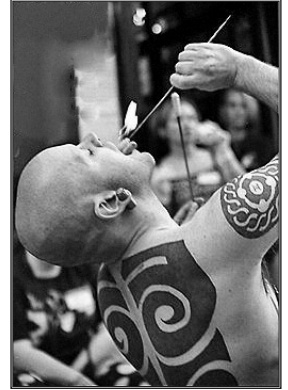
I personally prefer the European method. I believe that it is more hygienic, less traumatic and more advanced. This is the reason why the more innovative piercers in Europe are changing over. This is also why Urban Primitive hired me to introduce the European Method to Canada. The positive responses I get from piercing clients at Urban Primitive, who already have had other piercings using the North American method, affirm that my method is superior. Since a greater number of clients in Toronto get genital piercings, the added comfort of the European Method eases anxiety over the procedure.



Erik Sprague

Before becoming “The Lizardman”, he was Erik Sprague. In early 1998 I talked to Erik, before he started the majority of his transformation into what is now a sideshow and performance art icon. At the time he was still a university student, and had not yet began tattooing his face, although it was already all planned.

I was born on June 12th, 1972 making me 25 years old currently. My parents lived in Kentucky on the Fort Campbell army base at the time of my birth but soon relocated to northern New York along the Canadian border. Both of my parents currently work as school teachers and have since I was very young, my father also continues to work for the military as an instructor in the Mountain Warfare School. I have one sibling, my younger sister Erin, who was born three years after myself. I completed a high school with a New York State regents diploma and was a National Merit Scholar Finalist. This allowed me the luxury of choosing between many colleges and universities with a full academic scholarship. I ultimately chose Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY and received a Bachelor of Arts in Philosophy with departmental distinction in 1990. Currently I am engaged in graduate work in the philosophy department of the University at Albany and pursuing a Ph.D.



Why does such an intelligent and well educated person want to transform himself into a lizardman?

The general idea of the transformation originated as a performance art concept, to do a piece where the idea was to use body modification processes to gradual become something slightly other than human in some regards. Of course, I doubt I could manage something along the lines of being considered biologically other than human but I think given a social conception of humanity this can be achieved. The actual form and process for the lizard theme gradually evolved as I came to consider my desires in the form of tattoos, piercings, and other mods. Often the particular transformation idea was not consciously present but it recurs quite often and I now consider it a definite part/impetus to my overall goals concerning my art, my body modification, and myself as a whole. I should probably say that I first and foremost want to do this because I simply feel it is a good and healthy expression of who and what I am. The design work, the social implications, etc. all of these things reflect or express my ideas or views in some way. I can quite easily see why someone would not want to become a lizardman per se but I find it harder to see why someone would not the fullest possible expression of themselves. I think that my transformation viewed in this light may be much easier to understand.

What differentiates animal and man? Do we all fit in the same place on that chart?

This is rather interesting, since I am currently doing some work in medieval philosophy concerning the structure and form of dividing into classes and genus/species. It has long been my belief that man is an animal. To fit it to the above categories, man is a species of

the genus animal. This is such to me that unless you are asking whether or not man is an animal as opposed to being vegetable, mineral, his own genus, etc. that I feel the question you are likely pointing to is 'What differentiates man from the other species of the genus animal?' This no longer questions whether man is an animal but rather what makes him different from say dogs, rabbits, water buffaloes, etc. This is an interesting and important question to ask but I feel that it carries more import only after recognizing man as a species of animal and further acting in a manner which accords with that division. The latter is something that I think few people tend to do in their daily lives, otherwise much of our behavior wouldn't seem so obscure to us. In term of the differentia between the species of man and the other species of animal I think that the majority is simple biology — number of legs, musculature, eye placement, genes, etc. I really don't think we identify other people by their cognitive abilities, we look across the street and see a mostly hairless biped with various features and figure out that we think we see a person. As to cognitive abilities, which is usually touted as man being the only rational animal, my view does not yet have a lot of defined rigor, but it has gotten me this far and works well for me in practical concerns much more so than many more subtle and elaborate schemes. I deal with man as different from other animals in respect the level of ability I belief can expect from them in certain sorts of tasks (like doing math, problem solving, etc) where one gets a sort of base level of expected ability on species which is then modified by experience with individuals. Thus, initially I take it that I will only go to a man for mathematical problems or discourse but on the other hand experience has shown me that I have met dogs more capable of performing reasonably complicated tasks than many men.



THINK MY RETAIL SALES CAREER WILL BE EFFECTIVELY OVER
BUT
DON'T CARE MUCH FOR DIRECT SERVICE INDUSTRY WORK ANYWAY

What sort of life do you foresee as a self-made freak?

I think I would generally use the term self-made freak mainly in PR setting. I am not doing this to get a job as a freak, rather I am looking to get a job as a freak since it is likely the best way to capitalize on something I would do anyway. It is like my artwork, I will create it regardless of it having a market, but if people start buying I am not going to get a job selling cars when I can much more easily sell drawings. I think that although I missed the "Golden Age of the Sideshow" I still live in a time when there is a market for someone who has undertaken a project like my own in public display. I am a circus/carnival sideshow junkie. There is of course a great distinction between the circus and the carnival traditionally but I love them both and I don't think the distinction needs to be laid out here. I have learned, mostly through experimentation and luck, a number of acts and I am working on more. The best case scenario would be for me to be able to get a job with one of the few outfits still doing sideshows. I'm not too worried though, even if this were to fail I have enough credentials and people who know me well enough to look past my modification to see someone who can do the job. Of course, I think my retail sales career will be effectively over, but I don't care much for direct service industry work anyway.

What is it that draws you to this?

Well, beyond it just being a natural extension of myself it figures nicely into my two main interests: bodyart and sideshows. Also, I have known myself to do things simply for experience and further to make things more difficult or just prove a point. This may incorporate both. I love ‘going through the looking glass’ such as it is and I feel most comfortable on the other side, this will almost certainly have that affect. It will without a doubt make certain things more challenging due to general social reactions. I have welcomed, if not sought out, such challenges. I admit to losing a few more than I have won, but I wouldn’t change or capitulate on any of the experiences. In my opinion, it is the person who did not take me aboard for something inane like my dress or modifications that lost out on a dedicated, competent, and loyal possible employee.

Overall, you seem far more well-adjusted than most. Nonetheless are you ever worried that you might be crazy?

First, I think a lot of how well-adjusted I may or may not be is due to my family and friends who have always been supportive and reasonable in dealing with things they often just didn’t understand. As for being crazy, well I have thought that I might be crazy but it was never in a worried sense. In one sense, crazy to me means to be incapable of dealing with the world at large for any number of reasons such as obsessive compulsions, inability to structure sense data in meaningful ways, etc. I have never had or worried about having this sort of difficulty. In another sense I can see crazy as being to far removed in one’s own structuring of the world from that of others as to be able to meaningfully interact with them. This is the sort of craziness that I sometimes suspect I may be headed for but that I also often long for and try to achieve at least temporarily. I am very sympathetic towards views of quantum psychology like those expressed by Robert Anton Wilson and the sort of controlled multiple personality idea from some schools of ritualistic magick where the reality we view and react is one which is a model built on certain principles. By maintaining as many models as possible (each personality, being, whatever having its own model) you have different views available to you in assessing a situation and apply the one most desirable. This is very oversimplified but I think the general theme is apparent. By “going crazy” => abandoning a model and making a new one so different that it is not immediately translatable and then coming back to the others you allow yourself greater flexibility.

You have a background in martial arts weaponry — Can you tell me a bit about this, and how it fits into your life plan and philosophy?

I think I was originally drawn to the martial arts by seeing examples of amazing physical and mental/spiritual feats. Martial arts training is incredibly beneficial to almost any other endeavor. I might sound like a cheesy TV ad but the fact for me is that it’s true. Improved health, balance and coordination, bio-feedback (listening to your body), mental awareness, focus, and more are an integral part of progressing in one’s understanding of the art but if you look you can apply these concepts to the rest of the world with great efficiency. I guess the usual example is businessmen studying the Book of Five Rings — however what most don’t realize is that you actually have to train to realize the full benefits. It isn’t a set of principles you read and just apply, they are reinforced, refined, and developed through the physical training. To perhaps be a bit more ‘eastern’ about it, the division is

an artificial, there is not a mental/spiritual teaching and a physical one, there is just the whole and to deny either is to be incomplete. Until I began formally training in the martial arts (shito-ryu and then shotokan-ryu karate) I had been physically active but not with a true mental component. I had studied and developed many ideas and views but they weren't fully realized until I combined the physical and the mental. Beyond this, I have a special place in my heart, for lack of a better place, for two maxims/proverbs/sayings. The first is traditional "If you fail, fail magnificently" the second is a kind of abbreviation of the attitude one must take given here in one of my sensei's favorite and most often used expressions "Complete the task!". (alternately phrased in some connotations as "Bury it to the elbow") One last thing about the martial arts, as I progressed further and into the higher ranks it was my training and experience in the dojo that helped to begin to understand the idea of finding one's place in the tradition and the responsibility that comes along with being a part of something in any meaningful way.

Living in what appears to be a very normal peer group and city, how do you find people react to you, both socially and on the street?

I think that the social reactions are the most favorable or at least open-minded. When I am meeting people in a social setting they may not like what I have done or even want to understand it but they are still sociable. I think that talking to someone immediately breaks through the initial barrier (whether one is modified or not) you have established a communicative connection and taken away at least some of the dangerous unknown. When people just walk by on the street or see me as a person who has come in to speak to them on some topic they tend to react more viscerally. I know of at least one person who I saw react very negatively to the pieces I was wearing in my stretched lobes (she was unaware I could hear her speaking and see her making a face) who when later introduced to me directly was quite pleasant and spoke to me at some length about the process. Perhaps she was just maintaining what she thought was the necessary polite standards when talking to me but she seemed to come around towards the end. I get strong reactions, but as with almost anyone it's harder to be shocked or put off if you talk to them.

Have you "practiced" being a freak via mock-ups and painting?

Very much so and in various ways. I have done limited experiments with doing myself up in the manner in which I will appear after all the permanent mods have been made and with much less refinement than I hope the tattoos will afford me. Mostly my experiments has been with odd forms of dress, hair and beard styles, and of course body painting. Most of these have been on general whim or part of a performance piece. I have also performed some of the sideshow acts I have learned at parties and the occasional bar. I find it amusing that generally it is not the physical changes, odd make-up, and such which ultimately gets people to thinking I am a bit odd but more often it is my ideas and beliefs. Which perhaps is the way it should be after all.

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Erik also shared with us excerpts from his "tongue splitting diary".

July 20, 1997

I have long been fascinated by the forked tongues of snakes and some other reptiles. I have

dreamed, wished for, and otherwise contemplated what it might be like to have such a tongue myself. Unfortunately, it seemed like an impossible task. Then I happened upon BME wherein I found a reference to tongue splitting in the BME Extreme FAQ. I decided right then I was going to get my forked tongue.

The first thing I did was to begin to look for an oral surgeon who might help me. I was looking to lengthen my tongue as well so I consulted the local directory and figured that after explaining my desire for lengthening I

would break into the subject of splitting my tongue. I got incredibly lucky with my first call.

The price for the lengthening was reasonable and when I broached the subject of splitting my tongue the

doctor was actually somewhat enthusiastic with the prospects. I made an appointment over the phone for a preliminary exam and consultation.

It was during the time that the photos and experience of the gentleman from Italy with the forked tongue were added to BME Extreme. I was more encouraged by these than ever before. The results seen in the photo were almost exactly what I was envisioning.

When I went in for the appointment I was first asked to fill out the standard history forms etc. and was then shortly after taken into an examination room. The doctor came in and was very congenial and interested in my reasons for wanting the procedure. He mentioned that speech would likely be affected and wanted to make sure I was aware of all the possible problems this may cause. Then, he gave me a quick lesson on the structure of the tongue and how this would actually be quite simple to do with the standard laser he uses for lengthening and other procedures. He also mentioned to my surprise that there were two ways we could do it and that both would almost certainly be reversible. The first method would be to simply cut a slit with the laser which would have results similar to those in the photos from BME (I brought along a printout to show him). The second method would begin the same way but then he could draw the tissue from the top and bottom of the tongue together on the interior of the slit to form two more rounded or finger-like forks. The procedure was scheduled for a week later and would only take about a half hour using the laser and a local anesthetic (Novocain).

The doctor was quite interested in my act and my other modifications. He took pictures of my inner lip and tongue tattoos as well as my other tattoos and stretched earlobes. He is not only an oral surgeon but also does cosmetic surgery (mainly facial work) and has no problem with unusual requests, in fact he welcomes them. However, he does require you sit down with him for a consultation session to confirm your desire and make sure you realize all the potential risks (a good policy in my opinion). The doctor's name is Lawrence J. Busino — he is part of the Albany Oral-Maxillofacial group at 23 Hackett Boulevard (professional building) in Albany, NY. *[Note: Busino no longer performs this procedure.]*

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On the morning of July 18th, 1997 I went in for the operation. After a brief wait the doctor arrived and asked if I was ready to begin. I told him I was ready and actually excited to finally be getting my new tongue. The doctor marked my tongue and confirmed that the mark was where I wanted the slit and to the depth I requested (bilateral and about an inch deep). I confirmed his marks and was then given two shots of Novocain, one at each side of the back of my jaw. The doctor waited for the Novocain to take affect and then gave me an additional shot in the tongue itself. His assistant then gave me protective glasses to wear and we began. The laser was quiet but the suction machine for the fumes was rather noisy. There was no discomfort, only the occasional tugging by the doctor to hold the tongue as he worked. The fumes and taste in my mouth were unpleasant but not overly so. I was informed that cherry coke would help get rid of the taste it if bothered me after the procedure. After completing the split with the laser, the doctor put some sutures in to help prevent it from healing back together and to round the interior of the split. I was given a copy of their standard laser surgery aftercare instructions and the assistant went over them with me as well as the additional instructions from the doctor. I was also given a prescription for antibiotics and pain-killers should I feel the need.

It has now been about 12 hours since the procedure. The swelling has been bearable and the pain is not bad at all. I would say that compared to my tongue piercing a couple years ago that the sensations afterward are similar but more intense (5x). I will write more as it heals.

September 25, 1997

It has now been approximately a two months since I had my tongue split. Since the initial experience was written only 12 hours after the procedure I have decided to write a second piece describing the healing process and some of my experiences with my new tongue.

For the first couple days after the procedure the tongue was very swollen. As this had been anticipated I fasted and refrained from trying to speak for the first few days. Though I did this intentionally, the degree of swelling and pain involved moving and placing pressure on the tongue makes me think this may not have been a wholly optional way of treating my new tongue. The first couple days were marked by regularly taking the prescribed antibiotics and sucking on ice cubes.

On the third day I began hourly salt water rinses. These rinses helped a great deal and actually felt very good. I also completely stopped using the prescribed painkillers, which till then I had been using to help me get to sleep. The discomfort was not that great, but was enough to make comfortably dozing off a chore at times.

The fourth day was when I began to notice a real reduction in the swelling. This would continue through to the seventh day by which time the swelling was almost no longer noticeable. I began eating at this time, beyond the liquids I had been consuming. I stayed mostly with ice cream and similar consistencies but also began carefully chewing small bits of bread, avoiding using my tongue.

After a week had passed I was able to eat again normally and my speech began to return to normal. At first, I did have a lisp and some trouble speaking. This lasted a few days but now people who have known me for years say that they cannot detect a difference. The re-

actions I have received basically run the entire spectrum. I have had people enthusiastically ask me about the procedure and I have people become suddenly nauseous and rapidly turn away. The majority of people I have shown it to are curious to know what it is that has happened. Although, they also mostly seem somewhat repulsed or at least attracted to the idea, they are very good about open-mindedly talking about it.

October 20, 1997

I had anticipated that it would be very likely that I would end up having my tongue split cut again after the initial procedure. On October 3, 1997 I had underwent that second cutting.

I was having all four of my wisdom teeth removed by the same oral-surgeon who works on my tongue and figured this would be a good time to hit the tongue again as well. Since having the first cut I had decided I wanted to go a bit deeper and now had an idea of how far back up towards the tip I could expect it to heal. After removing the teeth (which incidentally I kept and am having carved and fashioned into a ring) the doctor once again used an argon laser to extend the split back as far as the base of my tongue on its underside — theoretically the practical limit. Effectively this means that the length of my tongue which I am able to extend outside my mouth is split.

The healing and care has been basically the same as I have described with the first cut with only one noticeable difference: time. This time my tongue has healed much faster. I was speaking intelligibly the day after and eating fairly well on the second day after the procedure. My swollen gums from the wisdom teeth were more of a bother than my tongue. The inner surface of the split is already beginning to granulate like the rest of the tongue surface. I am using a toothpick to carefully pull apart the bits of tissue which try to grow across the split and thus heal up towards the tips.

This seems to be working well as the surfaces are healing but there has not yet been any loss of depth to the split from healing. Assuming this remains the case I think that this will be last cut necessary to achieve my goals concerning the splitting of my tongue. Once I feel that it is adequately healed I am planning to have both forks pierced and possibly resume my attempts at tongue tattooing on the forks.

I REALLY DON'T THINK WE IDENTIFY OTHER PEOPLE BY THEIR COGNITIVE ABILITIES

WE LOOK ACROSS THE STREET AND SEE A MOSTLY HAIRLESS BIPED
WITH VARIOUS FEATURES AND FIGURE OUT

WE THINK WE SEE A PERSON



Todd Bertrang

In 1998, Todd Bertrang was already controversial piercer and cutter. Coming from the angle of complete sexualized obsession with body modification, Todd would eventually run into trouble with the law resulting in a five year prison term, but when we first talked, he was a cutting edge piercer pushing a number of theories on gauge selection and aftercare which were disputed at the time but eventually came to be seen as correct and ahead of their time. He supported himself with a motorcycle business, so he was able to indulge his piercing interests non-commercially, running a small specialty studio out of his home.



When did you first come into contact with piercing?

I saw, and became aware of piercing (other than ear lobes, which the at size most common, have never affected me, and were therefore overlooked) at the age of 18, just before turning 19. My birthday is September 7th, and the time line I'll reference here is important. This was in the summer of 1981. I was on my way back from the beach and saw a very pretty girl with her nostril pierced. For me, it was an intense sexual rush (mentally, not physically). Later on that same year, around October, I started buying issues of Easy Rider as I had just gotten my first Harley and wanted to learn as much as possible about them. They have a section in their magazine entitled "In The Wind", wherein people send in experiences of themselves or others doing things pertaining to riding

motorcycles. It was, and is, a thing to do for biker women to show their tits. Well, some of these girls had their NIPPLES pierced. OH MY GOD!!! Never having seen or heard of this before, it was an even more intense sexual reaction than the nostril thing.

At this time, I had just started what was to become a 6 year relationship with a girl who couldn't handle piercings, or intense sexuality, at all. NOTHING kinky for her, it was a turn off to her. I still managed quite a few sexual escapades of my own during this period as I am NOT monogamous, and it was VERY easy to get laid then. Especially being a young male with a Harley. Want a ride? Worked almost EVERY TIME!!

And then how did this turn into an active personal interest?

When I just turned 24, Sept 1987, several things happened. I broke up with my girlfriend, my friend Cap got a PA and his girlfriend an outer labia, and I started going out to clubs in Hollywood for the first time. The clubs of choice were Cathouse and Scream. Also, Fri-

day and Saturday nights were taken up with hanging out on the Sunset Strip.

I had been to Gauntlet about two years before to get a girl's nipples pierced. Cap was the one who told me about them. I had seen the photos of the "other" piercings during this visit, but was under the semi-mistaken impression that a piercing in a man's cock must be VERY painful. At the time, I was still quite young, and had many false sexual hang ups to get over. One of these was the typical heterosexual males aversion to ANYTHING that might make others think of him as GAY (the BAD word!!). At the time, any man with even an ear ring was thought of as gay by the straight crowd. There are historical reasons for this. At the time, Gauntlet, what is now Gauntlet LA, was the ONLY place to be able to go to a store and get a piercing in the US. It was NOT like now, with a piercer on every corner and most tattoo shops doing piercings too. I was SO naive.

I finally saw a picture in Easy Rider that showed a "biker" with his nipples pierced. It was an impossibility (I thought) for a gay male to be masculine, so therefore he must be straight. Here I'm thinking that it might be OK for a straight man to get his nipple's pierced!!!! This happened a couple of months before Cap got his PA. When he told me, I wanted to wait to see how his healed and see if the urine would allow for healing. The beginning of November saw Cap, his girl, and myself at Gauntlet getting my first piercings. A PA in 12 GA and a top left ear cartilage in 16 GA. Two weeks later, I was back for both nipple's, done in 14 GA. Unfortunately, Jim got the piercing's off. One, was "close enough" and I figured I'd "deal" with it as it hurt so bad. The other was so off, that we took it out, and I came back two weeks later to have it redone. It was STILL off, but, close enough, and OUCH!!!

Did you have any body modification experience before that, or was this a first for you?

Aside from being circumcised as an infant, I had never experienced any personal modifications.

How did it change from just getting piercings to giving them?

This is why I mentioned starting going out to clubs. Anyone who has hung out in the "old days" (pre-AIDS scare) can remember just how easy it was to get laid. Prior to my getting actually pierced, while Cap was healing, I again took girls down to Gauntlet to get pierced. This was hard for me as I had to shut my Harley shop down to do this. At the time I got my first piercing's, Jim (Ward, the owner of the Gauntlet chain) was restrictively selling PFIQ back issues to people because of the contents often contained SM references and photos. Cap told him I was cool, so I asked Jim if I could buy from him wholesale. Since he said OK, I immediately purchased ALL of the PFIQs, needles and jewelry (except issue #2 which he was not willing to sell).

Why didn't he want to sell #2?

He TOLD me he didn't have any more copies. However, I was told many years later that he still had a few. I have always wondered what was in it that was SO BAD.

Anyway, as I was going out a lot at the time, and sex to me has NOTHING to do with being in love, I was getting laid quite a bit. I read the PFIQs (Piercing Fans International Quarterly for those who do not know) cover to cover repeatedly during my healing, paying special attention to the "pierce with a pro" series. I started piercing, for free I might ad,

all the women I'd bring home. This was a considerable amount. By the next summer, 1988, I was fucking, and piercing, 20 plus women a month. What fun!! But the end result was, I learned how to pierce quite well, without outside restraints, as in... am I making money?

Seeing as in the earlier days of piercing, it was a largely gay leather scene, what different outlook and experiences did this give you?

It was THE reason it took me so long to get pierced. I didn't want anyone to think I was gay. And THAT idea would have prevented me from having the business I was still trying to get off the ground, and still have to this day. And ANYONE who had even an EAR ring WAS considered to be gay by the het crowd back then.

How did the interest in subincision evolve?

The fall of 1988 saw me settle into my first and only monogamous relationship. BRENDA. Anyhow, The sustaining portion of this relationship was that we liked to fuck each other and we'd decided to evolve together with sexuality (which I took to mean more and more piercings).

Brenda was NOT pierced when we met, but this soon changed. February 1989 saw us drive to San Francisco to have Jim give me an ampallang. Jim had just moved there to be with his lover and was starting to pierce out of his home with the ideal in mind of maybe opening up a shop in San Francisco if there were enough customers for it. A year or so later is when he hired Elaine Levine (Binnie) "Angel" to manage Gauntlet LA and he opened a store in San Francisco. When we returned home, Brenda proceeded to pierce her pussy. She gave herself a vertical hood, and four inner labia. A few months later, she gave herself 4 more inner labia and a horizontal hood. A few days after this latest pussy piercing bout, she sat down playing with her pussy and announced that she wanted to put in LOTS of rings so one day she play "connect the dots" and cut her pussy lips OFF!! I was AS-TOUNDED, NO I said, as I wanted to stretch them out (which we ended up doing). But at the same time, I was VERY turned on by the idea. As much by the idea, as by the fact the idea got her wet. By the end of the relationship, she had taken out all her piercings and no longer wanted me to fuck her with my PA in.

This brought about my thinking... OK, so if we aren't going to do piercings any more, then let's do genital cutting. I really missed having my urethra stimulated during sex. Also, she liked anal sex, and having her pussy and ass stuffed at the same time. She wasn't into my ideas of bringing in other people to have sex with us (VERY jealous). It occurred to me (remembering Carl Carol), that a bisected cock would be able to fuck her in her ass and her pussy at the same time. As we were hardly having sex at all, I figured I'll fix this, maybe it'll get her interested again. So I did a meatotomy. She tolerated it. Then, when she left for a vacation a few weeks later, I cut through and past my PA photo. The result is what you see in my 1st picture. She didn't like it, for this and other reasons she left. Since then I have continued the cutting halfway into the scrotum as of this Saturday night past. Today, as I'm writing this, is June 19th 1997. I have also severed the head partially (but not much, yet) from the shaft, and bisected the head by 1/3.

How have people reacted to it? Has the "public's" opinion of it changed in the last while?

The public has grown MUCH more tolerating of this, and of tattoos. I used to have ALL heads turning to stare with my little 14 GA nipple rings — We are talking 40 to 50 people at dimly lit night clubs!!!!

Have you had any problems due to the subincision, or has it been a totally positive experience?

I was sent to a mental ward for trying to kill myself after my second major cutting. I ran out of sutures and was misadvised to go to the hospital for a quick suturing. BIG mistake. I spent the night in the mental ward, and luckily, the head doctor had heard of this and released me the next morning. This, and I experienced hemoraging into the scrotal sac during this last cut. Hospital time again, but this time I got lucky and they were cool. I understand I am to be the head topic of conversation at UCLA tomorrow.

The other bad experience I had was several years ago. I went to jail, traffic related, and the county jail deputies couldn't handle my piercings, let alone my subincision. I went to the mental ward. About 50 degrees, no blankets, and I almost died. I got VERY sick in there. Luckily my girl was able to bail me out after 14 days. Not an experience I wish to repeat.

If someone wants a subincision or bisection, how would you recommend they go about it? Can they come to you and have it done?

Yes, I would be willing to do this for someone. I have done quite a few cock and labial cutting's over the years. But as yet, everyone who has asked me for a subincision or bisection has backed out.

There are many methods to cut the skin. Anything that cuts and keeps the wound open and clean will work. However, my method is to use a scalpel, less injury than scissors no matter how sharp, and subsequently faster healing. I also use sutures (stitches) to hold the shaft skin to the meatus underneath.

Bleeding is controlled by a rubber band tourniquet at the base of the penis. Bleeding between the meatus halves is controlled by silver nitrate, and/or cautery. I prefer NOT to use cautery as the resultant scarring will be much worse. Other than this overview, the exact procedure has to do with how they want their penis to look and work afterwards.

You've done some work with female circumcision (hood trimming) — Could you tell me a little about that?

I have done both hood slitting, removal, and labial excision. It is quite easy if the hood or labia are thin. If they are thick, or if there are veins involved, it becomes more complicated because suturing is required. Each female is unique, much more so than males.

What advice would you have for those considering them?

Like I said, each girl is different, and it also depends on what their shape, size and sensitivity is just prior to the operation. Any girl who does NOT like to have her hood pulled back to make the clit accessible should NOT have this done. However, if it is also something that mentally stimulates the girl, she MIGHT be a good candidate for it (having the hood removed). The inner labia are different. Some feel VERY good to play with. Some are numb (even some clit hoods have NO feeling), some even feel BAD to touch. Some girls are just mentally excited by being SMOOTH there. As long as it excites you mentally to



have it. That's the most important thing.

You're an advocate of large gauge initial piercing — why is this?

More surface area to heal. This is especially important in nipple and genital piercings. When someone gets hot, or aroused, or cold, these areas can change shape drastically. What you don't want is some tiny (10 gauge or thinner) piece of jewelry minutely tearing away while it's trying to heal. Also, jewelry this thin can cause damage to the person while engaged in sex. OUCH!!! And, often it simply doesn't even feel good. Too intense is the normal thought. Too small is the reality. There is an exception to this of course — The clit, and some clit hoods.

How long does a scalpel procedure last? Does the tourniquetting also dull the pain?

The procedure for a PA will take around three minutes, and around seven or eight for a reverse PA. Around ninety percent of the pain is taken away when I use the "base tie off". So much so that I use it now on ALL cock piercings that will not have this "get in the way". Which is especially all of them. The most painful part then is simply returning circulation.

When you do these large piercings, how do your tools and techniques differ from the old school (ie. needle) method?

Well, there is a difference from doing a needle piercing. While some scalpel piercings are done with smaller gauges, even thinner than 8 gauge, usually these are reserved for a 4 gauge or larger. MOST piercings I do, until I get past 6 gauge, are done with a needle. The biggest difference is it simply takes much more skill to needle pierce at 6 gauge than say 14, or even 8 gauge. And you have to accurately compensate for the thickness, without having two markings. A scalpel piercing is VERY different, and often NOT marked at all. You have to be able to "tell" what the flesh looks like both expanded and contracted, and REMEMBER this without marking it (don't take this to mean that ALL scalpel piercings are done unmarked, some are, depends on what, and where). And, yes, this means I make sure I see the guy hard first. Other than this, (this will sound easier than it is) you simply slice open a hole where you want it to be.

A large gauge piercing tends to heal EXTREMELY fast. 6 gauges heal in three weeks or less. Four and 2 gauges in two weeks. The after care is the same (my method of care that is) for a 6 gauge as a 16 gauge. However, a scalpel piercing tends to bleed, and certain ones require a special herbal soak to help with the blood seepage. This bleeding after the piercing

tends to make the healing much more intense. Not in the pain level, but in the MIND space. You have to be able deal with the fact you're bleeding a little for a couple of days. However, and this is a plus and ONE of the reason's why they heal so fast. The piercee is partially aroused during healing. You'll heal with a wet pussy, semi hard cock, or excited nipple's. This sends blood to the area and aids healing, not to mention feels good.

Some people say that it's better to start small and then stretch — What do you see as the disadvantages of this?

Migration, scarring, infections, prolonged healing. I don't have these problems with my techniques.

Are there any particular dangers in performing piercings this large to start with?

The same dangers inherent in the smaller piercings, just magnified because of the larger area being dealt with.

The risks are the same as any other piercing. Lack of knowledge of placement, size, shape, how do you do it. 10 GA and smaller piercings are quite easy to do, and easy to train someone to do. Keep in mind that the majority of piercings done are by trainees. An 8 GA or larger is a MUCH harder piercing to do, and requires much more experience.

Some people have claimed that once you start doing piercings using a scalpel rather than a needle that you cross into medical ground and enter dangerous legal territory — What would be your response to this?

No, plain and simple. There was a time when piercing's were NOT done at 10 GA. Like when I started. It was TOO BIG. The needles used come from medical supply houses that manufacture needles.

If you want to be a good piercer, you better be prepared to learn about the skin within relation to, how it heals, why it heals, why it feels good or doesn't, why it gets infected, and what to do about it. Well, guess what, we ARE on medical ground already.



Patrick Bartholomew

In 1998 Patrick Bartholomew and I did two interviews, after he submitted a series of radical piercings to BME — deep chest work, transscrotals, chin, nasal tips — as well as brandings and genital splitting work. Previously a mercenary and medic in South Africa and coming into piercing as an SM master, Patrick was over the top, confident and outspoken, and a body artist both brilliant and a little too daring. Patrick has always been a kindred spirit to BME's mission and I've continued to greatly enjoy and value my friendship with him.



Patrick, you seem to be largely an unknown quantity in international piercing, though you are spoken of with respect in the UK.

Yes, I stay out of piercing politics since I discovered too many of the lunatics running the asylum. I prefer to do my own thing my own way — and thus maintain standards that others either find unnecessary or are too lazy to obtain.

You sound a little unhappy with the British piercing establishment.

In this country piercing is mainly in the hands of tattooists who see it a lucrative sideline — alongside selling tattoo balm or tee shirts. So long as the method used works, and the person parts with money, they care very little for piercing. In the late eighties I was accused of being a 'pervert' and a 'shirtlifter' by a number of Name British Tattooists. Within a year I noticed that they too had joined us 'pervert/shirtlifters'. Money seems to have a spongy effect on a lot of morality, conscience, and ethics. I am afraid that I do see these people as exploiters of the genius of the few serious and very good piercers this side of the Atlantic.

How would you rate British piercing?

I believe that my old friend and mentor, Allan Oversby, who was known professionally as Mr. Sebastian, was probably one of the finest piercers who ever lived anywhere. I carry on his legacy as best I know how, but there are few other innovative piercers of any consequence east of New York. The good are acceptable, the not so good are abysmal.

Do you belong to any associations or guilds?

No, I refuse to give legitimacy to any that exist over here. One outfit offers a course for three or four hundred pounds which consists of a morning watching their unelected chairman do a couple of piercings. He then issues a fancy certificate and a kit consisting of fifty pounds worth of near worthless junk and you have a boil in the bag professional piercer ready to ply his/her trade on the trusting public. Another offers to train 'Cat-walk' piercers — doing piercings favored by the super models, this one is for about 700 pounds. It is absolutely hilarious — except I get a damned large portion of the repair work to sort out. All this trust is based on a worthless certificate of competence.

How do you rate or judge a piercer?

To me a Master Piercer is one who can do any piercing! And I do mean any piercing. I was accused some years ago of riding on Alan's reputation. I put out a challenge that I would do any piercing named by any other piercer in public, provided that they would do the same. I went further and promised that whatever they claimed was their best piercing I could do as well, and probably better. Needless to say I received no takers. When I see super work from the likes of Jon Cobb, I know a master when I see one. I don't think I would like to have to compete with him... (laughing) but I would if I had to.

You say you can do any piercing, would you like to explain?

Yes, having a sound knowledge of the skin and its physiology, my own skills with needle, scalpel, and suture, I can figure out a way using this ability to do anything. I know the dangers involved and I have all the equipment in my clinic to solve all problems that could possibly arise. To duplicate someone else's work is simple, obviously the first important point is they have succeeded in doing it, so the fact that it is possible is established, from there one works out a technique that one is familiar with, and after careful planning you go for it.

Is there any thing you would not do?

Yes, anything that I feel has very little chance of eventually succeeding, anything that will end in permanent and/or crippling injury, or anything that I feel the client could not live with for the rest of their lives.

You mentioned once that you did a uvula piercing and that you took it out within a short time believing it was a failure.

Yes, my client, Crudelia, started to gag uncontrollably after the anaesthetic wore off, so I whipped it out pronto, and scratched this one up as one of my no-no's. I am most impressed to see Jon succeeding.

When did this all start for you?

I moved to England in 1987 from Southern Africa where I had been, amongst many other things a mercenary medic, and it must have been in the early seventies that I carved my first ivory peg from the tusk of a Warthog and put it through the nipple of one of my army buddies. I suppose I did about a hundred plus piercings during the seventies and early eighties. All simple basic noses: ears, navels and nipples. I was blessed with the luck of a child in using the ivory as my jewellery medium, it proved to be hypoallergenic. When I got to England I was some what unemployable being over 40, so I set myself up as a tattooist. I worked 7 days a week, always had a smile, made a good cup of coffee and was the prince of good fellows. I was a lousy tattooist though, and it was due to an old friend of mine from my African past asking me to do his nipple that I came back into piercing with a will.

Is this when you met Mr Sebastian?

Yes. I found out through the grapevine that he was the best in the business, and started to pester him for information. He refused to tell me a darned thing in those early days, and it was only when he realized that I had the potential ability and the ethics that matched

his expectations that he helped me. Initially by telling me what not to do, rather than what to do. He was not prepared to accept the responsibility for my 'cock-ups' — nor would I have expected it of him. Mr Sebastian was a very private person, he worked solely by word of mouth, he did not even have business cards, and right up to the end he was permanently booked up for appointments. He loved his friends and his clients with equal passion. To Alan they were his life. How I miss that gentle voice on the phone saying "I have to go now, I have a trembling lad on the table here waiting for me do unspeakable things to him", and how I remember being one of those lads, smiling on his couch, in the total faith of his great genius.

Did you make many mistakes during your early days, or have any thing you could not deal with?

Almost! Yes, almost. Apart from the usual learning curve where my early positioning was not what I would use today, I have never had a piercing that has ever been a risk to my client. I think out every smallest detail before I act. However it does not pay to be blase or complacent. I once had a bleeder that came to me, and neglected to tell me of his problem on the grounds that 'I may refuse to pierce him' — too bloody true mate. My God did the little bleeder bleed. I did a PA which must have caused the donation of almost a pint of 'claret' to my central nervous system. What made it worse, he was French, and I do not speak French. In the end a homeopathic practitioner friend of mine put together a cocktail of arnica, ipecac and traumeel, which worked a treat. Stopped the bleeding almost immediately. I still keep this to hand, along with the adrenaline etc. to stop bleeding. I also have my cauteriser which works well when all else fails. I have no qualms in using what ever it takes to do a job.

What do you see as your signature piercings?

That has to be the chest bars, the Mega Pec Piercing. Though I am prouder of the large scrotum piercings that I have done, going in at over 15mm thick. These were more of a challenge. I enjoy seeing results that very few others are capable of. It is all pure ego I guess. I had a client once who's fantasy was to have a hole in his scrotum through which he could put his penis. I cut the hole with a 1 inch gasket punch and blanket stitched it around a plastic cotton reel. Within a fortnight his fantasy was fulfilled. Sadly I have no photographs of this, he was a very private person. Unfortunately he died some time ago from self strangulation. He was a good lad.

What experience do you have in implants, bifibulation, etc.?

Lots, most of this, however, is illegal here in the UK, so I can not go into detail in this interview, I am always be available to discuss these things with clients by e-mail or land line. Implants I usually do with 8mm hematite beads, these work best for me, and I rarely do more than one at a time. Like Mr Sebastian before me I will tell you what not to do, not what to do.

What future do you see for piercing?

Provided that there are still adventurous people with the urge to explore their own limits and those of us skilled enough to join the expedition, we are in for a fascinating, if rocky, ride. So long as there are people trying to protect us from ourselves, and the unscrupulous

trying to exploit us, the ride will be rough, but what society accepts to-day, it would have castigated us five or ten years ago with a vengeance. I still believe that the cutting edge of BM technology and advancement lies in the anal of the gay community, where adventurism is a way of life, rather than something to be attempted with trepidation.

Are you gay?

I am neither heterosexual, nor homosexual, I am just sexual. I was 17 before I wised up to the existence of sub females. Before that I started at about 12 as a sub, by 15 I was Dom, and now I am a S&M Dominant, who never mixes business with pleasure. As you may have gathered I am mortified if I ever hurt a client. I am married to Mistress Delta, a Domatrix (who also subs with me), and we have a number of male and female slaves who live in from time to time. Life has been good to me over the past 49 years, and I trust that it will continue to do so.

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Tell me about the Grievous Body Harm laws and how they affect piercers, both now, and in the past. Are they a spectre constantly hanging over your head?

No, not really, the law simply insists that what one is doing is a form of artistic expression, and not a sadomasochistic sexually deviant experience. We have not had a prosecution to my knowledge.

I was under the impression that it was the GBH laws that caused Mr. Sebastian so much trouble?

No, they were tied into the sexual S&M side of it all, and that is illegal, apart from the case in question being a serious bit of Gay Bashing by the police.

Genesis P-Orridge claims to have been essentially exiled due to these laws — There's an interview online where he makes these claims.

Gen is a lovely guy, but I do know him a bit better than the person interviewing him, it is not all as it says, just the same he got a bum deal.

As far as legislation goes, at this stage I am not sure of the direction that they will finally go... there is talk of making all genital piercing illegal.

If they do I will become very rich over night. Driving it underground will only increase demand, and I would employ a full time doctor to give me legal status. My own input is to set up a 142 hour training course over 4 weeks including the use of all commonly used methods, medical training for the treatment of shock, haemorrhaging and use of local anaesthetic. This would include a tough written and practical examination conducted by the Environmental Health Dept. Hopefully they will listen.

Wow. That would give England by far the most medically educated piercers. Who would determine what training is required?

Me hopefully!

It seems like more radical piercings take place in the UK than in North America, and have been for quite some time. Do you have any idea why this might be the case?

We are a lot more sophisticated in our attitudes towards sex and eccentricity, the North American attitudes are far more naive. It is only in the Gay Scene that this seems to even out. We also seem to have less restrictive laws that may account for our willingness to experiment. I still think that the North American piercers are generally very good, but they do rather shout about their 'new' piercings too soon. Long before they have proven their 'new advances' thoroughly.

Yes, I've noticed that — When new procedures come out here, one generally hears about them within a couple of months, whereas I've noticed that when you send me pictures of what would be considered quite radical here, the dates on it put it back often nearly a decade!

One success does not make a revolution, and there is still too much bull-shit mixed in with the fact. Many 'newbies' try to make up for their lack of ability with sensational sounding crap that even they begin to believe in the end.

Some of the unique piercings I've seen from you (that weren't mentioned in the first interview) are the Austin Bar (the "nose ampallang") and a chin piercing — Neither of these is particularly dangerous, but certainly very unusual... How did they come about?

I never honestly thought of them as being different when I did them. The old adage of: "If it Dangles or Protrudes then Pierce IT!" was all that occurred to me back then. As you say they was no danger involved.

To the extent that you can say, how is the UK scene different than the North American scene?

From the media one has the impression that the average American Piercer is an anti-social, sadistic, ignorant, drug abusing, self destructive, weird cultist sociopath. I know that this is as far from the truth as the Marijuana Laws, but mud sticks. Because of the sensational publicity and the rise of the Modern Primitives movement in the USA the average British piercer tends to shy away from this image like the plague, and they are, to a large extent, fairly conservative in their work and their publicity. There are the exceptions, mainly amongst the good ones.

I've noticed also that UK piercers, at least the ones that have made it into the North American media, are also much older — Many high profile piercers here are only in their early twenties, and have only been piercing for a few years.

The American public are much more trusting than the conservative British, they expect you to have about 150 years of experience before they drop their trousers here.

You estimated that you've done about 36,000 piercings?

Yes, I average about 4,000 piercings a year these days.

Are piercings there almost universally performed under a local?

No, very few.

Oh. Is it only when the client requests it?

No, very few piercers here have legal access to it and also lack the training and skill to treat

anaphylactic shock.

You have to be a nurse or in legal possession of the anaesthetic, work under the direction of a doctor and have the necessary resuscitation equipment available.

“Legal possession” is very vague, but if a doctor gives it to you, you are in legal possession. My own credentials are sufficient to use it, apart from the fact that I have three doctors as very close friends whom I can call upon at any time.

Most piercers in North America speak very negatively of anesthesia, citing the possibility that the anesthesia deforms the tissue, resulting in a crooked piercing...

Not sufficiently that a SKILLED piercer can not do straight piercings with slight skin distortion. I don't seem to have many problems working with it. The key is just to do your marking before applying the anaesthetic.

...medical safety risks (allergic/chemical reaction, or frostbite in the case of a spray anaesthetic...

Perfectly correct, there are risks, but nothing a reasonably intelligent person can not learn in 24 hours of training. My dentist, for example, has never had a patient go into severe anaphylactic shock, the chances are small, and with the quantities we use they are even smaller.

...and that it takes away from the ritual of the experience if you can't feel it.

If you want ritual join a church. If you want to feel pain, try your local village dominatrix, she will probably do a damned sight better job of getting ones pain levels to boiling point than I can with a needle in my clinic. (In a Dungeon it is another matter, remember I am an S&M Master). I use anaesthetic because it allows me greater lee way to get things right, (and straight). I am less likely to get a client jump — resulting in needle stick! And I can't stand screaming first thing in the morning.

So it's almost a matter of not mixing business and pleasure?

I never do unless it is a consensual S&M scene. On a recent Sunday night I did a pair of labia piercings — the young lady was attached to my rack, and, in fact I inserted the rings without a needle or pin, just pushing hard through, quickly without anaesthetic. The lady in question was ecstatic about the experience. I had problems getting her off my neck for the rest of the evening.

To a great number of people, the pain is a part of the transformative power of body art — So is that not really an option for them then? Is this due in part to GBH laws?

For them yes — for me “Nope”, I just don't get off on the pain of some one pushing bloody great spikes through me, and nor do most of my clients either. Mr Sebastian once did a tattoo for me under local anaesthetic (remembering he too was an S&M Master), I love it no less because it was totally painless. In fact I treasure it most of all my tattoos, because it was done with his love.

How would you do a piercing, since you do not usually use forceps?

The technique is fairly simple, but it has variations for each piercing. Firstly I prep the skin with alcohol. Next I mark up with a very fine gentian violet marker pen. Then, using a fine

1ml insulin syringe, I administer the anaesthetic. (From about .2ml for a nose, eyebrow or ear, up to 1.0ml for an ampallang and clitoris. 0.5ml for navel, nipples, p/a, guiche, clit hood and hafadas etc. the tongue is 0.4ml as is the labia). I prefer dental lidocaine with the small trace of adrenaline it comes with. (I also use prilocaine with octapressin where allergies may occur). After a two minute wait I insert the thin guide needle. This is usually 14ga. (eyebrow, tragus and nose it is 18ga). I then assess the accuracy of the piercing, and if corrections are needed I make them. Once I am satisfied with the positioning of the guide needle I insert a tapered insertion pin of the same diameter as the jewellery I am inserting. The insertion pin has a rear recess that positively accepts the end of the ring or barbell. I firmly and smoothly push the jewellery in behind the pin. Once the jewellery is straightened, I cover with a dry dressing.

There is rarely any bleeding due to the adrenaline in the anaesthetic, and due to the small primary hole which is stretched up to the jewellery. This pulls back tight onto the ring or bar once it is in place. If I am doing a PA, I prefer to use an internal guide tube (ID of 3mm) and pierce from the outside to inside. I insert the tip of the tapered insertion pin into the tip of the hollow guide needle and I then push back through the piercing. Finally the 12ga titanium ring (of between 5/8th of an inch through to 7/8th of an inch) is pushed into place from the inside to outside. Most of the straight through piercing I do with a solid needle, I only use hollow needles when a change of direction is needed, i.e.: a labret etc.

I do the piercings between my gloved fingers, (this can be very! very! very! dangerous! needle stick injuries are guaranteed if you do not know what you are doing and are not concentrating 100% on all cylinders. And the needles must be sharper than the manufacturers make them. Much Sharper!). I get no bruising nor skin distortion working like this.

Do you ever use clamps?

Yes, very occasionally, usually only when I am doing inverted nipples, they do help. Also when I do skin cutting I usually clamp the site with mosquito forceps to expel blood from the cutting site for about five minutes, then I remove them and cut along the perfectly created mark.

I prefer to use short blunt nosed surgical scissors for most skin cutting, a scalpel is low on my choice of favorite tools. But I use what ever works best.

Do you ever get bleeding?

Yes, especially with cutting, but any piercing can bleed if you nick a blood vessel. To stop it I administer 3 drops orally of a homeopathic remedy of arnica, ipecac and traumeel that my Homeopath friend makes up for me. It works a treat on small bleeds. On the more serious ones I use the cauteriser, that works on almost any bleeding I am likely to encounter in what I am doing.

I also use cyanoacrylate Super Glue in conjunction with sutures when closing an implant wound — A method we successfully used when I was in the Army. I had a deep slash down the inside of my left forearm (due to a very frightened injured cat I was putting back together in the middle of the night some years ago), I only used the super glue on this, and today it is almost invisible.

Do you ever have a client go into shock?

Yes, but usually very mild, I normally supply glucose enriched drinks when it happens, and follow accepted 1st aid shock procedure treatment. (Yes — I do ascertain from all clients any information relating to allergies or medical problems before I start working on them, if I am not sure I call in a doctor friend of mine from next door).

The worst cases occur usually in spectators, not the piercees. Many is the big guy I have peeled off the clinic floor, the poor fellow feeling a complete fool as he comes around. This is not some thing people have much control over, and I am usually pretty sympathetic.

What sort of emergency equipment do you have on hand?

Adrenaline to treat anaphylactic shock (I have never needed it, but I keep up to date supplies at hand). Oxygen, an Ambi Bag resuscitator, (again used once on a spectator), a comprehensive first aid kit and two halon extinguishers.

I also have a powerful emergency light above my dental couch in case of a power failure, (It has happened once when a utility company went through a main electric cable outside my premises) and a powerful rechargeable torch on permanent charge.

I also have a written emergency procedure for each foreseeable situation, and all staff, are fully conversant with the procedures. I can not stress strongly enough the safety of the entire operation.

What do you do about sterilization?

I work in a semi-sterile field (no air control), with proper scrubbing up procedures. I do not usually wear protective clothing, I change my 'T' shirt several times a day — especially in summer.

What is not disposable is cleaned in an ultrasonic cleaner with an alcohol/Phoraid mixture for 60 minutes, visually inspected, and then it is autoclaved.

My autoclaves are on a maintenance contract which ensures full testing every 4 months. All clinical waste and sharps are collected by a contractor for safe disposal.

Do you believe that you can improve your methods at all?

Not really, I have reached what I consider to be as high a level of development as I can, and as for my techniques, they are better than adequate.

Titanium seems to have caught on much more there — Why is this? What advantages do you get by using titanium over stainless or niobium (both of which are much more common in North America)?

Let me include Gold in my list of NO-No's along with Stainless. It too is too impure by my standards. I always felt that it was a race between healing and rejection with 316 Stainless steel. All too often piercings 'walked' during this period, and shrinkage was a constant problem. Some thing I still see with Gold.

The reason we stay away from stainless is due to nickel allergies. There is a EEC directive coming out preventing the use of Stainless in fresh piercings, weather Britain will accept or follow it is a moot point. I certainly will encourage it.

What's an EEC directive? (I don't know what EEC stands for).

Sorry, The EEC is the 'European Parliament' based in Brussels who decide what constitutes an Eccles cake or a Champagne (is it a recipe or a regional product — most of it is an utter waste of effing time, but occasionally they get it right.)

I like Niobium as much as I do titanium, but at \$3 to me for a navel ring in titanium Vs \$10 for an American Niobium equivalent, guess which one wins?

One of the tools that you use in your art is a cauteriser. Could you tell me exactly what this is?

It is a variable control transformer with a silver alloy electrode that heats up to white hot. It is generally used for sealing off blood vessels and removal of warts etc.

About ten years ago I walked into a medical supply company and bought one across the counter. No one queried me about it at all. As for using one, I used them when I was an Army Medic, I never thought twice about its use or results, it just happened and I have been right from Day One.

It is not illegal to posses the equipment at all, (nor is it illegal to posses marijuana seeds here, it only becomes a crime when you plant them).

It is a grey area. We don't have a written constitution, and much of the law is based on legal precedent, much of which conflicts with other precedents — it is down to who is the Judge on the day really, I am not enamored with the system at all, but it has its good points compared to some of the North American State Laws, many of which sound like they were written in the dark days of the Spanish Inquisition.

When you do brands with the cauteriser, how does it affect the end result? Is it more convenient or consistent or safe or painless?

I find it to be more accurate, the depth is easier to control and as for pain, I do it under anaesthetic most of the time. When done without, it is no worse than a 'strike' using a heated piece of metal.

Does using the cauteriser affect the "ritual" or "spiritual" aspect of a brand that many people find very important?

I am sorry if I can not take this aspect very seriously. I would be bloody worried if I went to a doctor and he told me to bite on a piece of leather while he stitched me, or if he did a small war dance between taking my temperature and checking my blood pressure.

Crudelia's branding was a ritual event though, correct?

I went along with it for his sake, he is a great friend, but all religious guff depends on the two words "I believe...." and if you don't then

The cauteriser also has some applications in piercing — Tell me a bit about how you have used the cauteriser to perform large ear cartilage piercings. How does it affect healing, end result, etc?

All too often people expect too much too soon — this is on the front page of my after care pamphlet. With ear lobe stretching this is 99% the case! In Zululand, the place of my

birth, a young tribal man would probably pierce his lobes at about age thirteen. It was only by age twenty that he had stretched it up sufficiently enough to fit the 30mm wide plugs into the piercings. Sadly one very seldom sees them anymore, the wearers are seen as being parochial country bumpkins.

In my case it's been about five years of on and off stretching to get me to 50mm... But there are at most three years of active stretching in that. However, due to a placement that was adequately high, I've had no problems.

SO very few do place the initial hole properly. What I get to see is people putting large quantities of wires into piercings as quickly as possible, resulting in the skin at the bottom of the lobe becoming very thin and finally snapping. This happened to Jason, and the two little resulting 'penises' finally shrivelled away, and I put in his present flesh tunnel to even up the size of the lobes. The major problem with stretching a lobe-piercing is the initial piercing should not be located in the middle of the lobe, but rather as high up as possible to the ear shell. If this is not done, I find the cauteriser works wonders in correcting the problem before it is too late. I cauterize upwards and fit a 7mm OD flesh tunnel straight into the hole. When doing the inner shell of the ear it is exactly the same, it is easier if there has been a piercing hole from which to start, but it is not particularly difficult all the same. Healing is not too bad, provided it is kept clean, and not abused, it heals perfectly within 5 months on average.

Probably the most radical use that you've found for the cauteriser (that I know of) is genital bifurcation. Can you tell me a bit about that? What are the safety issues, why would someone do that, and how long does it take to heal?

Its great advantage is the lack of bleeding whilst it is being done. The last one took about 30 minutes of actual work, realizing that I go very very slowly when dealing with anything close to the corpus cavernosum. I find it hard to explain things to some one who has no formal medical training, but as far as safety is concerned I feel that 99% of my safety precautions revolve around one thing only — caution, just being F#@*ing careful. The basic healing is about ten days, full heal about two months.

How far could you take this bifurcation in one go? I know a subincision can be done in one step, but what about a bifurcation?

I believe that it would take me about three hours to complete the entire penis. And I see no reason why it should not be done in one go. Though I did it in three goes the last time I did it. Two weeks between sessions. This was about six years ago.

At what point do you cross the GBH line or practising medicine without a license and actually put yourself at legal risk?

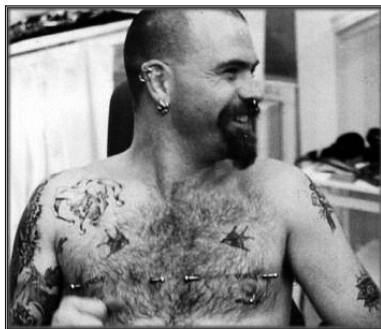
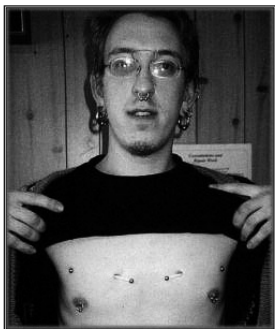
In the UK provided you are not claiming to be healing someone, you do not need a license to perform cosmetic surgery, provided you have your client's consent. This is in the process of being changed, but as of yet has not. As for legal risk, litigation has no hope in hell of success in a British Court if you consented to letting a piercer work on you in the first place. If you could prove wilful negligence you may be in with a chance, but that is almost impossible to get right. The courts work on the basis that you must have been bloody mad to consider it in the first place, and it is seen as being 'self inflicted'.

So how does a client protect themselves? Is it basically a matter of educating themselves as best they can and making an informed choice of piercers?

Most definitely — until proper evaluation/legislation can be introduced.

Implants are rapidly climbing in popularity here. Is the UK experiencing the same trend, or did it already happen?

It happened about seven years ago, but I get asked for about four or five a year these days.



Can you talk a bit about your experiences with implants?

I have had about a 50% failure rate, mainly due to premature abuse. Also if I put more than one bead in at a time the odds of rejection increase enormously.

You mention that you do beading using hematite balls, rather than the titanium and Teflon favored by some others. Why hematite?

It was available cheaply with a hole (for securing with a stitch inside the wound), and it is pretty well hypoallergenic.

Did you find that it was important to secure the hematite? What happens if you don't?

It helps, but loose surrounding skin makes all the difference really.

How are you implanting them? Using the taper method, basically like a piercing, or some other method?

No, I cut a slit about 6mm long following the grain of the skin. I then make a pocket about 10mm in under the skin in the membrane, I put a shallow stitch in the bottom of the pocket and pull the suture through the 8mm bead. Next I use the end of an insertion needle to place the bead into the pocket where I tie off the suture. Finally I stitch up the wound with three small stitches.

∞

In 1988 I was asked by a Gay Magazine where piercing would take me by the turn of the century, and my flippant reply was “God knows, I am more interested in where I will take Piercing!” That has been my philosophy throughout, and I only hope that it has been along a true and righteous path. I always believed that I would have an influence, and now that I look back I feel proud of what I have done and achieved, and Like Mr Sebastian before me:

I hope I will be remembered not mainly for my piercings — my art, but for my ethics, for my refusal to compromise on my standards and beliefs, for my methods and my concern, and for my sincere empathy for my clients.

Anders Sandberg

In 1997 Anders Sandberg maintained a leading website on “transhumanism”, a movement that at least minimally crosses over with body modification in that it discusses how we can change the human experience — and human form — for the better. It’s interesting reading this now how in some ways knowledge has grown much more quickly than expected, and in other areas, much more slowly. Towards Ascension!

What is transhumanism, and how does it apply to / interact with body modification?

Transhumanism is the philosophy that humans can and should become more than human — by removing our limits, be they mental, physical or social. Why accept a limited lifespan of around 100 years, a brain that cannot deal with more than seven things at once and being bound to one body which looks roughly the same throughout life? Why not start tinkering with ourselves?



But is this stuff real, or is it just science fiction?

A bit of both. On transhumanist mailing lists people debate the relative merits of living as a digital life form in computer networks compared to physical existence as a spaceship, but also questions of nutrient supplements and current research in biotechnology. There is a surprising amount of work being done that could be used to change the human condition.

We already know enough to do simple genetic manipulation of our own genes, replace certain organs, to make (very crude) interfaces between neurons and electronics, cognition enhancing drugs already exist on the market, some methods appear to be able to slow aging and people are developing intelligence-amplifying tools for the internet. By combining these results and already existing methods of enhancing human potential, it is already possible to become somewhat more than human. And the pace of evolution is quickening...

With restricting ethics being applied to fields such as genetic research, assuming these possibilities come true, how will they happen?

A lot of these possibilities are simply re-use of existing technologies in ways they weren't originally intended — the neural interfaces under development are primarily intended to help handicapped people, but could also be used to create human-machine symbiosis. What was once basic research suddenly turns out to be very useful in unexpected ways.

Of course, many forces seek to restrict these applications. But in general technology and knowledge is spreading more and more, and even small groups can today do what just a few decades ago would have required huge research labs. A student friend of mine genetically manipulated bacteria to glow in the dark — in his own kitchen! I think it is unlikely that restrictions against self-transformations will be able to keep up with the spread of

knowledge and the fact that doing many of these things are becoming cheaper and cheaper.

Do you think that the mass acceptance of minor body modifications (piercing, tattooing, plastic surgery) will help in the acceptance of more radical transhuman modifications?

Yes, to some extent. Just the acceptance that the body can be modified for “frivolous” reasons is an important step forward. And it also establishes a kind of “self-transformation infrastructure” that in the future might encompass more radical possibilities.

How did you get interested originally in transhumanism, and specifically physical improvements of humans?

I have always been interested in the future, and as a youngster I devoured science fiction. I once read P.C. Jersild’s *En Levande Sjal* (“A Living Soul”), a fictional autobiography of a disembodied brain named Ypsilon living in an aquarium and his adventures in the research lab. The story made me think about why we take our bodies for granted: do we really need bodies? What kinds of bodies could we create?

I started to read about these questions, and gradually I realized that there were very few limits to what could be done in principle; we can probably become something far more than humans.

Is your interest purely academic, or is it active as well?

I am quite interested in bringing these ideas about, so to that end I am studying neuroscience, psychology, medical technology, computer science and everything else that might be useful. I hope that my research will be able to contribute a bit to our understanding of how the brain works and how to interface it with machines — or increase its intelligence.

On the more pragmatic level, I also try to use the methods I learn about to modify myself. Nothing drastic yet, since I’m mostly working on changing the ways I think, but I gradually plan to optimize my body to suit my goals. Physically I’m still quite normal.

You run one of the most comprehensive web sites on the subject — Tell me a bit about that.

It began when I realized there was no good way for me to find the transhumanist information I wanted, so I collected some myself. Then my information addiction took over, and it began to grow out of control...

You mention the possibility of using alternate materials for bones to increase their strength — Sort of like Wolverine — Is implant science taking us in a direction where things like this can really be done?

Yes, although the usefulness of strong bones might be less than expected (after all, it is those squishy parts that usually get hurt). Titanium and ceramics are already in surgical use, and there are no practical reasons why individual bones can’t be replaced (replacing the entire skeleton would of course be somewhat more complex and expensive). Another interesting possibility would be composite implants into the bones, making them more durable and perhaps easier to heal.

Probably the most common modification ideas revolve around the hand. What’s pos-

sible there, and what are the difficulties and advances in achieving these goals?

The hand is awfully complex; changing it is probably one of the hardest problems in re-designing the body (except for possibly the brain). What I think most would like is increased dexterity and perhaps an extra opposable thumb. This might be achieved by some genetic tinkering, influencing how the hand develops. There are also interesting ideas for inserting various small sensors or tools into the hand.

And the legs and joints?

Many people complain that the knees are easily damaged; they are actually quite optimal, but might profit from a few more ligaments.

The feet can be redesigned to prehensile feet, although that would limit our ability to walk long distances or run very fast in exchange for increased dexterity.

One radical possibility would be to add an extra pair of legs. This is complex, but one idea is to add an extra hinge point to the torso so that the arms and head could be raised (much like a centaur); we could walk on all fours while using our hands normally. This could be combined with widening the pelvic arc, and perhaps with making the first pair of feet prehensile (the arms are used for dextrous manipulation, the forefeet for manipulation requiring strength).

Altering the proportions of fast-twitch, slow-twitch muscle fibers might be desirable for some people; muscle cells do not divide, but can enlarge/shrink depending on use. It might be desirable to add the option of some regrowth, especially to deal with accidents and wounds.

The torso?

The main problem with the torso is the spine — it is easily overloaded and damaged. One possibility would be to add a few short ribs to the lower back to attach tendons, improving overall strength and resiliency, but decreasing the twisting ability. It is probably likely that it could be modified in other ways to work well with our new ecological niche as seat-dwellers (this could be combined with modifications of gluteus maximus).

One idea is to suspend internal organs from the skeletal system, perhaps using tendons, instead of letting them lie on diaphragm. This would prevent many forms of hernia.

As far as basic aesthetic changes to the skin, what are the options of adding pigmentation and fur, like many animals have?

Humans already have a quite broad variety of pigmentation, and that is just due to one pigment. If we could introduce more pigments (and this is mainly a question of single genes), then the possibilities would grow tremendously. The same goes for eye and hair color, of course.

Fur is a bit more complex, but I expect that since we have had furry ancestors the old genes may still be in there somewhere, we just have to find them and brush them up a bit. Most likely patterning and texture are regulated by a comparatively small number of genes, so I think it is quite possible to get very interesting fur.

Of course, a more hands-on method might use xenografts — real fur implanted from mod-

ified animals (I guess some people would be rather upset at this idea), which would work in adults too. It might also be possible to use biotechnology to insert more advanced pigments into the skin in various ways, creating new skin colors or “high-tech tattoos”.

Looking farther into the future, what about the addition of extra limbs (arms, tentacles, whatever), extra senses, and any number of things?

Well, the possibilities are endless: ultraviolet vision, extra limbs, new senses, human-machine interfaces, an infinite variety of cosmetic changes, adaption to underwater environment, you name it.

To achieve this, we of course need powerful medical technologies, plenty of knowledge and the willingness to test out the changes. Especially important are the technologies being developed today in growing tissues and possibly organs outside the body for implantation, and the possibilities of nanotechnology (which would make many of the above-mentioned modifications much simpler).

The most radical ideas of course do away with the body altogether; the mind is uploaded into a computer, and then either downloaded into a customized artificial or biological body or uses a virtual body to live in a virtual environment. This would make us totally mercurial, and turn bodies into statements of style just like clothes.

For changes that need to be done on a genetic level, how does a parent decide what changes to make in their child, especially if the changes are primarily aesthetic?

Helix This is a tricky area, since there has to be a balance between the wishes of the parent and the future and unknown wishes of the child. “Just saying no” as some bioethicists suggests doesn’t solve the problem — not doing anything is an action too, especially when the change can be beneficial.

I think the best solution would be to allow only changes that increase the potential and possibilities for the child, not limits it. If the changes can be reversed or inhibited according to the wishes of the child, then there are no problems in my opinion. For example, genes creating (say) a tigerlike fur could be controlled by a genetic switch, and the child could decide whether to turn it on or off by taking a nutrient supplement.

Once genetic changes are made, is the individual still “human”? That is, can they still breed with unmodified humans? What would happen to their new traits?

It would depend on how radical the changes are. Just adding a few new genes or changing the old would not make them that much different from normal humans, and their children may or may not inherit the new traits (“She has got her mother’s tail!”). But some of the more radical ideas involve the creation of an extra chromosome just to keep track of all the changes, and then we would suddenly have a new species, unable to breed with unmodified humans. But by then, it would probably be quite trivial to do an in vitro fertilization with the desired number of chromosomes.

Or would we be better off sticking to surgical modifications?

Surgery has the advantage of working on adults, who can give informed consent, but cannot create the profound changes of genetic engineering. Maybe the best solution would be to add genetic support for later surgical changes, so that insertion of new limbs or organs

can be made much easier.

Realistically, what do you see as a timeline for the modifications discussed above?

Surgical modifications are mostly a matter of experience and daring, and will develop gradually (as my teacher in medical technology said: “You have to pay billions and appease the FDA for years to change just one atom in a drug molecule — but if you have a new neat surgical technique, you can go right ahead”).

Simple genetic modifications, like removing disease genes, can be done today. I expect to see the ability to insert new alleles in humans in a few years (like changing skin color). Later we will see the introduction of new traits, like fur or improved senses. The more drastic genetic changes that change the way the body works will take much longer, maybe 20 years or so, but much of the delay is more due to safety concerns than actual lack of knowledge. When genetic modifications become available is anybody's guess, political pressure could delay it indefinitely, or it could become explode into popularity.

Neurointerfacing systems will probably be developed in the next 10-15 years; prototypes already exist, but useful prostheses will probably appear after the millennium. Developing useful applications for healthy people will probably remain a speciality market for a long time until a “killer application” appears that cannot be provided by external systems like wearable computers and “Body Area Networks”.

Much depends on how soon (and if) nanotechnology can be developed, which would make most other methods much more powerful and cheap. Some enthusiasts claim we will have powerful nanotechnology able to change us on the cellular level in less than ten years, while more conservative people predict the great breakthrough to sometime around 2015 or so.

Other technologies to look out for is biotechnology (the source of much basic knowledge), battery technology (how to power everything) and computer technology (to make them smarter).

So a simple timeline would look like this (this will definitely be wrong, like all those scenarios with steam-powered supersonic airplanes from last century):

2000: Genetically modified children with simple changes like desired traits. 2005: New traits, such as fur or improved senses. Use of biotechnology in design of implants. 2010: Implants linked usefully to the nervous system, artificial organs with new abilities. 2015: Radical genetic changes, nanotechnology allows drastic modifications of adult bodies.



Ashley Kitto

Mick Noland

I interviewed piercer Mick Noland of “Extremus” in Kansas City in late 1996. He died not long after at the age of 45, after living as he wanted, doing work he enjoyed as a body piercer and helping others with information and support in his many areas of interest.



How did you first become interested in piercing?

Like many body mod fans, I found National Geographic (magazines and TV specials), showing body art practices around the world fascinating. I read a great deal and became fairly conversant in the subject... although there wasn't anyone to talk to about it! And like a lot of pre-adolescents, I did the safety pin through the tips of the fingers trick, sewed my fingers together to see how they'd look if they were webbed, and so on. Always a great gross-out on adults and girls. The opportunity never presented itself to go further (at the time... we're talking the '60's here) and it

just became one more side interest. At this point I was just a kid going to school, but at least I did learn I wasn't afraid of needles or blood.

When and how did this interest turn into a career?

Skipping ahead twenty-some years, my partner, Harold, selected Jack Kaplan at Body Basics to do a tattoo on him and we made a trip to Chicago.

Was being gay an important part of piercing to you, or simply a peripheral fact of life?

Nope, had absolutely nothing to do with it. I'm not much of a participant in the generally recognized "gay life." (I don't go to bars, don't cruise, don't party. Actually, I lead a very dull life for someone in this biz. Must be those 72 hour weeks...)

I was reintroduced to body mod and Harold got a Prince Albert as well as his tattoo. We decided we wanted more piercings, but couldn't afford to run up to Chicago every time the mood struck us, so I took some time off work and studied with Jack.

Was that a full-blown apprenticeship, or learning while you were pierced?

It was a very intensive, short apprenticeship.

I wouldn't recommend it for most people, because there's just too much to learn. But I wasn't a typical apprentice, being old (over 35), a pre-med student in college (giving me a strong background in microbiology, anatomy, and physiology), and having many years of business experience behind me. A high IQ and ability to absorb and retain information helped, too.

Most apprentices are young (18-24), have only a high school education (which isn't nearly as good as the high school education available 20 years ago), and little or no job experience. Not only do they have to learn piercing, but the basics of anatomy, of business — main-

taining inventory, budgeting, etc., plus customer relations, and so on. My assumption is that my apprentices will eventually have their own studios; if they can't manage the studio, it won't matter how well they perform piercings. This is a business, and to survive, they'll have to be businessmen/women as well as piercers.

Being one of those type A++ personalities, I wasn't going to do piercings unless I could do them right. Friends heard about my new skill and I started doing piercings for them, and they sent friends of friends....

So through careful practice you became proficient?

I hope I'm continually improving. I'm always looking for a better way to do my work. But even the first piercing I did on Harold was "proficient." (Technically correct, well placed, even, etc.)

I think that an artist of any kind continually improves through practice, but there is a strong element of talent which matters, too. There's an ability to make a piercing more comfortable and enjoyable for the client which has nothing to do with the needle or jewelry. As far as I can tell, it's something that can't be taught. You have it or you don't. A beginner with this talent (like Jerry Blain, my current apprentice) makes a client feel as safe and comfortable when he's doing his first piercing, as when he's doing his hundredth. In some ways it's like Karate — being able to visualize the perfect result and follow through to make it real.

What I heard most was that people were very unhappy with the piercing being done in Kansas City, that they didn't like the look of tattoo studios in town, they had constant problems with the piercings, and so on. Harold and I talked about it and decided that the time was right for a piercing studio and that we could afford to set one up the right way. For the first year, we both continued to work our regular jobs, and split the studio time, with Harold taking appointments and giving information during the day, then I'd come in after work and do piercings in the evening. By the end of the year I was able to quit my job and work at the studio full time. Work and sleep pretty much described that year.

How did your professional career progress from there?

The studio's client base has continued to grow every year, thanks to our very loyal clients and good word-of-mouth. We've been featured on three of the four local television news programs (one station twice) and had a CBS crew spend two days here doing a feature for the CBS Evening News with Dan Rather. (To my knowledge, it hasn't aired yet, though.) Our clients have "spread the word" as far as Europe and Australia, and we're listed in the resource sections of Skin Two and PFIQ. We've had a feature article in In The Flesh (issue 2) and have another coming up in Savage Tattoo.

Previous to opening your studio you worked as a government employee — Did piercing ever cause any difficulties on the job for you?

As far as the government job, once you're a career employee (3 years), it's impossible to get fired for one's appearance. I was already in an unique position (writing training material and instructing management) with consistently excellent ratings, so I didn't have to worry whether anyone liked my having piercings. If anything, I made it easier for other employ-

ees to feel “safe” getting visible piercings and tattoos since no one could complain about line employees if a management person had them!

Do you think that piercing is getting (socially) safer? Or is it only certain types of piercings (navels, etc.) that are no longer marginalized?

It seems to depend entirely on where you live. On the West Coast, pretty much any piercing is accepted, except perhaps in the most conservative businesses. Here in Kansas City, it's almost impossible to get a job if you have facial piercings, outside of the arts, telephone sales, and a few private businesses. Even minimum wage jobs (like MacDonalds) won't hire people with visible piercings (and ear piercings are limited to one for each ear). Many places won't let men have even ear piercings, although that's being challenged more and more as sex discrimination.

On the other hand, I do piercings on traditionally conservative people like cops, doctors, and lawyers — even facial piercings. More people are willing to be the first to challenge the old dress codes, because their piercings are that important to them. It's a slow process, but all piercings are gaining more acceptance. I see more parents coming in with their kids, then deciding they (the parents) want to try it, too.

Do you think that one day businessmen will be able to stretch their ears without social concerns?

What I see is that one day business people simply won't care about social concerns, because those concerns won't be a major issue in their lives. These are appearance values of former generations. Forty years ago, no man could get a job if his hair grew over his ears. Now there are very few businesses which would dare to require very short hair — and for the most part, they are businesses on the downside of the desirable-job slope. How many kids want to grow up and become an IBM “suit”? Success is what matters in the business world. The successful people today don't look like the successful people in 1950. Twenty years from now, personnel departments may expect to see baggy jeans and t-shirts and piercings... and be hesitant to hire someone in a three piece suit and a marine haircut as being “too far out of the mainstream.”

While we're looking into the crystal ball, where do you see this whole piercing (and body modification) thing going over the next couple of years?

I anticipate a continuing, mild growth in the body arts over the next few years. Five to ten years from now I expect a decline in the body arts businesses overall. This will be the “shake-out” period when the second-rate workers will drop out, since there will no longer be the “quick buck” opportunities. There will always be enough business for the quality studios and they'll continue to prosper. Long-range, I expect there to be a higher constant interest in body art than in the past, but more limited to people with a strong interest, rather than just following the latest Aerosmith video trend we're seeing now.

What a lot of people haven't realized is that there are more — and younger — people getting permanent body art — tattoos, large gauge piercings, scarification — that will be with them the rest of their lives. Often, these are in visible locations, so they've already crossed the line of worrying about what society thinks. These people will continue to be the core clientele for many more years. They've already changed the future, by not caring about

how the past generations think of them.

In your article in *In The Flesh*, a very unique and controversial piercing is shown. Could you tell us a little about that?

You're talking about "the Sprung", the mouth to chin piercing. It is unique, and may well stay that way. Sara and I worked on the placement and procedures for 8 months before I agreed to do it. We consulted medical doctors about it, verifying that the planned location wasn't in a danger zone, and were extremely careful. Although the piercing itself was much easier than I expected, the healing was difficult. Due to situations having nothing to do with the piercing, she ended up taking it out after about 8 months. We estimate it would have fully healed in about a year.

I don't discuss the actual techniques, beyond the fact that it can't be done with normally available equipment, because I don't want someone else trying it without taking as long as we did to make sure it's safe. I've had a number of requests for it, but I'd only consider doing another Sprung on someone with extensive experience with difficult piercings, and who lived nearby, so it could be checked on at least weekly. The primary healing problems were swelling of the underside of the chin (even after 8 months), and drooling through the piercing hole, especially during sleep. It's one of those experiments which, however cool it appears, isn't meant to be a commercial piercing.

What do you think of the recent fad (?) in piercing for surface piercings and unique and technical piercings, such as the work of Jon Cobb, Steve Haworth (HTC), and Thomas Brazda (Stainless Studios)?

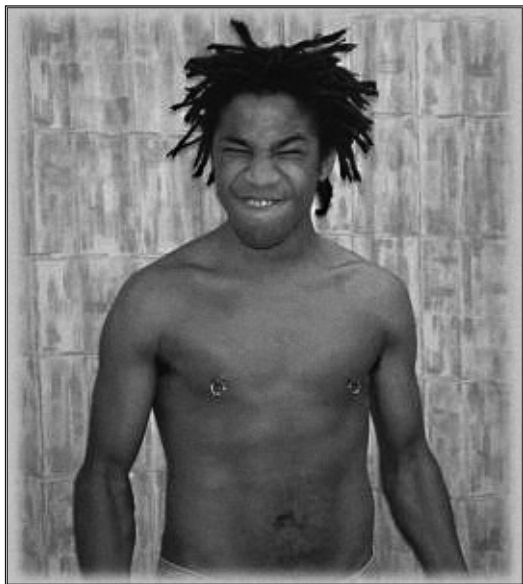
I have enormous respect for Jon Cobb. He approaches experimental work much in the way I do — research it to death, then try it out on yourself or someone close and experienced in caring for difficult piercings, and accept the fact they don't always work, or shouldn't be commercially available. Just because something can be done, doesn't mean it should be.

I set my limits at anything I can't be sure is safe and will be successful (or, in the case of surface piercings, as successful as surface piercings can be).

I do have concerns about people turning experimental piercings into commercial piercings without going through the same ground-up research as the originator. It's easy to assume that because one person can do an experimental piercing safely, that everyone else can, too. But there's a great deal that's "unspoken" between the initial idea and the resulting piercing. What may seem workable initially may not work long-term. Anyone interested in getting — or doing — a uvula piercing, for example, should read Jon Cobb's comments in the rec.arts.bodyart FAQ. He no longer does them specifically because of the long term problems. (Exactly the kinds of problems I envisioned when I first heard about the uvula piercing — and why I haven't and won't do one.)

Creativity in the body arts is great, but safety is critical; not only for the individual but for the industry. Many areas of the country are seeing more regulation and legal problems because someone tried something beyond his skills and knowledge. The state of Kansas recently passed regulations on tattooing AND piercing as a direct result of complaints against one bad tattooist.

Artists need to ask themselves: “Is what I plan to do safe? Is it legal? What’s the worst case scenario? Am I and my client prepared to deal with the worst possibility?” Too often, artists assume the client knows the ramifications of his request, when the client is just thinking “This looks cool.”



In many cases, there’s a fine line between “body art” and practicing surgery without a medical license. Body artists are not the ones who decide which side of the line they’re on — courts do. Many artists think a waiver is their safety net. But a waiver is meaningless in court. I’ve already seen piercers lose lawsuits for botched piercings. It’s just a matter of time before someone gets hit with the practicing medicine without a license charge — and the artist will lose. I’m not willing to pay that price just to call myself an innovator.

EXTREMUS is the only piercing-specialty studio in the region, and one of the few studios who will pierce minors (with parental permission), so we draw from a

much larger area than Kansas City alone. We’ve had people from as far away as North Dakota and Texas come to Kansas City specifically for a piercing. I even have clients who moved to Virginia and California, but comes back at least once a year for a new piercing, saying they won’t let anyone else touch them! That’s serious loyalty, and I’m very proud and appreciative that my work is thought of so highly.

What are the legalities there for piercing minors?

In Missouri, the minor has to have written consent from a custodial parent or legal guardian. We check IDs carefully, and have a separate form for parental/guardian consent. If the parent or guardian doesn’t sign it in front of us, the form has to be notarized, with a copy of the parent/guardian ID attached. For guardians, we have to see proof — a court order or whatever. Beyond that, my personal policy is that I’ll only pierce minors who are old enough to take care of their own piercings. That’s about 10 or 11, but I’ve turned away 17 year olds who acted less mature than that (like throwing a temper tantrum in the studio to convince mom to sign the waiver.)

At EXTREMUS, the piercer has the final say in whether someone gets a piercing. If we think someone’s been drinking or using drugs (even if they say they haven’t), we tell them to come back another time. If someone seems unsure or it’s obviously a matter of peer pressure rather than a real interest, we talk them out of the piercing.

Reverend Mad Jack

One of the earliest well known figures in body piercing history was Chicago's Rev. Mad Jack, the owner of Body Basics. We talked in 1996 about his work with surface piercing (this was before Tom Brazda popularized the surface bar, and surface piercing was still very much "outsider" work) and more, as well as his tattooing (at the time many body piercers were tattooists first).

How did you first become interested in body modification, on a personal rather than professional level?

I first became interested in body modification in general when I was a young teenager. I lived with my very straight laced parents in a suburban community at that point. Before that we lived in the inner city, and out in the suburbs I was somewhat of a rebel?!

So was your piercing public or private then?

At that point in time my piercing was kept very private. Keep in mind we are talking back in the 1960s.

Were you on your own doing it, as an individual, or were you in a peer-group where it was acceptable?

I was very much on my own doing it, my peer group would never have been able to deal with it.



So you were piercing on yourself? Where did you find things like jewellery?

Yes, it was on myself. As for jewellery, well, as with anything that is desired bad enough, one finds ways. I would search out jewellery that would work and do whatever was within my ability to modify it. I was usually pretty creative and figured out what was needed fairly quick.

At this point I worked whatever type of job I could. Mainly construction work as it paid well and nobody seemed to care what I looked like.

And how did those interests become a career?

My interests started to become the dream of a life in the body modification arts when I was about 17 yrs old, during the experience of getting my first professionally done tattoo. I knew when that needle touched my skin what my calling was for life. I sought knowledge about any and all body modification from that point on.

Did you start as a tattoo artist, or as a piercer?

I began my professional career as a tattooist, then a short time later began really learning piercing, and added the piercing to my work.

And how did your professional history continue from there?

My professional history would require thanks to many people from over the years, from many walks of life. I've had instruction and some simple pointers from some of the all

time great's, as well as some no name nobodies who would prefer to remain unknown. I always say I quit counting how long I've been in the business after 15 years because it makes me feel old. Well for the world to figure out, I turn 44 years old in October of '96 and I've been learning and actively working in the body modification arts since shortly after I got my first professional tattoo. When I close my mind to learning I'll be dead and gone so I have a long time to go before I know everything there is for me to absorb out there.

What is it that differentiates a bad artist from a good artist from a great artist (in all the body arts)?

Working clean, caring about the quality of your work, taking the time to learn what you are doing before attempting to do it, ethics, honesty, caring about the people whom you work on, giving to the body arts and not just taking from them.

One of the things that you've become known for is surface-piercings. Could you tell us a bit about how that came about, and what your feelings on them are, especially in light of the attention that extreme piercings have been getting lately?

I'm not really quite sure how it came about that I became known for surface piercing. I do know that I've achieved a very high success rate of healed healthy surface to surface piercing. Some of that comes from the technique I use to do the piercing, some comes from the detailed aftercare and follow-up care I give.

Does different care need to be given to surface piercings than to "normal" piercings?

Basically the only difference would be follow up care done by us in the shop to try and help people with problematic piercings, but that is ALL problematic piercings, not just surface piercings. I truly believe most of my success in that area comes from the simple fact that I really care and am willing to give my all, from the first time I talk to someone about what they want to subsequent visits through follow-up care. The attention that the "extreme piercing" have been getting recently, which has not all been good, can be viewed as public concern for what is not yet fully understood by the masses. I don't always agree with all the things I see being done, but who are we to question what other people want done with their bodies. I am by no means condoning everything that goes on in the body modification world, in fact quite the contrary, I have very definite opinions on a lot of things I see. I am however old enough and wise enough to keep my opinions to myself, unless something is so far out of hand that there is obvious danger to the individual.

Do you see the APP or APT playing a role in any of this?

No, I don't. I've suggested an ethics committee, but nobody seems to feel it is a can of worms they want any part of.

How have you seen the industry change while you've been in it?

I've seen lots of changes, some good, some not so good. The main changes I've seen have been the advance of people learning to work clean. Some of them anyway. I've seen a lot more acceptance from the general public. Of course I've also seen an awful lot of people jump on the bandwagon, wanting to cash in on the popularity, yet not know what they are doing. VERY SCARY!!!

Where do you see the industry going over the next few years, and how do you see your role in it?

The industry will continue to grow as more and more people learn about it. With the advent of more people becoming directly involved we will see tattoos that are so fine they should be in museums. Piercings will continue to become more openly accepted until they are as well accepted as simple ear piercings are now, with constantly improved aftercare.

Was the tongue tattoo done using a machine, or some other method? What was it like — A lot of spreading? What design options are there for tattooing a tongue? How did it heal?

Yes, it was done with a tattoo machine. With the tattooed tongue is a somewhat tricky situation. Very few design options will work due to the moistness and general area. There can be a lot of spreading, if someone works deep. As for healing, well, the tongue heals so very quick that there's not much one can really do. With the tongue, one must realize that most of the ink will end up falling out and only a light design will remain. The actual process of the tattoo is extremely tricky, as it is a possible needle stick injury waiting to happen.

Some people have claimed that doing an “outie navel” is a dangerous piercing. Michaela Grey of the APP has even gone as far as to say it carries with it a risk of liver infection... How did you assess the risks of this piercing, and determine that it was safe to do?

The outie navel is no more dangerous than any other piercing. The so called direct link to the “liver” — well, let's stop and consider other piercings for a moment. The septum is linked to the brain supposedly, as well as the nostril. Then there's the tongue... and let's not ignore the dangers of various genital piercing, the PA, the Clitoris, the Triangle, then last but not least what about the dangers of the Uvula.

I assess the risks of all piercings with an exam of the persons tissue, and a private discussion with the person so that they are aware of what is involved. I also explain to the person that we do follow up care so if they have any problems, we are there to help them through the problem. Not every piercing is right for every person and if it looks though it may not work out for the individual they are made aware of the situation. We also have doctors that are piercing friendly that we can refer people to if it gets to that point.

With the surface piercings on the side of the neck, these are piercings that some piercers claim are too dangerous to attempt. What sort of checking is done to make sure the client is at no risk?

The same answer applies to this question that I gave to the “Outie Navel”. With a neck pierce what one is dealing with is a surface pierce, and at best there is a 50/50 initial chance it will heal successfully. Sometimes we have to do repeated follow-up/check-up appointments with surface to surface piercing.

I do not like to lose a piercing, and will work with people to try and not let a lost piercing happen. Most people who get these types of piercings are willing to deal with the trials and tribulations that come with the territory.

Fakir Musafar

Fakir Musafar is without a doubt single-handedly one of the top ten most important people in modern body modification history, and many would rank him as number one. Since before even tattooing was acceptable, Fakir had been documenting his body modification and ritual activities, and was an important part of both the early and current body modification movement. I did a number of interviews with Fakir, this being the first. While I now consider Fakir a friend and think very highly of him and his huge contributions to body art and body play, our beginning was rocky as I'd called him out on his sometimes stereotypical portrayal of indigenous cultures — a la the “noble savage”. Fakir Musafar and I did this interview in 1997.



By using your body, modifying your body, you can go into states of consciousness and discover the true nature of life and yourself. As Ram Dass said, “there are many paths up the mountain, but the view at the top is same.”

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At what age did you first realize that you wanted to live your life differently than most kids?

It actually started at a very young age. I remember as far back as four or five years old being a little bit different than other people. I wasn't too aware of it then, not until I got a little older and got into school. At that stage a lot of strange phenomena occurred in my life. I would go into trance states very easily and I learned at a very early age to just auto-

matically go into lucid daydreams and could live a life quite separate from the one I was living in my physical body, and then come back and do things I got from the lucid daydreams in my body.

I guess the crucial point for me was when I reached puberty. I lost a lot of my abilities. I had an ability of psychometry... I would ride my bicycle out into the country, and where I lived was an Indian reservation. I'd find an Indian campground or an Indian burial place, pick up a rock, sit there for hours holding the rock and read the whole history of what happened in and around the rock. Including the life of the man or woman who was buried underneath it. Things like that... I also had the ability to do some psychokinetic things like when I was in a lucid daydream I could look at small objects like a piece of paper or toothpick and make it move.

What would you say to people who look at that very skeptically?

Well, it didn't happen to them, but it did happen to me. I didn't ask for it to happen for it, it just was there. In my early years I was very afraid of these things. It made me different from other people and I tried to hide it as much as I could and tried to not have peo-

ple see this. I thought I was going crazy or something like that. I was very concerned that I was not like a lot of other people.

Were you actually concerned that you might be imagining the whole thing?

No. That was the frightful part of it. What I did was not imaginary, it was very real, and so my whole introduction to life was a bit different. My relationship to spirit and body was very different, apparently, to other people.

Where I grew up I was impressed heavily with the programming of my parents, who were not Native Americans, and I was impressed heavily with the Lutheran church. I had to sit in a choir loft. I liked the ritual, but a lot of what happened there didn't ring true to me.

Like I said before, when I reached puberty I lost a lot of my abilities. The lucid daydreaming went on, and I discovered the erotic component in all of this. I also started to look in libraries — I lived in libraries — I was a bookworm. I was very curious to find out how other people lived because everything was very limited and restricted.

By other people you mean other cultures?

Yes, even in our own culture. Places away from this small remote town in Aberdeen, South Dakota. I was highly inspired particularly by National Geographic because we had a school library that had all of these bound up. I would spend hours reading them. I also read encyclopedias. I would start with one particular set and read all of volume A, then all of volume B, and so forth and go through the whole set, and then take another set and read it. Which most kids did not do in the seventh grade.

When did you actually start exploring rituals of the body?

I started doing that even before puberty. I was very caught up in the idea of ordeals, initiations, and body rituals. I had been exposed to it somewhat as a child because of the Native Americans around me, and their tales.

Is that in person, or through psychometry?

No, this was firsthand. This was in the 1930s and at that point there was a policy of assimilation of Indians by the American government. So they would take the Indian children and board them or have them stay with other Indian families in this small town and they would make them go to school with us in hopes that they would stop being Indians and become something else.

My first overt moves were quite secret. I realized I was different, and at about age twelve I was confirmed in the Lutheran church and I was a bright little boy and I had all the answers. We had a very gentle Lutheran pastor and he was very fond of me. He would say, "Roland, tell me about the doctrine of trance-substantiation," and I would give it to him in full. But I never believed anything they told me, because it didn't ring true with what my insides told me. So I rejected soundly all of those notions from a very early age, and put up a good front. I found you could get by better in this world if you didn't flaunt your differences, and I practiced everything that I wanted to do, things that made me fulfilled as a human being, in secret for the next thirty years.

Over that time you slowly started to meet people?

No, I didn't meet anyone. There was no one to meet, and no one to share with, for approximately twenty years. After I moved away, even then I had a hard time because my secret life was very fulfilling and a very large part of my waking hours, but again, I had to hide it all, and wait until I could find people who were sympathetic.

Did you feel a need to find others?

I wanted to find others very much but under the circumstances it was not possible. Under the cover of having photography as a hobby I started back in my very early age doing dark-room work. That way I could get some privacy to do what I was going to do. I could go into my mother's fruit cellar, lock the door, and I was always developing film under a red light. Actually I would be in there ripping flesh.

But your parents knew they couldn't open the door...

No. I had the advantage of the cover of this photography. It was also a blessing in disguise... I had this desire somehow, not to share, but to document everything I did. Starting at age fourteen or so I started to make photographs periodically of every body thing that I did. All the modifications and body play practices.

Did you ever think then that it would get as public as it is now?

No. All I was trying to do was stay out of insane asylums. I knew if I let people know fully

what I was doing they would lock me up because that's what they did in the 1930s if you were that different. For instance, I wanted a permanent body piercing at about thirteen or fourteen, and I did my first piercing when I was fourteen on myself. I knew nothing about piercing but I had to have this hole in my body. It meant a lot to me. I had seen a picture in an old National Geographic of an old south seas island man, who had just had a child; he was a father. So as a father he was entitled to have a hole bored in his nostril. In the picture, the caption was all I had to go by. They used a ring of green coconut shell that was springy, made a sharp point in it, pried the ends apart, put it on his nose, knocked the little prop out that held the ends apart, and the ends bit down into the flesh. The caption said "after some time a hole was formed." That's all I knew about body piercing. No one in this community even had a pierced ear. It was a totally unheard of, unknown



phenomena. It would be considered in contempt, in disgust, you were a freak if you had an ear piercing.

So I was sitting in the choir loft of the Lutheran church in my lucid daydreams and I came up with a scheme to do this. Obviously there were no green coconuts in South Dakota, and I couldn't sit in the choir loft with this on while it bit through my flesh. So I found another way to do that. I had played with my body a year or two prior to that with my mother's

spring clothespins. I would make clothespin fans. These were handy devices and I thought I could make a piercing with that, like the coconut ring. I took a clothespin, drilled a hole in one side, a little nail in the other, and then I had to figure out where to put this because you couldn't be obvious. The one part of your body that didn't exist, that was never looked at, that was never exposed, were the genitals. Well, I had a dick, and I liked my little dick, and I decided this was the place to put it where nobody else will ever notice it. One day I put the clamp/clothespin on my foreskin and let the spring loose, and ouch, it hurt! I left it on, determined to make a hole like the south seas island man did in the nostril. After some time instead of a very sharp bite it developed into a sort of an ache and that moderated into a lesser strong sensation, and sometime late that night after I was wearing loose baggy pants all day, I had a strange sensation there. I went down to the bathroom and turned on the light and low and behold the little nail had gone through the skin and popped out the hole in the other side. I put in a little copper ring and I still have that piercing today. When I do my Piercing Intensives school I usually tell that story and show them... "Here it is, still there!"

After that I followed suit on everything I could find and whenever I could I would pierce myself, attach the piercings to a cord and pull on it, I got into the habit of doing the Indian custom of hooking hooks with weights on them onto my body and dancing around into a state of ecstasy. I was doing all of this at fourteen or fifteen.

Then I wanted a tattoo at about age seventeen or eighteen. So I got my mother's sewing needles, put them in a little pin-holder, got some India Ink, put a little Listerine in it, and dipped the needles in there and made my first tattoo.

And you've still got that as well.

Yup. And I saw another picture in an encyclopedia of an Ibitoe, a wasp-waisted boy of New Guinea. It said above all things, these people admired a well-spiked nose and a small waist. So I found a belt, and in secret, and at night, I would put this wide belt on and pull it tight. I would become the Ibitoe. From wearing the belt I got sensations and found I could do shifts in consciousness, all of which played into my earlier experiences with lucid daydreaming and trancing.

Did you build back the things you lost at puberty?

Well, it wasn't so much loss as transformation. I moved from stage to stage to stage. In my late teens I had what I'd call my first real transformative experience, and that was against the coal-bin wall. [You can read about this in Body Play #8]. That had to do with bondage, and sensory deprivation and so-forth. I had this very slow, conscious, cell-by-cell, long-term lifting out of my body and experienced my consciousness away from my body. Almost all of my body experiments and modifications have sooner or later lead to some kind of transformative experience that changed me forever for the rest of my life.

It's pronounced "Fahkeer Mooshuhfar". Since I was an avid reader and I looked for curious stuff, I first ran across it in a Ripley's cartoon. There was a man who lived in 12th century Meshed Persia who called himself Fakir Musafar, and I admired this guy because he had a message but he never seemed to get it across to anyone. He said, "You can learn about God through your body." He had large permanent piercings through his chest, six

daggers through deep amounts of tissue, and he had big permanent piercings up and down his arms to which he fastened horseshoes. He went around for eighteen years like this and nobody got the message.

I held that image of this previous pioneer in body modification until the late 1970s. I came out of the closet when I moved to California. I finally started to find some people who were sympathetic. The first one I found that was really helpful was Davy Jones the tattoo artist. I had for years wanted a large tattoo. I had for years done small ones on myself including the bottom of my foot with a magic symbol. To me, tattooing was a magic symbol. It was never pictorial, and you didn't go in and pick the design off the wall. You had to wait until you had a vision and you saw your body with this mark. Then you got the mark and something happened and your whole life changed. That was the way I'd always seen tattooing. I guess I was influenced by all of the reading and all of the other cultures because that's what it's all about in Borneo or Marquesian Islands. It's not done solely for decoration, it's part of an initiation, a rite of passage. It's part of transformation. I did a photograph of my back where this vision kept appearing and I kept drawing little by little until I had a design that matched my vision. I rendered it up on a big board with the photo and I went around for years to tattoo artists. This was in the late fifties. I got a very cold reaction everywhere I went. I'd say, "This is what I'd like tattooed on my back," and the old tattoo artist sitting in San Francisco or St. Louis would say, "Well, that's nice sonny, but how about a panther, or Mom or an anchor." I said, "I don't want Mom, I don't want an anchor, I want this!" They simply would not do it.

In the early 1960s I met Davy Jones who was a merchant seaman who jumped ship several times and had somewhat the same inclinations. He had lived in other cultures, in Western Samoa, had gotten the flying fox tattoo all up his hip and down his thigh. He'd done his ritual initiation with a pig's tooth, a hammer, and soot, and grease. When he saw my drawing, he said "I'd love to put that on. I know what you're doing." "Great, what time can we start?" It was a Sunday afternoon, and I'd just gone over to have a consultation with him. He said, "How about right now?" I said "great" so he locked the shop, he called someone over to help stretch the skin, and we put on the larger part of the outline.

Later Davy Jones came when I asked him (if I signed a release that if I died or was found mutilated or injured I would not hold him responsible) a year or two later and we did the Kavadi that I always wanted to do... the framework with the spears, something you can't do to yourself. And then later, my next super-transformative experience was the first time I really hung free (with help) so I could go way out into space by the piercings in my chest.

Do you see yourself as a rebirth of the original Musafar, or just someone who's inspired by him?

That gets to the coming out and how I assumed the name... I met a man, an eccentric millionaire called Doug Malloy... Or he met me, he traced me out back there in the late sixties. By this time in the small underground, particularly the SM and fetish community, I was letting it be known what I did and I was showing pictures of myself. Even some that I had taken when I was in my teens. When he saw this he latched onto me and I became a protege of his. Or he was more like a patron — He supported whatever it was that I wanted to do. He would provide me with the opportunity to do more elaborate things. He

was an interesting man who saw visions. He was also the guy of course that sparkplugged the beginning of the body piercing movement and was also a patron for Jim Ward (we were together in those days). Except I had been around for many, many more years before Jim ever got any.

PFIQ had started, and in 1977 they had the first international tattoo convention in Reno, Nevada. Doug was in with the organizers who were from New York and all over and they wanted a grand event. They were going to get three or four hundred people to Reno in the off season when the rates were cheap. They set it up and he said, from a vision of his, "You should go, Roland, and show them everything you can do, because this is a favorable audience and they will understand it." I spent months doing beds of nails, props, the contortions, the yoga, the piercing, the pulling on the piercings. All of these things I had been doing I worked up into a very spectacular act for the Reno convention. Now he says, "You need a name. You can't go in there as Roland! That isn't going to work." So I said, "Alright, I'll take the name of the person I admire most, Fakir Musafar from Meshed Persia, since I have pretty the same message he had. By using your body, modifying your body, you can go into states of consciousness and discover the true nature of life and yourself." So I took the name Fakir and even painted it very fancy. And that's how Fakir got his name.

What's it like now that your probably the biggest name in this business, even a celebrity? Do people recognize you on the street?

Oh yes. Somebody just the other night said, "well, I'm going to have Fakir come over and participate in our week of ritual." "FAKIR! YOU KNOW FAKIR? Oh my God!" It's like this all over the world.



Now, most of the reputation Fakir has came because in 1983/84 I connected with Andrea Juno and Vale who were struggling along to do a punk paper, and they wanted to do books. I met them and I suggested, "look, this is something a few people at least are really keen on," and I had already coined the word "Modern Primitive" and used it several times in PFIQ, like in 1977. I said to them, "I'll give you all the pictures and all the interviews you want, and all my viewpoints, and you find a couple of other people and you do a book called 'Modern Primitives'" Andrea said, "We'll lose on it, we'll print a thousand copies and nobody will buy it. We'll never sell them." She was convinced this was a dumb subject. So Vale went ahead anyway. They took twenty-seven hours of interview with me, and used out of the huge stack of transcripts only a few very sensational things and left out all the philosophy. They took all of my pictures and used the hottest ones. So in 1985 the book came out and I think since then it's been printed twelve or fourteen times and there are about half a million copies of it wandering around the world. That one more than anything else had my message in it, and it has inspired more people than I can dream of.

I've done extensive educational work. My goal, unlike some of the others, was not to do

show-biz, but my goal was to do private experimentation. Small, private rituals, work with people who really understand what I'm doing, document it, and then write about it. If they did things, or were inspired to do things by what I did, I would help them do it. We would document it and I would put that out. That's basically what I have in Body Play.

I've heard quite a few different stories about how your chest piercings were done. Are the rumors as to them being done by Doctor Brown in Mexico...

That's bullshit. I do know Doctor Brown... I went down there and interviewed him, and had Annie Sprinkle interview him. "The famous dick doctor!" I had a long, many year connection with him but he's long since disappeared for me.

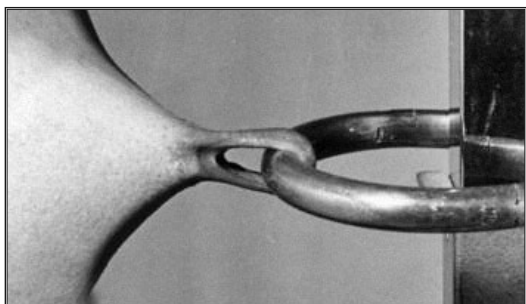
The full story of how I did those piercings on myself by slowly forcing through a thin steel rod is in Body Play #14.

Are those intramuscular?

No, they are not. They are ahead of the pectoral muscle and they are through as much breast tissue as you can get. I've seen a few of these done, and it makes me sick because the ones I've seen definitely aren't going to work. And you couldn't hang from them. They're in the wrong place. It's just not right.

I was told that during the healing you got seriously ill and were long-term hospitalized?

Not true. [laughs] I had done the hanging a number of times, including the transformative one with Davy Jones out here in my garage which was empty and like a Mandan lodge with light-shafts coming through the metal. After that one I decided that I would do this



periodically, probably once a year. I wanted to do, as the Aricura people did, where this custom originated back in South Dakota... They very often would do this and leave the pegs in for deep piercings and let them heal up, so the next time they did it they didn't pierce it, they just put thongs or something through the piercings.

It was after the fourth or fifth one of these that I decided I was going to make a permanent piercing here. No one had ever done that so I decided I would try that. I did them one at a time, [again, see Body Play #14] I used a clamp, and I screwed them through slowly, it was a heavy duty stainless steel rod.

A 14ga?

About that. It wasn't that large.

Didn't you have problems with abscessing due to inadequate drainage?

No. Again, getting back to the lucid daydreaming and the psychokinetic abilities, I've always had this relationship with my body that few people have. I went through the Kavadi experience with all the iron rods and in my case you can make huge wounds. If it's done

under trance, if it's done shamanically, there is no trace of a wound, there is no bleeding, and there is no healing problem. I teach this to people and they do it partly in the body piercing that I teach here at the school.

I just got approval from the State of California that I just got approval to operate a body piercing and branding school with courses and instructors who all have California State certifications that they're qualified to teach body piercing and branding. First time. Only one. I was forced into it by Gauntlet. While I was still working with Jim, I tried to start a school at Gauntlet, and I received a lot of negativity, because their piercers were so badly trained. We finally parted ways over basically this issue. He and I and four or five others had spent years, trial and error and experimentation to develop all of these techniques for all of these piercings that people now have. His attitude was you don't teach anyone else what we've learned because they will then go and open a shop and be competition. They wanted to have a monopoly as long as they possibly could. By the eighties this was popping up all over and the kids that were doing it were doing it very badly and they were doing things you shouldn't do and they were causing physical damage and trauma and tremendous problems. I saw this; they came to me all the time. I said, "This is nonsense. We've got to show them how to do it safely and how to do it right." So that's when I started the body piercing school, and that was six years ago.

Eric Dakota was your first student?

Yes, Eric was my first student.

When did the rituals become more public?

After the tattoo convention things opened up for me. I came out of the closet. The larger group events didn't come until much later. I first had a small handful of people who wanted to do what I did or wanted to seek ecstatic experiences with body rites, like my current partner Carla who I met because of the film *Dances Sacred and Profane*. She was one of the first people who did the ball dance. We did this, just she and I and a friend of ours. That was about 17 years ago. Then some of her friends saw the pictures and she related her experiences and they said "we want to try too." So the next ball dance had maybe four people. And then we had fourteen people, and then we had forty people. Now we do a grand ball dance and body rites every summer at a summer gathering out here in California and we have as many as a hundred people involved.

Most of those people at least at the start were from the SM community?

Quite a few. I would say the group that we have right now that are into this are multi-religious backgrounds (we have Sufi, we have Hindus, we have Pagans), and they are all Queer, bi-sexual, gay, or lesbian. Not many straight people go for this. In fact, this is how I first came out of the closet. The first people who accepted me and invited me in were primarily gay SM people.

But aren't you primarily straight?

No, I'm bisexual.

That's something I've never seen you talk about much in interviews.

Yeah, and it's only been recently that I've been asked and I've recently come out about it...

There are a lot of people like that. I have a good friend, Baba Ram Dass, who had a stroke about a month ago. Last thing in the world we expected. Ram Dass went along for quite a number of years, spoke to 5000 people in auditoriums every weekend, but it's only in the last couple of years that he came out that he was gay and everybody assumed that he was straight. It's fairly safe to do that now, but it wasn't a few years ago.

Were you actually leading multiple secret lives then, one of body play, and one bisexual?

My gender identification has always been since my teens different too. It's just a matter of my recognizing, developing, and following my promptings to do the body rites. The same thing is true of sexual development. It's not until fairly recently that you could do this and not get into trouble, that you could say that you were bisexual.

What role would you say the spiritual plays in “normal” people’s lives? How can ritual help them?

I've run into a lot of searchers. I had a very negative reaction at first, back in the seventies with the New Agers. Whenever you brought out a needle or you mentioned blood or the body they ran away. So I had tried some workshops, and I had tried some public appearances with them and it didn't work. Things have changed since then, radically. Now the general public is quite open to going as far as to involving the body in ritual. The big thing for me, is that if you leave the body out of religion, and out of ritual; if you leave sexual energy out, you have a hollow shell. You're not complete, you can't make a circuit. I've always felt that way, since I was in my teens. This is what disturbed me about the Lutheran church. It's taken a long cultural evolution that started probably in the 1960s when the first people dropped acid and said, “Gee, the world may not be the way it looks.” And ever since then, established notions, programming, the training and teaching of institutions, has been questioned and they've been thrown away.

We're finally to the last taboo and it started about 1970, got very strong in the 80s, and it reached its peak in the 90s. Anything involving the body in Western Judeo-Christian ritual was totally forbidden, that's why we had so much flack about the early body piercing — “Self-mutilation!”, you know.

If somebody wants to get involved in ritual, what should they know, or watch out for?

First they need to get informed. I have the biggest problem with people wanting to, or actually going off and start trying to do body rites like a Sundance or a hanging, and not spending five minutes finding out what it's about and anything about anyone who actually did it. I have a big problem with that one! My advice is always learn all you can. There are plenty of places to find out about this. What did the Hindus do for two thousand years? You want to do a ball dance, you want to put hooks in your body? Go to the people that have done this for a thousand years, visit them if you can, or read about them and learn all you can. Or meet people like our modern primitives who are doing this on a regular basis and have for the last fifteen years. Learn.

Does the mass sub-cultural popularity of suspension and ball dances through tattoo magazines make you nervous?

Yes, because they're going off half-cocked and don't have the proper respect. They're not usually doing things shamanically. First and foremost, since I was twelve years old, I have to live shamanically. Which is different from how other people live and it involves a strange and interesting relationship between spirit and body. I work through the body. I have what I call the "body first approach" for exploring spirituality — It involves piercing, cutting, branding, tattooing, flesh hooks, Sundances, sculpting the body, you name it. All these things will get you to the same place. As Ram Dass said, "there are many paths up the mountain, but the view at the top is same." My path is the body path, and it's been adopted a lot from Native Americans, from Sufi, and from Hindu culture.

But that path can take you different places; there are some people who are just interested in the aesthetic.

That's right. They aren't really wanting to go up the mountain.

What influence do the rituals and beliefs of other cultures play in your rituals? Are they the same, or inspired, or...

They only were inspiration. You have to understand I have my own idea and definition of ritual, and also of pain. Those two are very important to me. Ritual is simply going into an act. It's like a play. You know what you start with, and you know what the desired result is. Like a Sundance: You know you're going to fast and prepare yourself, you're going to want to go to some other space. The beginning is the piercing, the end ripping the flesh free. What happens in-between is always different and always spontaneous. People are stuck in this rut with Western Judeo-culture, like going to a Catholic church where you have a mythol. And they think of that as ritual. The anthropologists went out and old Indians in South Dakota laughed. They asked, "This Pow-wow dance, do you put the red here, and the green here, and do move this way five steps?" and they'd give them all kinds of bullshit because they couldn't understand, when you do a ritual what you're trying to achieve is the ritual. How you get there is different every time. The people in Western culture are just stuck with that notion that you go from A to B, and so forth. Their idea of ritual is very different. So I'd say the other culture's influence on me has mainly been inspiration. I go for the same end result. I do not claim that I did a Native American Sundance. I did my version of a Sundance. I'm not ripping them off. We are inspired by the same thing and our goal was to zoom out into cosmic space or something.



What would you say to people who say that borrowing ideas from cultures is offensive to those cultures?

That came up several times. Boston, on television, I had Native Americans say "You're ripping us off!" and I said, "No I'm not, I'm seeking inner experiences in the same kind of way some of your forebearers did. What do you do for ritual?" They said "We go to the Episcopal Church." I said, "Have you ever done a Sundance? Have you ever seen a Sundance?" "No, no." "Well go see one once. I grew up with people who do this and they know what

I do and they say Bully.” They understand that what we’re trying to do is get the result.

So then there’s not really anything you need to do to be respectful?

I’m sorry if any of them feel offended. I’ve gone over and done this stuff with Savite Hindus. I have a very good friend who’s Kumar who’s a Kali priest in Panang and they know fully what I’m doing and they’ve seen me do things and I’ve been with them when they’ve done things and we’re going for the same thing and we’re going to the same places. Our rituals are designed to go the same path and get to the same spot. How you get there, all the little detail in between, isn’t of any concern.

You actually going there, and seeing it firsthand, is fairly recent?

Yes. I was inspired to do Kavadi first when I was only in my teens. I saw the glassy eyes — One of my early gifts was psychometry and I’ve been able to do that particularly with photographs. Psychometry is touching something or someone and knowing all there is to know about them just by psychic contact. Like the rock on the Indian burial ground. That’s always been and it’s still there. I would look at these pictures and the captions, the text that went with them, was all bullshit. I finally realized that by psychometry. If I meditated on the Hindu man with the glassy eyes and the Kavadi frame and spears, I could get into the same state as he was in when this photograph was taken and know what he was feeling and why he was there. That’s how I’ve been able to do most of my rituals by the way. I feel that what I am doing is a form of psychometry. By capturing the image I can go into that consciousness, I can go into that time, and into that mind or feeling world and come back with whatever is there. Sometimes it’s frightening or scary, that’s how I was inspired to do the O Kee Pa, the Mandan ritual, hanging by the chest piercing.

How did your feelings about the events happen when you saw them in person?

The full story of this is printed in Body Play.

It far exceeded my expectations. The morning of the literal ceremony when people started with the piercings, I was in a nearby hotel in downtown Penang, a couple of blocks away. I was afraid to get up and go over there. Two things I feared: One, it would be weak, and the energy wouldn’t be there and I would be disappointed after waiting fifty years to see it. Two, it would be so hot, I wouldn’t be able to help myself, I would rip off my clothes and start pushing rods through my body. As it turned out, neither of those things happened. I was totally swallowed up in the energy, it is so magical. Body rites of the Savite Hindus are so powerful. A European wanders in there and they get heady, it’s like having about two bottles of whiskey or something. They get totally intoxicated in that atmosphere. And these people are taking nothing. They’re just doing their thing, they’ve got their ritual, they know where they’re going to go with it, they’ve been trained since childhood to do these things, and it is strong!

Is Penang the only place that the old rituals are still going on?

No. You have to look. All these practices in recent times have been suppressed. So called “large mass piercing and torture rights” really belong in India among the Tamil people. These are the original people who lived in India, and 20,000 years ago build a high culture, and they gave us the written language Sanskrit, all the literature, they gave us all the

Yogas, they gave us Tantric practices. All of that came from Savite India. Then the Vedics came and drove them out, pushed them down four or five times, in the south of India. These people have been treated as slaves through the colonial period. They hauled them off by the thousands to slave and pick tea in Sealan, and mine tin in Asia, etc. The British exploited them horribly. But they've always maintained their culture and their religious practices. They're very charming and graceful, but to get into the inner secrets, uh-uh. Very difficult. When we were there, in two trips, we penetrated and sat in the temple, in the tropical rain, with Kumar and his friends. One guy, his brother had the record of having the most hooks in his body — He had 900 metal pots hooked in his body, walked seven miles, and then walked down a seventy foot ret-hot coals.

Are they happy to see a Westerner interested?

They're very gracious. They were sort of blown away by what we were doing and very surprised to find other people doing this kind of thing. Just like earlier, years ago, I found some Native Americans who were this way because I was doing Sundances before they reinstituted the custom. Now they're doing it in spades, but some of them are not getting it and doing it the way they did it traditionally. And I am. Some of the young guys get pierced, and they dance for a little bit, and then they go back with one mighty leap and try to break free to get it over with. The object of this is not to try and break free, but to pull on the Goddamn piercing for hours and days if possible and go into a trance. If you rip free right away you obliterate the chance of something good happening.

People really need some guidance. It's alright to experiment around, but it's really nice to have guidance. It's nice to have an experienced shaman who is doing these kinds of things and can make it happen. We've had trance possessions. I've had a figure appears at my piercing rites and piercing shops, regular body piercing in a shop, quite often the Blue Lord, the piercing god, Murugan, the patron saint of the Tamils. I've this deity come through in possession trance. I've had somebody who didn't know anything about him, a kid in Dallas, in the midst of a very hot ball dance with colored lights and incense, and no audience, and spinning around for three hours. This kid tranced out and became the Blue Lord. He says, "Ha! I'm back again! Hello!" I use him and evoke him all the time. I always charge my piercing needles with his energy. If you do body piercing shamanically, you push the tip of needle against the flesh, the tip of the needle will actually find the appropriate place it's supposed to go if you do it shamanically. And then we always have people do the deep breathing and do the exercises and preparations that make body piercing a shamanic act and a magic thing rather than an endurance. It's almost like the skin parts and the needle just walks through. You don't even have to push on it. And that happens to me a lot.

Piercers who see their work as a technical act would probably take almost offense at these statements.

Well, my experience goes back to the early days at Gauntlet and working with people there and I knew something was wrong. Some of the piercers would take people into the little booth and pull the purple curtain and we would hear the Godawful scream "ehhhhh!". And I said that isn't what's supposed to happen when you pierce people. There was something wrong. Well, it turns out that technical skill is one thing... I have one protege that's

now working very hard to develop the shamanic side of it. In fact, we put a great deal of emphasis in our five days and my piercing school on the shamanic side of doing body piercing because it's just as important as health and safety. And this is where people get the real service when they get pierced. They usually have something they want to happen to them, conscious or unconscious. It's not going to happen if the piercer isn't aware of this and isn't capable and trained enough in magick to make it happen. To us it's an art, it's a skill, it has it's health and safety and medical aspects which you damn well better be aware of, but one of the more important things that happens when you do a body piercing... it isn't just putting steel through flesh, you're doing an act of psychic penetration here, you're opening openings in the body and things can go in and come out of those openings. So you damn well better know what you're doing magically or you could do a disservice to the people you pierce. So we try the best we can to get people introduced to that in the Fakir Intensives.

When we were talking about culturally inspired rituals, what about rituals that involve psychedelics, since that's a very important part of ritual?

I'm asked that one a lot. My own three years of private exploration used absolutely nothing. I can get just high and get to other dimensions, and shift consciousness beautifully without it. Not everybody can. You have to realize that what I'm on is the body approach to opening up and accessing inner stuff, inner space. When you're taking a psychedelic or any psychoactive, you're doing the same thing, you're doing it just a slightly different way. What you're doing is taking a plant substance that is changing something in your body physically. I've had a lot of experience recently with Santo Dime. The Brazilians have an ancient church and they make use of a substance called Ayahuasca.

It's a tryptamines?

Chemically the essential ingredient is dimethyl tryptamines (DMT). When they get with their Ayahuasca in their ritual, that's brewed in the jungle, is very different from what you get with chemically prepared stuff. Some people say the same thing about using real good mushrooms versus using artificially created material. The plant spirits don't really work well through the chemically made stuff. So yes, there is a place for this in all ritual, in all spiritual and religious exploration. There's definitely a place for plant substances. But we're doing the same thing as hanging the body up by flesh hooks. We are intervening in the body to create some special kind of consciousness.

What relationship do you see between ancient rituals and modern rave rituals? Both are endurance-based, trance-inducing ordeals...

Ok, raves are an ecstatic rite. People go there to seek ecstasy. They go there to combine spirit, body, and get that feeling of escape and unity when you're not all tied up in one world or the other. That's not much different from what they do in Africa or what they do in the South Pacific. And they sometimes use plant substances too. It's a rediscovery of something that's always been here. The body piercing movement and everything these people are into is nothing new. That's one thing I always emphasize. It's just a rediscovery of something that's already been there. Fakir isn't bringing anything new. Fakir is just by example reintroducing something that's always been there. People have always been able to access this. The only reason they haven't is because of the prohibitions, the programming

or Western Judeo-culture.

How would you define 'Body Play' (the word, not your magazine)?

The full definition is printed in Body Play #1.

There's no word in our culture for this so I invented that word to cover it. It's using the body and playing with it.

Originally you were with PFIQ. What made you move from PFIQ to Body Play?

The limitations of PFIQ. It very exclusively covers just contemporary body piercing and pictures, and doesn't have a whole lot of meat in it. I saw what was happening in body piercing as a part of a million other things that I'd practiced for 34 years and nobody was addressing it.

So the point wasn't body piercing, the point was what was behind it?

Yes. I was more interested in why people are doing it and what they get out of it than I am in the actual literal doing of it or the seeing of it. For 10 or 15 years I was a major contributor and later an editor and my goal was to make PFIQ a little broader and a little more inclusive. The thing that I felt was lacking was real life stories by real life people with pictures to go with it. That was my goal. I wanted substance, I wanted content, I wanted education. I wanted some solid stuff here to bite on, and the prevailing attitude of the people at Gauntlet was they didn't want that...

Why not?

I don't know. Since then they've tried to change the format and they've copied and aped me for about three years now. Every time I do something... I do something on Vadra Vamra, they put him on the cover a year later. I do something on flesh hooks, they're looking all over to find people for flesh hooks.

I guess there's 'In the Flesh' doing that as well now.

There's enough stuff and enough people out there, I mean, god, be original! Why don't they just go out and get something new! No problem! [laughs]

So basically you were filling a void that PFIQ or any tattoo magazine couldn't fill.

Yeah, or any religious, spiritual, or new age magazine too, because I'm addressing all of that... They don't know where to put Body Play sometimes. I've gotten on the New Age counter in some bookstores like Barnes & Noble. They don't know where to put me. Some places I get in with the sex magazines. Sometimes I get in with the piercing, tattooing, and biker magazines. There isn't really a place for Body Play.

How does a person get in contact with doctors that do unusual jobs?

In my case I go out into a lot of different communities, I have a lot of traffic with a lot of people. For instance I look around for a friendly doctor in an SM group. If we want advice on what to do if someone passes out from being whipped too hard, we have our friendly doctor in the SM group who's into whipping. I have another patron millionaire who has many, many connections. Many highly placed people, and always when I need specialized information I usually go and ask him to find someone for me and he usually does.

I want a doctor, or a plastic surgeon... it pays to be a millionaire — you get a lot of access that way. And if you can't be a millionaire, it pays to have one or two that are friendly with you, because they can usually do stuff that you can't normally do.

What do you think of the popularity of new procedures like implants?

It leaves me shaking cold because it's not being done for any purpose that's ritual or expanding consciousness.

Does there need to be a balance between spirit and aesthetic, or can they be unrelated issues?

My feeling is there should always be a connection between inner life and the practices we do in outer life. Not to have a connection, or to avoid having a connection is to seek imbalance, and when you have imbalance you get Darth Vader!

You spent a long time on the cutting edge of the industry... What advice would you have for these people currently on that edge?

I would caution them to be aware of the fact that they're doing magic, not just aesthetics and show business. And not to get carried away with ego because the psychic consequences are very serious. The penalties are very stiff for abuse and misuse of this kind of power. When you carried away with flights of fancy on implants, and I can do bigger than you, and I can... There we're getting off on ego trips and you're doing ego tripping on something that's essentially shamanic and Magick. The law isn't going to come and bust you but the psychic law is always patrolling. You're going to get caught sooner or later and have to pay a penalty for misuse.

Who or what patrols that...?

Well, again, I guess I've got to use an analogy. Because I just saw the last of the Star Wars trilogy it's very much like Lucas presented, it's very much like The Force. All these things, whether you're using plant substances to journey, or whether you're hanging in cottonwood trees with flesh hooks, all of these things are best done with the aid and approval of the "force". Not to do it that way is opening yourself up to incredible risks and disappointments and problems and despair and possibly even death.

Fakir goes about this in a shamanic way, he's not out to make a bundle of money, he's not interested in getting any more famous. He's famous enough. That results in too many phone calls and too many emails. I'm famous enough, I don't want to be any more famous.

Do you wish you were less famous?

Sometimes.

Your interest in corsetry first started with the Ibitoe?

Yup.

And then...

This was long term, slow masochism. It was adjusting, it was changing the body slowly. I grooved on the sensation of cutting myself in half with the belt, and it would get so tight,

and it would get very difficult and I would get very charged by it and it would become erotic and I wanted even tighter. The belt works fine, and it's great to train the body, but in the long haul you've got to train more of the torso than a two or three inch wide strip in the middle. I realized that you needed corsets.

I had such a passion to do this, and I had training, I have a masters in technical theater and I had gotten a lot of training in costume design and whatnot, I was skilled at making costumes. So I said, "what the hell, I can't find or buy corsets, and any corsets they made won't fit". Nobody had made a new pattern for ninety years so I went into my basic training I had in costume design and figured out how to make corset patterns which have to be made off sculpted mannequins. So I made the first patterns mainly to make corsets for myself. I had already trained and become an inveterate lacer in a corset made by somebody else, a leather one from Mexico. But it was not adequate and it wouldn't do the job quite right. So I learned how to make corsets and I made them first for myself and then for other people. It's a wonderful, marvelous thing, and I've continued on with corseting ever since then and I'm corseting right now, and back in training, and going back down to 19".

Since you can probably claim some credit for this, why do you think corsetry is back in style?

Corset mania runs in hundred year cycles. Every hundred years there's a corset cycle and it's happened for 400 years in a row now, and there's no reason for it to stop. The last corset mania reached it's peak about 1890. The one before that was 1790. I traced all of this. And you reach extremes in corseting, this extreme in fashion, at the end of each century. So we are now very close to the end of the century — There's got to be corset mania, just like 2090 there'll also be another corset mania regardless. Now the corsets are different... They may be made out of rubber, plastic, and PVC, they may be worn on the outsides of the garments instead of the insides, and god knows what they'll be made of in 2090, but you can bet that 2090 there'll be another corset cycle.

Can we get a brief bio?

Well, I don't know... brief?

Well, you went to high school, you went to university for technical theater...

No, I first went to Northern State College and I have a Bachelors degree in Science and Education and I taught high school for a year, and English, speech, drama, journalism. And then I came to California and I got a Masters degree from San Francisco State University in Technical Theater and Creative Writing. I had a job in theater. I was actually the tech director for the actor's workshop for a couple of years; lighting and scenic design, etc. They moved to New York. Also I had a job at SF State teaching tech theater, scenic design, make-up and costume. Not being able to find ultimate good employment there I finally wandered off and had a series of odd things... I was an engraver for high tech industries, I taught dancing (that's where I got into corsets), because of the creative writing and tech background (when I started out to be an electrical engineer), I got a job as a copy writer at Ampex corporation and that started a 27 year career in high tech advertising. I worked in large SF agencies being an account supervisor for United Technologies, Memorex, and people like that. Then I worked in a number of agencies over on the peninsula and in Silicon Valley

and finally had my own agency for 17 years.

Your branding started on yourself as part of ritual activity?

Yes, that's covered in Body Play #1.

I did a branding ritual in Torrence, CA, last week. It was quite successful. It went till three in the morning. I did about seven people. The last one was about a 17 strike brand and on strike eight the lights went out. People were very helpful. We had rhythm, we had chanting, we had incense, we had drums, and they brought in flashlights, and we finished it with flashlights.

When you first started offering branding to others, it was in your immediate group?

Yup. It was just sharing because people wanted the experience.

When did the seminars start?

It was like the body piercing, but much later, and much smaller. It's still fairly small, but now I'm finding regular people four times a year to attend a class, I have a school in it. The aesthetic, the feeling, and the magic of branding is so different than tattooing. There are a certain number of people who don't really like tattooing but they like branding, particularly the experience of multi-strike branding that might take an hour or so of repeated burning in a very rhythmic fashion. It adapts itself very well to ritual and to transformative experiences. More so than tattooing, and it isn't instant and hot like body piercing. That's a real different experience too. It has its place ritually. Branding has a different space.



There were a lot of people who were starting to dabble and they were using soldering irons, and hot wires, and the biggest problem I had was in the SM community. There were some people representing themselves as "brand masters" and they made mini-versions of what were cattle brands. Which don't work at all on people! And I saw some of my friends in the SM community getting horribly mutilated.

They didn't realize that the width of the red hot metal, when it heals it will be three times wider than that. So all of the brands came out to be big nasty holes or blobs. And I had to have the experience back in my early days, ten thousandths of an inch giving me a very wide line. They didn't know what they were doing. So that how I got started teaching some branding. So that people would avoid that trouble.

You really seem to push yourself quite hard for an old guy!

The only people I deal with and surround myself with are people from 17 to 27. Very seldom do I even have any traffic with anyone older than thirty. And so I just kind of think I'm 27 years old. But I'm not 27. I'm actually going to be 67 years old. I decided two years ago that I'm going to get younger instead of older, and it seems to be working. I can be kind of a gender bender at times; I cross dress sometimes, I go out into public. I can wear the highest of high heels and have the smallest of waists going down the streets.

You have a lot of fun.

I do. I enjoy life.

How did you find jewelry and tools for your early piercing?

We invented all of that. I'm talking about Jim Ward, myself, and about five other people. We invented the whole thing. There were no needles, there was no jewelry, there were no techniques, they didn't even know what kinds of things you could pierce that would work. All of that was developed between 1969 and 1975. And it was all developed out of this core group that was held together and brought together by Doug Malloy.

Everybody knows what happened to you, and everybody knows what happened to Jim, but what happened to the others?

There was Sailor Sid. Sailor Sid is dead. There was Alan Oversby who I had dinner with last November. He's gone (Mr. Sebastian). There's Sammy Horsefrekenback. I don't know where Sammy is. He's in Germany. There were three of four people where I can't mention their names because they don't want to be known. There were some piercing pioneers that no one will ever hear of, like the couple in Texas who had a pierced nipple when there were only seven people in the whole Western world with pierced nipples.

That you knew of.

That was about 1976.

Didn't Europe have a flourishing heterosexual piercing scene at that point?

No. The only people that had piercings in Europe at that time were circus freaks that worked in a German carnival. I know a couple of people of people who had pierced nipples and tongues and they only had it so they could put a hook in it and pull a wagon across a stage and make a living. Only ones... The phenomena started as far as I know, and I've been here the whole while, in Los Angeles, in West Hollywood. And the first place it was open, was a little store on Santa Monica Boulevard that we all thought would not go (we couldn't make \$750 rent on the place). I used to fly down every weekend and pierce when it first got started. It got that there were more people than piercers and it was all gay males. The most popular piercings were Prince Alberts and nipples. It grew and grew and grew from the gay people, there were gay SM people, who in turn used to play with straight SM people, so then the next group who came through were the straight SM people. And the guys and their slave women (general) were getting labias, etc. pierced. That was the next wave. There was an era for each of these. The later wave got to be the punks. From that it went out into the general youth population.

Did any of the circus folks, for example Rasmus Neilson (a circus performer with a huge Madison and nipple piercings), cross over into your group?

No. They had a different world all their own. I'm sure Rasmus Neilson thought there would never be anybody else who would pierce their nipples and put hooks in them.

Doug Malloy made his money from MUZAK?

Amongst other things. He was a self-made millionaire who came from a dirt-poor family up in Washington. He had a little man who came and guided him psychically and that's

how he became a millionaire by age 24. He had the golden touch. He was a spiritual man, he was a psychic man. We hit it off beautifully. In the final days he had a bit of difficulty with Jim because Jim wasn't going down the spiritual path and he died unexpectedly on us so that it never got totally resolved.

Doug seems to have been a bit more private than the rest of you, but was he as actively interested in it as the rest of your core group?

More so. He was totally into it. Doug Malloy was a bisexual man, who haunted all the odd little neighborhoods and little goings-on, particularly in Los Angeles, but because he had money he was able to go all over the world, and check this out in New York, and SF, and London, and make friends. He just had an absolute passion that this should come alive and be more available to people who really wanted body piercings. He was also into tattooing and a lot of other kinky things. He lived across the street from Bob Hope in Tuluca Lake [laughs]. And right behind him was Nancy Sinatra. A real celebrity filled world with gates and guards and stuff and he used to come out to Hollywood and pick us up in a classic Silver Cloud Rolls Royce, and you could park in the middle of the street and every one would drive around you and wonder what movie star this was. Ha! It was very nice.

I guess you guys had no idea that piercing would become the huge commercial industry that it is now.

Definitely not.

Do you think it will continue to be that? How much is fad?

I think it's in our culture now and it's going to stay, but I think that a lot of it has gone over the peak. We can tell by the proliferation. I've trained more than the majority of the people out there trying to make a living at it. Very hard to make a living doing this. There are only a few people doing this that actually make any money at it. It's done mostly for passion and mostly for joy and mostly for fun. I keep training these people ten at a time and I get very intimately connected with them. I know who they are and I follow them up for two or three years. But still, people want this. It was a needed service that was not provided in our culture. So I look upon it as being cultural aid, cultural support, to have trained body piercers, particularly the ones who know the art, the skill, and the magic. Because mostly what the people come in for nowadays is the magic. We're finding this more and more. People come to us and say, "Can you teach us to do this more shamanically? I want the flesh to part and the needle to go through and go into ecstatic states." I have a lot of people come to me and about half of them come to me for mainly that reason. And we do teach them the most sophisticated techniques and skills. I've got a network of a hundred people who are constantly connecting with each other and passing information this way and that, and doing this every day. And that's what we put into our school. It's the cumulative knowledge and ongoing learning experience of hundreds of people on an ongoing basis. That's what makes what we're doing so good.

How did you meet your first students? How did you meet Eric Dakota for example?

Eric was a groupie, piercing novice/devotee in Santa Cruz. We had these odd calls come in, most of which were hung up on. Somebody would say, "This is so-and-so in Berkeley and we're having this festival and we were wondering if you could send a body piercer over

here because some people would like to get body piercings?” And the general attitude was “Why bother. If they want a piercing, have them come over and see us on Market Street.” I happened to pick up one of these calls one day and it was somebody in Santa Cruz in an art gallery having a ritual that wanted to include some piercing. They asked if Gauntlet could send somebody over, and I said, “No, but I’m Fakir and I’d be happy to come down there”. So I did. So I started doing a few of these little gigs, and in the course of these I’d usually do a little slide-talk about what’s piercing and what’s available and how they’re done and what kinds of piercings you can get and a little background and about the magic of it a little bit. And then we’d have a little piercing ritual in closed quarters where we’d take our clothes off and pound drums and the whole number. It was at these that I met Eric and a whole mess of others. Allen Faulkner and all these other people.

You mentioned that you met Cleo through Dances Sacred and Profane?

Actually I met her but didn’t know her at an SM group four years before, Janus Society in San Francisco, and she was this weird French woman who kept binding her breasts with rope, and making fun play out of it. And I thought, “Hmm... That’s intriguing,” because I’ve always been into that sort of thing. Then when we premiered, the world theatrical premiere of the Dances film, the film makers thought it was only appropriate to do it in SF. They had trouble finding a good theater to do it in, so we finally ended up in the Mission District, at the Roxy, which is an avant-guard, experimental kind of place where they show those kind of movies. We did the world premiere and that was very successful. Sell-out for a week, two shows a day, or something like that. I talked at most of them. She lived nearby, and she hung around, and she volunteered to get us a place to hold an opening party, and I could use her apartment to dress in and rest in and so on, so we made a date to have a date on a fourth of July (it was like ten years ago), and we got stuck with each other. We’re both very open, we’re both experimental, we’re both into SM, we’re both bisexual...

Your partnership has grown over that time...?

We’ve got a very strong spiritual relationship and we go out and do the things we did the weekend, in Los Angeles, the branding and so on. We work together as a team, and work with a group of people, sometimes very derisive, uncooperative people, and usually make it come off where they feel it emotionally and get strong and get involved and something really nice happens.

And body play and art and ritual has been a strong part of that.

Oh yes. The Dances thing showed at around a number of theaters. First it did a year on the festival circuit, got very nice reviews in London, Italy, etc. I went over to Europe, that time with Annie Sprinkle actually and went to a couple of those and spoke at them, like at Antwerp and places like that. Then it came back over here and they premiered it at the Roxy, and showed at various places around the United States and I went to those and always took Cleo with me and she would sell T-shirts and just generally help out.

Do you think that all the other aspects that you two have gives your relationship a strength that other people don’t have?

Yeah. We can share. We can share very much in this spiritual realm, and since we’re both coming from the standpoint of body art oriented expression and ritual, it works fine. We

work together with our people very nicely doing suspensions, piercings, endless piercing rituals, the Savite Hindu rites that we do every summer, and on and off during the year. We've done ball dances for Fear Against AIDS for a number of years in a row, the red dog moon or whatever. These kinds of rituals and piercing rituals can be very helpful to heal community. All of the reasons that I give in the magic of piercing, in I think the second issue of BP.

What's coming up for you?

I see more shamanic work. This year I see a little bit of travel. I have to be very selective because I get endless invites. I must get five college students doing papers on modern primitives a week (which I can't handle). We had all these invites to European festivals and things because of the name. Every now and then one comes up that's appealing. I'd like to get a bit more private time. Every day I spend at least half an hour doing my body play and my shamanic work. Doing writing. I have a friend who's published four or five books who has a couple of major publishers interested in doing my autobiography, which I would never have dreamed of doing a year or two ago, but I've had five years of psychotherapy and I've gone through all these experiences and I feel that maybe now I can be honest enough to do it.

Do you mean traditional psychotherapy?

Yes, traditional western psychotherapy.

How does that go together...?

With what I'm doing? Well, I got into a terrible state back when I had my fallout with Jim in that grim period five year ago, and that's how I originally happened to go. Sort of like, "I'm kind of fallen apart, can you help me?" [laughs]. And since then it's become wonderful. Now you have to understand that I'm with a very well accredited, mainstream, but gay, Jewish, Jungian therapist. Which makes all the difference in the world. Who feels that he is doing shamanic work. So he is a shaman in his specialty, working with me, a shaman in other specialties. It's help me work out a lot of stuff. I feel that to really write a book that's worthwhile, and I only have one book in me, it's got to be totally honest, and I've got to say and fess up to stuff that I would even tell myself. I'm not going to do it until I feel I can do that, and I think I'm about ready. I need to take a year off to do the mechanical part of it. The story's been told a thousand times, the hidden corners have never been touched. I do need someone who will take a couple of chapters and an outline, and give me a \$25,000 advance so I can afford to do it, but that's not a problem.

More speculatively, what do you see coming up for the industry / community?

I talked to Ron Athey and Annie Sprinkle recently and we were pioneers in body stuff, she in showing off and doing the sexual side of it, and he in doing really grim rites with play needles and stuff, bloody rites and tattoo. Ron was thinking, this year's freaks are downing last year's freaks as old hat, is what he's been running into. He's been doing the Europe circuit, and what he did before was really hard to get and really not something you ought to take into public. Now it is. Ron has matured; he's doing stuff that is really deep — has meaning, and form. He's really got an art going here. But of course, there are this year's freaks, that are bloodier than last year's freaks, and he was considered the bloodiest of freaks

and so now he's a has been. Annie Sprinkle is too. We were talking, "Are we all has beens or what?" It's just a phase. In the long haul, I'm going to be remembered, I'm sure, and it's not really me... You've got to understand, I look at myself, I'm just an archetype — These people are tuning. What these people are tuning into when they see Fakir and the Modern Primitives book and they see all this other stuff coming along, they're tuning into an archetypal person, an archetype that's universal. And I can't take it personal when they come up and say, "you transformed my life". I didn't transform their life. I was just a channel and there was this archetype that calls himself Fakir that did something, that caused them to go off and try something new. That's really where I'm coming from.

If you could sum up what you want to accomplish in your life...

Well I think I've pretty much accomplished it. I'm just sitting back now. This is Apul Gira on the ruins. This is the time of harvest when you get to see how the stuff turns out after you planted it. So I'm in a period where I'm watching stuff grow and admiring and watching the beauty of the flowers. No kidding. And I'm very optimistic about where it all is going. What I feel has happened is people have opened up to the kind of experience that would result in transformation and there's one lady who writes extensively on this stuff Atwater, Beyond the Light, who studied near-death, because what we're doing is very similar to the people exploring the near-death experience. She sees what's happening to people having near-death, very common, regardless of their experience, she doesn't care what they saw, where they went... What are they like a month later, a year later is important. She sees a brain shift. They behave and function differently.

They understand in a different way. I've had the same experience with people who've had a lot of the Dime, the Ayahuasca experience tends to do the same thing. It's a body approach too. When we get enough brain shifted people we can have a new culture. Ted Polemous over in London speculates a lot about where we're going, where do we go after the fetish of the fetish... I didn't like him for a while and I got stuck at Heathrow airport with him for five hours and we really had a chance to get acquainted and boy, we tuned in. And then we got on a panel in Copenhagen, and we had a two hour debate on where culture is going. What do you do when everybody's so individuated that society falls apart? He was very concerned about that. Because society was originally made on the primitive model which is arms, legs, fingers, eyes; a body. What happens after we have done enough body play and body experimenting and everything gets fragmented and everybody is totally individualistic and we have no more society, we have nothing in common with each other. He couldn't possibly conceive of, when you go through that experience, a lot of people are going to get brain shifted, and behave differently, and see, and understand things differently. They can come together and make a new society, on a new model. That was my suggestion, that's where I think it's headed.



When the harvest is over, is death what follows?

Ultimately we all go the same way. I like to think that maybe I'm prepared, but then again, you never know. No matter who you are or where you are... Ram Dass had a stroke and he was paralyzed and couldn't speak. That's the last thing in the world we expected to happen for Ram Dass. I'm sure Ram Dass never expected it either! You know, he's Baba, he sat in a cave, he had thousands of people worshipping him for a while. Didn't expect him to go to his Merton County apartment with his lover and have a heart attack but that's what happened. So you take it as it comes. You never know what's going to be the next thing you're going to do. For me, personally, it's learning to live with the unexpected, because in the last year it particularly accelerated for me, and the unexpected happens on a daily basis. Learning to live with it is learning to live shamanically. For me, I'm getting into a period of fulfilling my shamanic dream, being able to function the way I really probably should function, and of course, ultimately, I'm going to leave this coil. I meditate on that every day, about the impermanence of everything, including me! Especially me.

To people who don't understand a lot of what you're saying, and who see it as some kind of craziness, what are the key things they need to change in their way of thinking to understand where you're coming from?

Well, I think that things have been changed, but only in younger people. There are older people who will never understand. They're just going to have to live their life and die and go wherever they go. But I have a lot of hope for a lot of people whose eyes have been opened. This is a period of great openness. I have a great optimism here for a lot of people wanting, going for, taking risks, and getting involved in physical life to the point where they have transformative experiences.

I'd like to do BP the book II, I just need \$12,000 to do it.

So it's just a matter of finding a backer that'll give you an advance?

Well, to hell with someone! Hey, if I can change the shape and size of my body, and I've done some remarkable, marvelous physical changing, in myself and others, and I said, "gee, why can't I do that in my world?" and I started doing that one. It works great. I'm unlimited spirit flowing into my body. I'm my unlimited body putting unlimited amounts of money into my bank account... The next day I had \$3000.

Well where did it come from?

Unexpectedly! No, no... If you can manipulate anything in the physical world by these things, anything at all, you can manipulate all the rest of it. This is where I'm at in my practice right now, and it started with my body piercing and so forth. I've bent my feet, I've changed the shape of my body, I've made my waist go up and down, I've grown big nipple and little tits, and I've done all kinds of weird things. I've stretched my neck, I've sculpted my arms, and from that I learned something.

It's more than just changing your body, it inundates every aspect of your life.

Yeah, what's behind it? Why does it work, and what do you learn, and what relation do you get between body and spirit? I've got that one worked out really well. I've got another book on that subject which I may get published.

Urban Primitive

Raven and Daemon Rowanchilde are the owners and founders of Toronto's Urban Primitive Design Studio, a way of thinking and a bodyart studio embodying a tribal consciousness for modern information times. Together they provide clients with what they feel is a more meaningful bodyart experience than many studios are able to provide. Raven is a piercer and an author on body ritual, and Daemon is a well known tattoo artist that developed his own neo-tribal style. Together they also facilitated some of the first ritual events in Canada, including an annual ball dance and kavadi bearing. This interview was done in 1998.

Tell me about the rituals you've hosted — how did these come about?

Raven: The ritual events came largely out of the growing number of people who had experienced powerful psychological transformations during their tattooing, piercing or scarification experiences. Daemon and I had over a decade of experience with bodily ordeals as rites of transformation. Since Urban Primitive provided a supporting atmosphere in which to have these types of experiences,



many people starting asking us if we would organize more community-based events. As a student of social anthropology at U of T, I focused the majority of my research on pain inducing, body modifying rituals of pre-industrial indigenous societies. In particular, I became interested in male genital modification and that interest translated into a paper that I got published in the journal *Human Nature*. My interest in body modification extended into the varieties of ways that pre-industrial cultures explored voluntary pain induction as spiritual ritual. The spiritual component of pain rituals constituted an almost universal phenomenon among pre-industrial indigenous societies.

Also at that time, Fakir Musafar had been actively involved in his own explorations of pain rituals. Initially Fakir's focus was to simply explore techniques used by other cultures to attain ecstatic states of consciousness. These early explorations appealed to Daemon and I.

What role does spiritual ritual play in a society that appears (?) to be largely devoid of it? How can it help people?

I don't believe that our society is devoid of spiritual ritual. However, many young people, in particular, find little connection with spiritual rituals that are highly mediated by priests, etc. They need more direct experiences to inform their beliefs and values. Bodily ordeals provide a platform for direct experience with states of consciousness that can be perceived as spiritual.

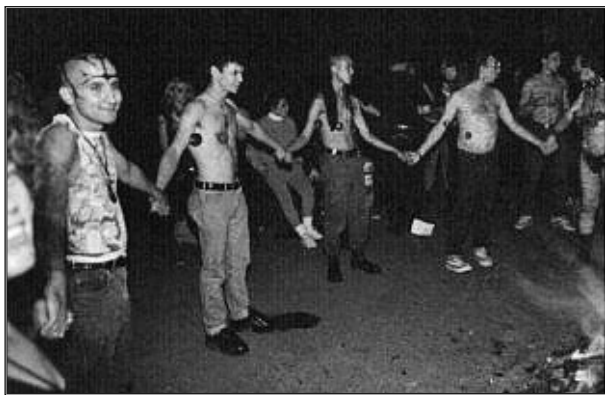
Rituals of the flesh act out commitment.

Daemon: Even in our materialist, misogynist, racist culture, I believe that people have the

potential to be deeply spiritual. But obviously, on the outside manifest level we are doing things wrong. We have got to search inside ourselves, to reconnect with our selves...

If someone wants to involve a ritual event, what should they know? Are there any dangerous, psychological or physical in events such as a ball dance?

Raven: I suggest that anyone wanting to explore bodily ordeals as spiritual ritual get some practical grounding in safe, sane and consensual SM practices. Take an SM 101 course to



get practical information on safety. I also recommend exploring Tantra for breath control techniques, mental focus and bodily movement. If you plan to participate in an existing group or community, find out who these people are and what their intentions are. Ask lots of questions: What precautions do they take for safety? How much experience do they have in a particular practice? Do they provide a

workshop explaining procedures, safety, concerns? Are they making a profit? Do you have to sign over your mortgage? After experience with both large and small events, I recommend small, private group experiences with an experienced spotter or “Ground Control” for each participant. In the case of a ball dance, the Ground Control is generally responsible for suturing, collecting the fallen balls or bells, monitoring the dancer during the ceremony, removal of sutures and clean up, and downloading after the ritual.

From a physical standpoint, the G.C. significantly reduces the risk of infection with proper knowledge of pre and post suture preparations. The G.C. must also be prepared to deal with the possibility fainting or falling dancers. Psychological concerns present more potential problems. People have spontaneously relived memories of childhood abuse during a ball dance. A few of the people that I interviewed for my online book talked about such experiences. The G.C. has to be aware that when someone experiences a painful memory, they may: a) need to stop the ritual immediately b) decide (with gentle encouragement) to continue with the ritual to work through the trauma, and c) require an empathetic listener during the download after the ritual.

How do these rituals relate to BDSM? Are people who find meaning in a ball dance usually into “alternative lifestyles”, or can it be meaningful for people without prior experience?

Both. People with no prior SM experience had the advantage of no pre-conceptions or expectations that can sometime color the experience. On the other hand, SM folk have the advantage of familiarity to work through the pain and push their limits. Many people assume that SM folk are more inclined to these rituals, but this is not generally the case. A lot of SM folk want SM to be accepted by the mainstream. The erotic platform of “kinky sex” was easier to consume and digest by the mainstream. Spiritual ritual involving pain,

however, are considered so far “out there” that they resist being appropriated as fashion. I say, “resist” because, as we later found out, the power of the commodification machine is extremely powerful and this threatened to turn rituals that were very meaningful to many people into a fad.

The most blatant example is an article in the (second) premiere issue of *In the Flesh* that featured a young man named Devin Murfin hanging from flesh hooks. He claimed he was doing an O-kee-pa ceremony and that he was planning a “gang hang” which he planned to videotape and then sell the tapes.

Murfin hasn’t a clue what an O-kee-pa ceremony is. There is a four hundred year old history surrounding the O-kee-pa (sometimes referred to as the Sundance) that is culture-specific to the Plains Indians. The ceremony is very elaborate and involves an entire year of preparation and the participation of the entire group. I was very fortunate to have participated in a peyote ceremony with Cheyenne and Arapaho people in Oklahoma. Later, my Cheyenne friends invited me to attend a Sundance ceremony. The Cheyenne perform the Sundance every summer. The ceremony allows them to renew and revitalize their culture. This is particularly important when we consider the attempts at cultural genocide they have endured.

Unfortunately, Murfin hurts this renewal process with his blatant appropriation and commodification of the ceremony. Sparrow and I wrote a very long letter to the editors of *In the Flesh* discussing our concerns. They published our letter and promptly dismissed us using the same lame arguments that have justified cultural genocide for hundreds of years.

Your one-year-book, “Transformation in the Urban Jungle” discussed some of these issues — What is this title referring to?

I wrote the book in response to the growing media misrepresentation of people exploring spiritual rituals involving pain. I also wanted to address the issue of cultural appropriation in a way that reflected the attitudes and concerns of the people that I interviewed. *Transformation in the Urban Jungle* refers to the healing component of spiritual rituals involving pain. I wrote the book in an academic style to demonstrate to readers that a large body of theoretical literature supports some of the ideas in the book. I also wanted to challenge some of the long-standing theoretical notions in the psychiatric community regarding “self-mutilation”. We turned the book launch into a ritual. On the Winter Solstice, I gathered a group of twenty close friends and acquaintances to participate in a piercing ceremony. I thanked everyone for attending and asked that the focus of the ceremony be that the book enlighten both participants and non participants of such rituals and promote understanding. My friend Peter Dawson lead a short meditation and had everyone bless a blue stone for me to hold when Maribelle did my Aphrodite piercing (aka Christina). Sparrow launched the book onto BME just as Maribelle pushed the needle through freehand. I screamed in a way that I hadn’t done even when Jim Ward pierced my clitoris. The room went silent. It was a moment that I could only describe as epiphany. I burst into tears. Since BME published the book over a year ago, I’ve had scores of people emailing their thanks. The book also generated considerable academic interest; in addition to graduate students exploring body modification for their theses, local psychologists have initiated new research that re-examines the idea that self-injurious behavior may actually have a thera-

peutic effect.

As an academic, your background is as a “cultural anthropologist”. What exactly is this, and how does affect your involvement with ritual and body modification?

I have tried to inject the long-standing theories surrounding body modification, particularly in male genital modification, with a new perspective, one that is informed by my experiences and those of others. I have guest lectured at both U of T and York several times in the last two years. I also presented my paper, Male Genital Modification: A Sexual Selection Interpretation at a conference of die-hard evolutionists in Montreal. I have also tried to generate interest among young students to increase academic exploration of body modification. I get a lot of email from both undergraduate and graduate students asking for information, sources etc.

Some people have objected that events such as Kavadi, ball dances, and other rituals that borrow from the religious and spiritual ceremonies of other cultures, and that this “theft” is offensive to the original culture. As someone who has organized these events, how would you respond to this?

Those are valid objections. Daemon and I were very conscious of informing participants that we were simply exploring tools or techniques for transformation, much the same way that tattooing, piercing, scarification or branding can be tools for transformation. We never attached any culture-specific meaning/s. We didn’t dictate what the participants should think or feel; the ceremonies were very individual experiences. We did provide a pre-ritual workshop outlining methods, addressing questions and concerns and providing practical breathing, chanting, movement exercises to facilitate a more powerful and integrated experiences. Overall, participants had very positive experiences.

Daemon: We’re exploring the past not because we want to return to the past; that’s impossible. Our intention is to draw inspiration from the past and use the insights that we gain to inform the present and future. One example that comes to mind, is my recent experimental archaeology project with Dr. Julian Siggers. Julian works for the Discovery Channel. When I tattooed Julian several years ago, we talked about our mutual interest in indigenous body art and formed a strong friendship over time. Julian wanted to do a television piece on the Ice Man. Julian hypothesized that a sharp, pointed instrument found in a leather pouch attached to the Ice Man’s clothing, may have been used for tattooing the designs on the Ice Man’s body. As part of the presentation for Discovery Canada, Julian duplicated the Ice Man’s tool using different materials: caribou antler, cow bone and chert. Julian didn’t tell me which tool was the exact replica of the one found on the Ice Man. On camera, I hand tattooed Julian with each of the tools. The one that worked the best was the cow bone and I used that to complete his tattoo. After I confirmed that the cow bone worked the best, Julian informed me that the instrument found on the Ice Man was made of cow bone.

What does someone need to be careful of to be respectful to other cultures when borrowing elements of their rituals?

Raven: Honor the source of your inspiration in some way during the ritual. Be clear that you are not claiming access to culture-specific rituals or their meanings.

Daemon: And if possible, ask.

Tell me a bit about your involvement with North American native groups seeking to revive traditional ritual and body art.

Raven: During the course of researching and writing my book, I met two Native women who had very interesting tattoo designs on their arms and face. Initially, they wanted to contact Daemon and I because they were interested in the work we were doing with transformation rituals. After I interviewed them for the book, we discussed our mutual interest in traditional body art forms. They asked me if I had any sources that weren't Europeanized woodcuts a la Theodore De Bry, etc. Unfortunately, most of the pictorial sources of traditional Native body art is a fabrication of the European imagination. Many of the representations were based on the descriptions of European travellers which were then re-interpreted by European artists who had never seen the people. What little documented information we have of Native Canadian tattoos was written by the Jesuits. I spent an entire day at the U of T library pouring over volumes of the Jesuit Relations looking for decent descriptions of tattoos. A motor vehicle accident curtailed my research activities, but I understand that similar research (perhaps more appropriately) is being undertaken by others in the Native community.

What role does your own pagan background and belief structure play in all of this?

My pagan spirituality informs everything that I experience.

While we're talking about rituals from other cultures, what about rituals that involve psychedelics, which an important part of the rituals of almost all cultures. How does an Urban Primitive deal with radical chemical experiences like DMT — Is it ritual that makes the difference between enlightenment and insanity?

This is so important. Like bodily ordeals, psychedelics can be powerful tools for insight and healing. Ritual context does make a difference, however, even rituals can be misused. I know people who do psychedelic "rituals" every week! They may believe that they are discovering new insights when they have become enamored of the projections of their own mind. Drug induced catharsis rituals and rites of passage can become addictions and of themselves. Drug misuse happens long before one realizes it and it can exact an enormous toll on one's physical, psychological and social well being. Despite my seventeen years of disciplined psychedelic ritual exploration, I spent much of last year misusing pain killers and anesthetics following a car accident. Now I practice meditation and only do psychedelic rituals once or twice a year. The only "drug" that I do on a daily basis is a nootropic called Pikamilone.



In the first issue of "Body Play" there is a photo of you getting branding by Fakir — Was this your first experience with branding?

Yes. I met Fakir at a Living In Leather conference in 1993. We hit it off right away. I bottomed to him at a dungeon party. Later I asked him to pierce me. When I came for my

appointment, I saw a photo that he had of a young woman with a branding. I knew right away that “this was it”. I told Fakir that I wanted to ritualize my branding experience. He enthusiastically agreed. I invited close friends and a few acquaintances. Dead Can Dance played on the ghetto blaster. I allowed a photographer and a videographer, provided that they were respectful. I dedicated my branding to the healing of all sentient beings who were suffering. I lay my head in my girlfriend’s lap and focused on my breathing to slow down my heart rate. I was so excited that when I heard the sound of the propane torch heating the metal, I thought my heart would burst out of my rib cage. The first strike made me suck in my breath. I became aware of a strange, yet familiar acrid-sweet smell. When I realized that that was the smell of my burning flesh, I silently dedicated myself as my sacrificial incense to the gods. I felt a warm euphoria wash over me after the third strike until the sixteen strike. Half an hour later, the branding was done and I felt ecstatic.

A bit over a year later, “Body Play” published a beautiful photo of a large back brand that you did. How did you progress from being branded to being a brander?

I experimented a lot on cardboard, oranges and the willing flesh of my slaves. What interested me most about branding was the catharsis that it could induce. Sparrow’s branding was the most powerful catharsis ritual that I participated in. His release was so powerful, even in the context of a “profane” public setting, that not one person was left unaffected by what they saw.



How did you learn? If someone wants to learn, how should they go about that?

Source as much information as you possibly can. Then... practice, practice, practice.

Does ritual play an important role in branding?

Branding, perhaps more so than tattooing or piercing, lends itself more to ritual experience. I believe that branding, by virtue of olfactory stimulation and intensity of sensation, can invoke ancestral memories. Branding also has a profound history of therapeutic and spiritual application.

When the two of you met and got involved in 1984 due to your mutual interest in paganism (at the opening of your shop, “The Witchy Shoppe”), did you also share an interest in Body Art at that point?

Daemon had been tattooing for a few years when I met him in 1984. I had been exploring bodily ordeals, i.e. flogging, bondage, blood control (constriction, blood letting), sensory deprivation, fasting, breath control as part of my spiritual practice for several years. When we got together our separate interests merged and evolved into our current practices.

To mark your marriage (tell me if you’d prefer another term), you share tattoos — Tell me a bit about the role that body art plays in your relationship.

Daemon and I got handfasted in 1989. We wanted to permanently mark our spiritual commitment to one another with ankle tattoos.

Daemon: Everything that we do, are and will be gets expressed somehow, somewhere in the body.

How has your personal involvement with ritual and spiritually transformative body art affected your own life?

Raven: Body art has affected both of us in a very profound way. I detailed some of my personal experiences in UPTUJ, including getting my clitoris pierced in a sexual reclamation ritual.

Daemon: My personal involvement with ritual and spiritually transformative body art has marked points of transition, e.g. my palang piercing literally punched me into a new level of being. It gave me more courage and confidence to make changes in my life. My other piercings, tattoos and brandings also helped me transform psychological programs that held back my spiritual growth.

Is that why you try to share these experiences with others and help them to achieve them?

Both: Exactly.

What role has the net played in the life of UP?

Raven: The Net has allowed us to access a global population, both in terms of artistic recognition and to articulate our philosophical disposition. It has been particularly lucrative for Daemon during his convention tours in Europe. He tours almost six months a year in Germany, Austria, Belgium, England, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, Switzerland and Italy. Since people are able to view his portfolio online, the internet has facilitated the recognition of his work to the degree that he is one of the busiest artists at every convention. We also have a regular stream of clients who come up from the U.S. for tattoos because they have seen Daemon's work online.

You are known internationally for being one of "THE" people to come to for tribal work and have a distinctive flowing style. Did you start with this, or did it develop over time? How?

Daemon: My style has and still is developing. When I started out years ago, I wanted to break down the design to its simplest form and develop it from there. My interest in tattooing began after my first tattoo at the age of 18. At this time the desire to do this kind of work seemed purely physical, an unconscious urge that over many years to come would reveal itself as being so important and full of meaning that it would change my outlook on life forever! I was self taught and only tattooed on and off sporadically for many years as I explored the various arts and built myself the foundation that I now rest on. I "did my time" touching up and fixing old tattoos for free until I had the skill and confidence to attempt a complete piece on my own. At this time tattooing was not a career move, but purely an exploration into experience and artistic expression.

To further my knowledge and understanding of what I then considered "Body Design" I completed a Fine Arts degree at the Ontario College of Art in Toronto. I studied the Experimental Arts to both loosen up my creativity and stimulate my imagination. I studied Fine Art to discipline myself and to learn how to paint and draw the human form, both

in its natural state as well as in motion. I was fascinated by the dynamics of the human body in motion and how these dynamics could be enhanced creatively by a skillfully placed and well executed design. I soon took human anatomy to learn from the “inside” how these interrelationships worked. During the second half of the term I went to the University of Toronto to dissect human cadavers. This might not seem so romantic, but was quite necessary to fully understand the dynamic relationship between the various parts of the body. In my final year, I did an independent study project that examined tattooing as a legitimate art form.

During the years that followed, I put many hours into tattooing and painting. While working on my clients I became much more aware of the process of transformation and the experiences that this process often evoked. These experiences ranged from a simple euphoric afterglow that lasted for a couple of weeks, to a full blown cathartic release that shook the very foundation of their being. I started paying closer attention to the factors that led to these experiences. In the years that followed, I devoted all the time I had to both perfecting my skill as an artist and researching/ exploring the most effective ways to set the ground for a true and spontaneous transformation. I believe these two elements must be both present and in balance to allow a full “tattoo experience” to take place.

In terms of style, I took precision and definition further than it had been previously explored in black tribal design. I sometimes spent twice as long on a piece as someone else, but the quality, flow and crispness of the lines compensated for any extra discomfort and expense. I am presently exploring the marriage of black daemonic tribal with gray water-shaded patterning that reflects the energy and vitality of the particular piece and the individual wearing it. This not only further integrates the art with the person, it becomes a personal energetic signature or fingerprint of that person.

What’s the most important thing a person should consider when getting/planning a tattoo?

A person should realize that the tattoo is not just being placed on your body; it is becoming a part of you, an extension of yourself.

What do you do to help provide that?

I divide it into three parts:

- 1) **Pre-Tattoo Experience** — a full and formal consultation prior to being tattooed, to allow the artist and the client the time to get to know each other and to arrive at the best possible design and placement.
- 2) **“Set And Setting”** — creating an atmosphere that will provide the most effective environment and allow for an unrehearsed, spontaneous and open experience. This is further enhanced by allowing the client their input into the choice of music, incense, candles and the people that they wish present for their experience.
- 3) **Post-Tattoo Experience** — Including after care, healing and reflection.

You’ve said that pain is an important part of getting tattooed. What role does the ritual of tattooing play, and what role does the end aesthetic result play? Depending on the situation, would you “make” the tattoo hurt more for some people? (You may want

to reword that question)

The aesthetic is as important as the experience. It is a permanent marker of the experience and when it is executed beautifully, it remains a positive reminder for the rest of the person's life. As far as the pain element, tattooing, especially with larger work, is a rite of endurance. I find that the most powerful experiences occur with tattoos that require six hours or more to complete.

You've also done some work with some very interesting methods of scarification, one of those being tattoo gun scarification which to the best of my knowledge, you originated. Could you tell me a bit about that?

Well I just wanted a better, more accurate method of cutting the skin with greater control. The blade that I attach to the needle-bar is not a scalpel(which I understand most people use), but a blade more like an X-acto. The blade cuts differently, and does not allow the skin to knit back together the way that a scalpel does. The blade is very small, which together with the quick up and down sawing action of the machine, allows me the accuracy and control that I need.

How does scarification relate to the other body arts?

In scarification, nothing gets left under the skin to color it with unless there is some kind of irritant or another introduced. This Idea appeals to some people-no metal hanging from a piercing, no ink under the skin, just a design made out of your own flesh!!

What do you think of many people who are starting to treat scarification as a purely visual event, with no respect for the underlying spiritual event? What do you think they're missing?

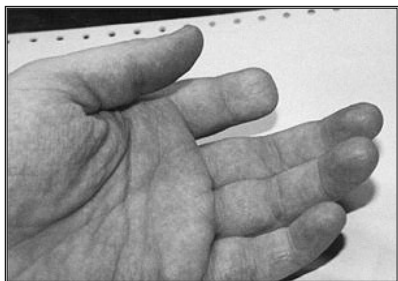
Raven: It is inevitable, especially since the techniques have improved the overall visual quality, that scarification has become represented more as an art or fashion form. I hesitate to get dogmatic about the spiritual component of scarification. While I believe that acknowledgement of the spiritual allows for a richer experience, it is not for everyone, nor should anyone insist that it be strictly a spiritual practice.



Daemon: They're just two different schools of thought which at times do overlap to form a whole new level of experience.

Fingerless “S”

At age sixteen, “S” voluntarily cut off his own finger. This was one of my first interviews on the subject, done in I think 2000, and it’s amazing how “normal” this sort of modification seems now. While sometimes these days a finger amputation is a “rite of passage” into the “heavy mods club”, before they had that cache a different set of drives motivated them.



I know you did the amputation at sixteen — that’s pretty young. What led up to it?

I was very young, perhaps seven or eight, when I discovered that I was fascinated by amputations. I still don’t know what led up to that. This interest eventually mutated into a desire to have my own amputation. I continued to fantasize throughout my early teen years, often using string or rubber bands to tie off

a limb or finger in the hopes that it would dry up and need to be amputated. It never worked; I always chickened out when the pain got bad enough.

The day I actually cut off my finger was no different. I had done all the steps on previous occasions, but never had the courage to follow through when it came time to cut. I don’t know what was different on the big day, except that I somehow managed to make a pretty deep cut. Maybe I just wasn’t paying attention. Once I’d made that cut, I decided that I might never be able to get that far again, so I decided to finish the amputation right there.

Do you know now why you did it?

Because I want to be an amputee. I need to be an amputee. I don’t know how else to explain it. It’s a driving need that I don’t understand myself...but it’s real, and it’s strong.

What was the exact procedure of the cutting? It sounds like it must have been a slow process?

It was pretty straightforward. I used an ordinary utility knife (also known as a razor knife, box cutter, etc), using ice water to numb the finger, with a piece of string used as a tourniquet. My initial cut was across the top of the finger just above the last joint. From there I cut down and around...the hardest part was the large nerve that runs down the thumb side of the finger, because even with the ice water that nerve was still pretty sensitive.

What was your family’s reaction?

They were understandably upset about the whole thing, more so because I couldn’t — wouldn’t — explain how the amputation had happened. These days they’ve all forgotten about it, or perhaps they just have the good sense to not ask me about it anymore.

How did your friends react?

They were curious, but nobody got too upset about it. I know that’s not a great answer, but I’ve just never met anyone who made a big deal of it.

What do you tell people now when they ask what happened to your finger?

I usually say that I got my finger slammed in a car door. If someone presses for details I just say that I don't want to talk about it. Most people respect that.

Have you expressed yourself with other body modifications as well?

No. It's not as if I'm morally opposed to tattoos and piercing and such, I just haven't seen any that I wanted to have myself.

Have you expressed yourself with other “self destructive behavior” as well?

No, I don't think so. I could be wrong.

I routinely do web searches for info on self-mutilation, although I've never found very little of substance regarding self-amputation. I usually find a lot of info on lower-grade self-injuring behavior like cutting and burning. After learning more about SIB, I did try doing a cutting, I think mainly to find out where I stood with regard to this other kind of self-destructive behavior. To make a long story short, I found out that I'm not a cutter...I don't much care for pain, I didn't care for the bleeding (it wasn't satisfying, it was just messy), and I felt as if I hadn't accomplished anything by inflicting those cuts (mere scratches, in fact) on myself.

Some of my scars are indirectly due to my desire for amputation. From time to time I've experimented with ideas that could develop into a way to achieve my amputation. Some of those experiments left scars. Most of those scars are on the very limb I wish to have amputated, and that was a deliberate decision on my part — if I have to make scars, I may as well make them on the “disposable” parts of my body rather than the parts I intend to keep. There's probably a deep and profound psychological meaning in that, but I think it's just good planning.

Why do you think that people should have the right to do amputations? Doesn't society have the obligation to protect you and stop you from doing things like this?

These two questions are aspects of the same issue. It's a very complex issue, and I can hardly begin to scratch the surface.

I believe it's a matter of individual rights as to what you do with your own body. As long as you're willing to take responsibility for your choices and abide by them, why not choose to amputate a limb?

The problem is whether you really can take responsibility. An amputation is usually a pretty expensive thing to go through. Prosthetic limbs can cost a lot of money, if you choose to use one. Unless you're pretty well-off, you can expect to share these expenses with others, such as your insurance carrier or government health bureau.

I'm a strong believer in individual rights, but I'm also aware that individuals collectively comprise a society, and that society has its own imperatives about what's best for its own survival. Is it in society's best interest to allow its members to modify themselves for personal reasons? Do these modifications affect the individual's value to society? Is it society's job to keep its individual members content, and if so, is it right for individuals to take advantage of society's preferred services in order to attain contentment?

It's a huge issue, and an important one. I don't have all the answers.

If you cut your leg off, what obligation does society have to give you benefits, even ones as minor as using the handicapped parking spaces?

That's a very good question. As a society, We don't differentiate between people whose disabilities were acquired purely by accident versus those who were disabled as a result of doing something stupid like driving drunk. If, for the sake of argument, we extend the definition of "stupid" to becoming disabled purely by choice, where does that leave us?

A person's eligibility for disability benefits is a bit of a moving target. The definitions of what does and does not qualify as a disability has changed over the years, and continues to change — I can't keep up with it, myself. I can only say in my own defense that I hope to avoid the issue entirely by staying independent and never having a need to claim a disability benefit.

Are you interested in amputee lifestyle and fetishism (wearing braces, prosthetics, etc.), or more interested in just the amputation itself?

Mostly it's just the amputation, but of course that includes things like crutches and prosthetics, and the "amputee lifestyle" as far as it applies to living life as an amputee. Focusing solely on the amputation is a fetish fantasy...there's nothing wrong with that, but it's nothing to do with real life. I've slowly come to realize that an amputation affects everything in a person's life, and even for someone like me there are bound to be aspects of it that I won't like.

Is it the act or the end result that's more appealing to you?

A little of both. If there were a way to have my leg removed without going through the process of injury and treatment, I would certainly take advantage of it, but since that isn't possible I'm forced to deal with the process that leads to amputation. Over time I've developed a casual interest in medicine and surgery, and I enjoy learning about those subjects.

Do you find other amputees attractive?

Yes, definitely. I'm turned on by attractive women, just like any guy, but an attractive woman with an amputation is far more stimulating for me. Guys are a little different...a male amputee definitely catches my eye, and I usually wonder how his amputation would look on me (not much different than wondering what I'd look like if I were as ripped and buff as some of those dudes at the gym).

Have you found that there are people who find you more attractive because of your amputation?

I can't say that I have. I don't attribute this to my amputation, though, since a missing fingertip is really not very noticeable. Even people with whom I spend a lot of time usually don't notice unless I point it out to them.

"Cutter" on BME has described the sexual benefits of stimulation using the nail-less stump. Have you found this to be the case also?

Not as much as I used to. Familiarity breeds boredom, I suppose.

Elayne Angel

Since this interview was first published, Elayne Angel's New Orleans studio "Rings of Desire" has been permanently closed in the aftermath of hurricane Katrina, but when we first talked, her downstairs neighbors, Louie's Juke Joint, cringed at the thought of piercing. They did say though that Angel is the sweetest, most professional lady they've ever met, and that her studio is like an unusually clean doctor's office... with "black paint, neon, and scary nurses". Elayne Angel is one of America's very first piercers, and it cannot be denied that with her early role at Gauntlet she helped define what piercing is today. Many credit her with the popularization of tongue piercing, and of course her legally trademarked wings backpiece inspired many tattoo fans to get the same. We did this interview in 2000.

What made you change your identity from "Elaine" to "Angel"?

I haven't changed my identity. My legal name is now Elayne Angel and has been for years. When I got divorced from Mr. Binnie, rather than take back my old name, I thought as long as I was going through the trouble of a new license, credit cards, etc. I might as well have a name I liked. Most people in New Orleans had taken to calling me Angel. It is easy to remember when you see the wings.... So, I just went with Elayne Angel. I use the names interchangeably. "Miss Angel" - "Angel" - "Elayne" I use 'em all.

Actually, that's not quite what I meant — In the distant past, you must have at one point been "just Elayne". At some point you changed your name and had the wings tattooed. I'm asking more about the motivations and drives behind that transformation...?

I'm not sure I've exactly ever been "just Elayne" in a sense. I was an unusual kid — bookworm/oddball/nerd/freak/good-girl/sex-pot. I was very into fashion and was accustomed to receiving a fair amount of attention from dressing in unique styles of my own creation. Many of the folks I've run into as an adult who hadn't seen me since childhood say I haven't really changed, or that I seem the same somehow. (Which is kind of remarkable given the tremendous alterations to myself with many piercings, much tattoo work, and my copious curly hair shaved off.) I've had deep internal imperatives to adorn and alter my body. I don't know where they came from, but they've been there as long as I can remember.

It wasn't so much of a transformation as an evolution. It was very organic. I didn't have a goal to have a certain per cent of my body tattooed within a period of time, or any such thing. I've just been livin' and doin' what comes naturally. I had the angel wings tattoo, and no other tattoos for a long time. It was over 5 years before I had any other tattoo work done. People just started to call me Angel because it was easy to remember once they saw the wings. I didn't object, and ultimately embraced it.

I think, if anything, the transformation was more internal than external. There is a strange



kind of moral/ethical responsibility that comes with bearing angel wings. You can't feel good about wearing them, and also be a crumb. (At least I can't.) "Being an angel" is something to try to live up to, and I perceive that it has been a very positive guiding influence on me.

How do you feel about your photo being used for a major HMV advertising campaign?

That was a shock. I'm really upset because the woman who took the photo (years ago) begged me to allow her to shoot me and I said "no" many times because I'd already experienced people using my image without permission. She SWORE she would only use one image of me for an art show, IF I approved. So, she knew she did not have permission to use the image. It is all over NY subways, and I saw the HMV on 5th ave in NY. It gave me vertigo, looking up at a (pink!) 10 foot high photo of my back. Eeee! At least they could have used purple! I am talking to an attorney about it.

As a part of the original heart of Gauntlet, what motivated you to leave, and how do you feel about the demise of Gauntlet?

I feel very, very saddened by Gauntlet's demise. It is the end of an era. I was very happy to be there doing what I was doing. I would have stayed indefinitely. But, basically, there were upper management problems wherein I couldn't do my job properly and satisfy my customers. It was embarrassing to me. I couldn't get jewelry inventory in the shop in a reasonable period of time, and that sort of thing. I am still staying in touch with Jim Ward, and that feels good. I really love that man a lot.

What does having the first Gauntlet "Master Piercer" Certificate mean to you?

Well, the primary reason it is so meaningful is that Jim gave it to me after I had given notice that I was leaving Gauntlet. So, he didn't really need to do that for me. It made me feel he truly appreciated my contributions to the field. When I started at Gauntlet it was just one branch-Los Angeles, and that wasn't doing well and was actually about to close. Jim had already moved to SF but Gauntlet wasn't doing well enough to allow him to open a shop in SF. He said, "Well I have nothing to lose, so I'll give you a try." When I left there were 6 branches.

Why does urban legend place you as the person responsible for the popularity of the tongue piercing?

For the first decade or so Gauntlet was primarily doing male genital and nipple piercings on gay leather men. That was the population Jim came from, and those were the folks that were exploring the possibilities of their bodies back then. Gauntlet was founded in 1975. So, when I came along in the '80's and put a friendly, sunny female face on body piercing it brought several different population groups (and different focal points of the body for piercings) into the sphere of body art as consumers.

Jim had done very few tongue piercings before mine, and I believe he said he didn't know anyone who kept theirs in permanently/long term. I did a second one, and he had never heard of that. Two was more than twice the fun of one, so I ended up with the 5 I still wear. (I did 4 of them myself) They have been there for YEARS. Just got back from the dentist last week and he said, "You have very nice teeth." So far, so good! (I LOVE them!)

When we opened the SF branch Jim invited me up there. I was feeling very enthused about my tongue piercings and said to him, “I want to pierce San Francisco’s tongue!” or something of the sort. And, I pretty much did...or at least got a start on it. So, with my help, the tongue piercing went from being virtually unheard of, to one of the most popular placements on the body.

You guess that you’ve done 30,000 piercings? Are you tired of it yet? At what number will you quit?

Even more than that by now. No! I’m not tired of it! I adore my daily life and that my work day centers around piercing. I love to pierce, still. I keep learning, growing, and improving professionally. Human bodies and the people they house are infinitely unique and fascinating to me. I have declined a lot of business opportunities that might make me more money, but they wouldn’t make me happier because I’d be more of an administrator, and less of a piercer. I don’t want to open other shops, get involved in jewelry production, etc. because that would take me away from being with customers and what I like to do best: piercing.

I don’t have any number of piercings I ultimately plan to aim for at all. But I am a bit of a statistics freak, and I like to keep track of stuff like that for my own nerdlly edification. It isn’t a contest with anyone or any goal I have set for myself.

I have no idea when I’ll quit. I don’t really think about that. I am extremely content and feel like the most fortunate person I know. So many people are passionless. They don’t even have a hobby that excites and stimulates them. I get to live my bliss and do what thrills me daily! Lucky me!

As a pioneer in the field, what do you feel were your most valuable contributions?

I think one of the most important things I did was to just make it OKAY to get pierced and be pierced. Back then it was pretty much only fringe-type folks who were involved. There were certain types of freaks (I use the word fondly) and S/M folks. So, in 1981 when my dad found out that my nipples were pierced (via a tattletale former gynecologist of mine) he freaked! He was so disturbed that HE went to a therapist about it! Body piercing was not something people had heard about. Now it has been on every news channel, sitcom, on commercials, in print media advertising; it is ubiquitous. But piercing wasn’t an industry back then. It was one funny little shop and the general public didn’t even know it was possible to pierce a nipple or a penis.

Many people felt VERY uncomfortable with their desires to pierce their bodies in those days. They didn’t know it was okay. I believe that my supportive, joyous, positive attitude helped a lot of people to get through that and feel comfortable about their desires. They were then able to take that step and get pierced. Naturally, as the popularity and visibility grew, that ceased to be much of an issue.

You may consider it to be “urban legend” but I feel comfortable taking a lot of credit for the popularity of the tongue piercing. Since it is one of my personal favorites, and a delight to many who have them (and their partners) that makes me feel it is a valuable contribution.

Also, not just entirely in the piercing arena, but as a result of my own body art overall, and my visibility, I believe I have helped to make it easier for women to be heavily adorned and to be more accepted and to feel good about it.

Why are rings for above the neck piercings cheaper than rings for below the neck piercings?

The rings for above the neck start at 18 gauge which are \$15.00 and up. We don't use jewelry that thin for below the neck piercings, so 14 gauge jewelry starts at \$20.00 and up. It is just that the cost is based on the jewelry sizes.

Tell me about Chi-wa-wa Ga-ga? What made you open this shop? How has the reaction been?

I was pondering what to do with a small retail space in the back of the building where ROD is located. I had sub-let it to a few different folks and nothing had worked out. I thought I'd do something. This epiphany hit me and I knew just what to do. I partly did it because of Justine, my biz partner. She is the wife of my piercer, Pat. They are a great couple. It was kind of a perk for him to have her near here. They have a Chihuahua that is my dog, Angelo's little brother. Both Justine and I had bought little "leather" jackets for our dogs, and couldn't find enough sweaters to keep the lil' guys warm for the winter. Lots of people around here have small dogs. It all just fit.

It has been a hit! New Orleans is such a festive place. It is the perfect environment for putting your dog in an outfit or costume. For many folks their pets are like their children. We do lots of holiday business and get special inventory for each holiday event. We have a web site up and get great feedback and orders for merchandise. People are really into it! We have lots of regular local customers that come often for new outfits. There area also a great many tourists that pass through, and a number of them get excited about it when they have small pets.

I also get to use my early background in fashion design. I design dog clothes and costumes, too, which is a blast! We make little camo military outfits, faux fur coats, and so on. Angelo is definitely one of the best dressed dogs around.

Which of the two businesses do you enjoy more? Are they linked?

Now that Chi-wa-wa Ga-ga is up and running I'm more like a consultant. Justine eats, breathes and sleeps that place. It has really given her purpose in life. That is one of my greatest rewards in establishing CGG. I am far more involved in Rings of Desire, but the lil' doggie store is right down stairs.

Some people have complained recently about the presence of dogs in the piercing studio? Why do you allow this, and why is it not a problem?

It is not a problem because I DON'T allow it. I used to live in an apartment in the back of the shop. In fact, for the first 2 1/2 years in N. O. I lived there. That was my home (it was part of that dream I had about the building, too*). So that is where my pets were. I finally moved out but the cat stayed, and the dog came back and forth. Nobody ever said anything. The pets did NOT have free reign, and absolutely stayed out of the piercing areas. (It is a pretty sizable shop.) So, one day someone finally says something. The next day

the pets were out of the studio. That's that! Angelo still hangs out downstairs in Chi-wa-wa Ga-ga a lot. Sometimes he is in the office (my former apartment. That area is separated from the piercing studio by 3 different doors and is about 65 feet from the enclosed piercing rooms.) He no longer hangs out in the waiting room and hasn't for a LONG time!

You've pierced and lived all over the country — why did you decide to settle down in New Orleans?

New Orleans kind of picked me. It was my theoretical first choice before I even set out from Los Angeles, and I never really developed a second choice.

I wanted to live where I could be myself, and it wouldn't be a big deal to have a lot of body art, be a bald girl, or look different. I wanted to live where it doesn't snow; I loathe cold weather. And I wanted to be far away from any Gauntlet (out of respect for Jim) and to be where they needed piercing services—which was just about anywhere at that time. New Orleans fit.

I felt totally at home here, right from the start. Before I even moved here, when I was visiting, I was walking down the street and the carriage drivers started pointing me out and drawling, “Theeere's the tattood lady o' the French Quarters,” and I would smile and wave. People are very warm and friendly in the South. I didn't really have any close contacts in town and I had lived in Los Angeles my whole life. But I felt comfortable to move here. Friends that I know from other areas say they will come to visit, and they actually do! I love that.

I had a dream before I came to New Orleans of looking at and kind of touring a building. It was quite detailed, realistic, and memorable. Then when I got here and saw this building where Rings of Desire is, I realized it was the place I saw in the dream! I ended up getting to put the shop here and it was all pretty wild. My existence here has been VERY charmed. I feel like I have an angel watching out for me....

Is it difficult being a woman in what seems to be a largely male profession?

I sort of failed to notice. When I started, it wasn't a recognized “profession” per se. I was just so thrilled to be able to pierce. Basically, I just do what I do and didn't think about it on those terms. I'm a very determined individual when I set my mind to something. I feel that ultimately people respect and trust me based on my own merits and not on my gender or other extraneous factors.

What does this mean that you do? What is your role in the APP?

I am involved in several different aspects of outreach with the APP. This is the Job Description I wrote for the position — “APP Outreach Coordinator. Primary Functions: Liaison between APP and piercers, would-be piercers, medical, dental, and health care professionals and the public. Promote and foster image of professionalism in piercing within the piercing community and to the public at large. Respond to inquiries for information about the organization.”

“Duties: Generate and distribute educational, health, and safety information regarding piercing to the public, piercers, and health care professionals. Reply to calls, mail, email, from interested or affected parties. Send printed materials including membership applica-

tions. Educational public speaking at hospitals, schools, conferences, etc., to provide information and promote awareness of professionalism, safety and hygiene in body piercing. Contact piercers to provide information on the organization and encourage membership. Respond to inquiries from members and offer support for piercing education in their communities.”

In real terms it means a lot of talking, educating, and sharing information. I came up with a proposal for a set of APP approved after care instructions for piercing. I have been in touch with the American Association of Blood Banks, various Hospitals and medical and dental facilities. I speak with piercers and encourage their involvement and interest. I'm kind of the official-unofficial “staff writer” for the group. I do a lot of writing and plenty of email correspondence educating all kinds of folks from media to concerned parents to piercers and medical professionals.

There have been a lot of changes and growth within the organization and I feel really great about the direction things are taking. I would encourage piercers who care about what they are doing and want to do it as best they can and desire to have the most updated information to look into the organization. We are having a big conference in Las Vegas in April.

What do you see yourself doing in twenty years?

Wow, this one really tripped me out, because it made me think of how old I'd be in 20 years. Oh, scary. I just kind of hope our Mother Earth is still turnin' by then, and that there are still human beings around, and that we are able to live on her. I pretty much live in the present with an eye cast towards the future, but I surely don't dwell there.

I don't have any age set when I'd plan to retire. Honestly, I see myself working at least part time, doing piercing! I've done quite a few different things in my life, and this is surely my life's passion. Even though I enjoy traveling a lot, most of my travel has been on business, because I am not all that big on LEISURE, per se. I prefer to work. I'm not one to sit around and do nothing; I'm definitely a doer. I don't have a television. I love to go to the gym, and I actually read or crochet while I'm on the stair stepper! (No I'm not joking; I dig crocheting! I'm currently working on a nice big blanket.)

I'd like to stay active and have fantasized about doing some adventure travel like white water rafting and/or mountain climbing in the future.

I'm totally in love and having an extremely fulfilling, healthy, harmonious adult relationship like I've never experienced before. When I think about 20 years into the future, I mostly think about me and my bald little head (still with a bunch o' jewelry in it) and my girl, with her hair all gray... Living happily ever after.

Blair

When Blair and I did this interview in 1999, he was a 29-year old artist, piercer, scarifier, body modifier, and ex-school janitor best known for his expertise in strike branding. He worked and still works in nearly all forms of body modifications, from scarification to piercing to tattooing to implants to subincision, as well as enjoying rituals and performances such as suspension, sword swallowing, and beds of nails.

You were janitor?

I used to work for the Peel board of education. I basically did custodial work. I worked in schools from J. K. to 5, and 9 to 13 as well.

No one in the schools minded that you had your face tattooed or anything like that?

No, I think I'm a pretty nice person and pretty hard to hate.

Then how did you move to start doing piercing and branding professionally?

My friend went to get a tattoo, and I went along. It's a Harley Davidson tattoo actually—I got a Harley and it's a pretty amazing feeling. The fact you can travel anywhere you want to. It was my first vehicle, but I sold it to buy an autoclave. That's far more exciting anyway. If I hadn't got autoclave, I wouldn't be doing anything I'm doing now.



Anyway, I got my first tattoo, and I thought what an amazing art form—you create this permanent art on someone's body. I bought tattoo equipment from Spaulding, and starting doing tattoos on myself and on friends, but I couldn't really pick it up. It wasn't really what I wanted to do. Piercing was pretty new at the time; this was about 1990. I saw my first tongue piercing on a tattoo artist that I knew, and I saw my first septum piercing on a girl that worked reception at a tattoo studio. I soon as I knew you could get it, I was right there, I wanted my septum pierced. Then I started getting more piercings, and doing a lot of reading on anatomy, and looking through articles on piercing, and of course all the old PFIQ's and stuff like that. Then from there, piercing myself, and my brother, and close friends. I think I was just so picky and so into my work that I started to get a reputation. People knew who I was even though I was far from the city.

Were you working out of your house?

Yes, I was just working out of my house. I had a spare room that I converted into a studio—I had the autoclave, and a dentist's chair, lots of different photographs of traditional people from all over the world with different modifications. This was at my parent's place.

What did they think?

They were pretty excited. They were happy that I was sober and doing something that I re-

ally, really enjoyed.

It got to the point where I was loving it so much that I pretty much knew that that was what I was going to do for the rest of my life. From there I casually went from working for the Peel Board to piercing full time and then I never looked back. Not ever. I had a vision actually... there was a time in my life where I spent a lot of time wondering what I was looking for. And then I had this vision that said that if I followed body modification, and body piercing, that all other aspects of my life would eventually just fall into place. It gave me something to focus on and I spent pretty much all of my time and energy on doing body modifications, and everything did fall into place.

How did this happen? What do you mean by “vision”?

It's hard to explain visions — it's not quite like a dream, and it's not quite awake. It's just all of a sudden you have this realization. It's as if someone gets half of a book and throws it into your brain in one second — this vast amount of knowledge just pops in.

So more like a revelation than a “vision quest” type vision.

Yes — I consider them visions because they were something that happened outside of me. It wasn't like I just thought, “hmm... this would be a good idea”. I do a lot of meditation and a lot of prayer, and I call these visions.

How you got into piercing is easy to understand, because it was around at the time, but what about scarification?

I always put them together. When I got my first tattoo, I asked the tattoo artist, “so, how do you do scarification anyway?”, and he didn't know. I thought, he tattooed, shouldn't he know how to do scarification? I asked everybody and nobody even had a clue.

Did you think there were people doing it?

I just assumed there'd have to be! It's a body modification...

Had you seen it?

A little bit. Just in *National Geographics* and documentaries on tribal groups that had done scarification on themselves. I thought it was amazing.

When they didn't know you went ahead and started?

Yeah. I got my old tattoo guns and cranked them up and tattooed my leg like seven times to see if it would scar. It never really scarred that well, but now in retrospect I know I could do a really good job — you just have to chew the skin up, but I wasn't doing it well at the time. I'd actually watched someone brand before. It was a pretty neat experience, but I remember looking at the brand and thinking, damn, I could do a way better job than that. It looked somewhat inconsistent and the person was stoned at the time. The person that was branding was stoned and I was thinking, this is irresponsible. They're branding someone and they're wasted at the same time. It wasn't someone's garage, it was a well-respected shop.

I basically got some surgical stainless steel and designed a couple of bits that I thought would work. I designed them as traditional branding tools. I branded a couple of friends

of mine. Right away I thought this was so limiting — you do one strike and that's it. I decided that I wanted to do something a little bit different, not quite the traditional way. I always thought that if you really wanted to bad enough, you could do a portrait on someone's back using my style of branding. It would have to be all done in little pixels. You can do almost anything with branding, you just have to have the skill to do it.

I started trying different little techniques here and there, what worked and what didn't. Eventually I got to the point where I started branding using overlapping strikes. That way you can get a nice consistent line. What I was always told by other branders was once you do the strike, if it's not the way you wanted, you have to leave it anyway. You can come back to it later once it's healed. That didn't seem to make a lot of sense to me. Often with a brand that's a V shape, if the person's skin isn't perfectly flat, then one end of the V will get deeper than the other. Sometimes you just have to give it another little touch just to make it heal evenly. I just got a couple of different tools and started branding the way I do. It evolved that way from the traditional old school to my style, which I see a lot like painting.

I really do think it's a lot like painting. When I have my tools in my hand, and that person's skin, and a really nice stencil... that's the beginning. When you start heating up the metal, it's just so much fun... it's like a big paintbrush to me.

Do people normally come to you with a finished design? How much freedom do you usually have as an artist?

Often they come in with things that aren't really brandable. They're too small or too detailed — they would just become a big blob. So I rework them so they are brandable — I make them looser, and I make things more symmetrical. People come in with rough sketches and I make them as close to perfect as I can. I get quite a bit of freedom. I like to do larger pieces. Often I'll do things freehand. When we did Sarai's arm, it took me four hours to draw it on, and an hour and forty-five minutes to brand it. Drawing it on was so much fun... "Do you like this?" "No" "Then how about this" "Cool"... It was really exciting.

Is the technical aspect part of the thrill too — doing a perfect circle?

Yeah, when I actually do my branding I have a game plan, I try to pull it off the best that I can. I'll do this first, and this second, and this third, and this fourth. That's pretty how I see it.

Why do you have to do the strikes in a specific order?

You have to know the skin. When you put a hot piece of metal up to the skin, it shrivels which will distort the stencil. You have to know how to brand it so it distorts kind of in your favor, so that when you're finished it still looks really good.



Your canvas is constantly changing shape as you're painting.

Yeah, you have to really think ahead. You have to look at the whole thing and say how am I going to pull this off and still have it look good.

You learned that through experience?

For me it was just common sense... For sure...

Are there any disadvantages to the overlapping method?

No, not all. I think my work is very consistent.

So the don't overstrike rule that most branders have is pretty much myth?

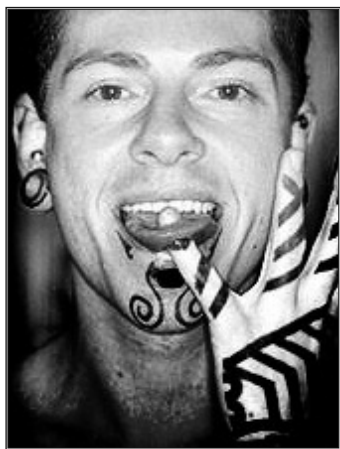
I just that because they figured it was a burn... "oh my god, you've struck it once just leave it alone". Really, if you think of it as a painting... The end result after I've finished branding it has to be as consistent as possible, so if I have to touch it a little bit in one spot I'm going to do it. It just makes sense. Often a person might flinch a little bit, so the brand doesn't end up being as consistent as all the other brands you've done, so you have to touch it up in spots.

And now that you've got people travelling distances to see you, you have to get it right the first session...

Yeah, I did both the full backpiece and the full sleeve in a day. I don't think I've actually ever had to touch up a brand. It's always been a one-shot deal.

Of all the different types of scarification, do you think that branding is the easiest to get really first-class results with? Is it easier than cutting?

I'd say they're both about the same. You could screw a cutting up by cutting too deep and you could screw a branding up by branding too deep. It's pretty important — you could



really damage someone if you didn't know what you're doing. And everyone's skin is so different. Just because you did one brand on one person, and the skin was so easy, doesn't mean the next guy is going to be so easy. Some people have very dense skin and lots of fat cells, and other people have skin that's very thin, and you can see everything underneath it. Some people's skin burns nicely, and other people's skin doesn't burn really. Some people skin cuts easily, and other's skin you have to work at it. I think branding and cutting are about the same in terms of skill level.

The one thing about a cutting though is you have to be much more meticulous when it comes to sterilization procedures because there's a lot of blood involved. You have to make sure you're not cross-contaminating anything. Ever.

You have to be really smart about it. Whereas a branding is completely cauterized. You basically just have to disinfect the skin. You can leave without a bandage because it's not open at all. But you've got to be smart.

You shouldn't just bend a piece of coat hanger wire. I've seen some good stuff done with

one, but just because one guy did a good job, doesn't mean it's going to look good next time.

How does someone go about learning to brand? Would you apprentice someone?

I thought about apprenticing somebody, but I'm a real ball-buster, and they'd have to have the same values as I have. They'd have to have to be as picky with sterilization and drawing the perfect stencil. Just because a stencil is perfect, doesn't mean it's going to look good on the body. You may have to redraw that circle on the shoulder by hand to make it look perfect.

I'd be kind of bummed knowing that I taught somebody how to brand and they weren't really as picky as I am. So I don't think it's going to happen any time soon. I've been looking for someone to train to pierce, and I haven't even been able to find someone that I'd like to train for that. It might happen...

You only have your left arm branded since you're right-handed. Do you think you'll ever find anyone else to do your right arm?

I'm not sure. I haven't seen anyone who's work I like — Even the stuff in magazines I haven't been too impressed with it. I'm not really sure... I'll probably just do it myself. At least I know how consistent my work is. It's probably just going to be a dot pattern because I can't get too complicated with my left hand!

It would be nice if there was someone close to me that I would trust to do that. It's nice to get other people to do work for you, like when people tattoo you. Most of my piercings are self done, but some I did get friends to do. I got a friend to do my industrial because it was really awkward. I did do my two conches myself, and I cut my labret open.

As an artist, how is the experience of doing a brand different than the experience of doing a piercing?

I think when I do a branding, it's much more exciting, it's more meaningful to me, because I think it's more meaningful to them. Not that a piercing can't be meaningful too... But I pierce for a living, so most of the people who come in have only thought about it for a week. But the people who I do branding on have thought about it for a good six month to years. I think probably because they didn't know there was someone out there doing it, but I think also it's more symbolic. They had to think about what they REALLY, REALLY wanted. Often people will come in to get tattooed and they'll say, "what can I get for \$60", or "I like that one there, but I can only afford this much". People don't do that when it comes to branding. They've thought about it for a long time and they know what they want.

Pain isn't really an issue for them. Branding clients don't worry if it's going to hurt. When I pierce navels I always here "is this going to hurt?" I don't think any of the people I've branded have even had it be an issue — they know themselves so well. "I'm going to get branded and I'm excited" — It's a meaningful day for them. They've thought about it.

To make a generalization, the person who comes for branding is more highly evolved in how they think about themselves?

At least with my clientele... On a general level, absolutely. People usually come in to me

with a really solid idea of what they want to get done. Often people come in for tattoos with the most diverse ideas “I want to get a sun, or maybe a lion, or maybe a dolphin.” Those are pretty different ideas. When it comes to branding or cutting, people know themselves well, and know exactly what they want. I haven’t worked on any crazy people so far.

When you first started you were doing mostly people that you knew — how has it changed now that you’re working on strangers?

When I first started piercing, I was mostly doing friends and friends of friends, and I had a really good circle of friends. So anyone I was working on was a really amazing person... same with the branding, just really incredible people. When I started piercing on a commercial level, that’s when I started getting a lot of crazy people. A lot of people who don’t really think about it much. In terms of branding though, it’s still a really good bunch of people even though I don’t know them as well. Absolutely great.

Do you think that working in the suburbs rather than in a downtown shop changes your clientele? You get almost exclusively people who are coming to you, rather than walk-in...

That’s true. I get the best of both worlds. People know who I am, and they’re willing to travel for that, so I get people from suburbia and people from the city.



What is subincision?

Subincision is where you make an incision down the lower half of the penis — basically you just cut open the urethra like a split hot dog. Most of my customers see pictures of it and they don’t really get it.

Why would somebody want to do that?

The inside of the urethra is really, really sensitive, so once you do a subincision, it’s expose. When you’re having intercourse, it feels a whole lot better. Traditionally it was done by Aborigines in Australia, so it’s not just something we invented in the last couple of years. It’s been around for a long long time.

On a general level, what’s the procedure like?

It was pretty complicated. There’s a lot of steps involved. It was very detailed. I had everything all planned out, so there wasn’t really too much room for error. It’s a good procedure I have.

And the results?

No closure or anything like that. We did it in three stages. I think next time I do a subincision on someone I’ll just do it in one shot. There’s less trauma if you just have to heal once. It looks really good, it’s nice and healed. I thought about doing it myself, but...

You’ve also done some beading on him and a number of other clients?

I think normal people — I guess I shouldn’t say “normal”, but people who are piercers or tattoo artists tend to be a bit freaky. We don’t have as many limitations, but people who

are just getting started have limitations and say, “well, that’s too far”. Most of my friends are pretty extreme — beading is not that big of a deal.

Most of the people who I’ve done pearling on haven’t been very verbal about it, but I don’t think they have any limitations. I think they wanted them and now I had a solid and safe procedure. If you’re going to get a piercing, beading’s not much different. That’s how they see, and it’s how I see it. I don’t see much difference other than it takes me a long time to mark it out to make sure it’ll turn out well and heal well, and not have much bleeding.

To the extent that you want to comment on the procedure, it’s pretty close to a piercing?

There’s not much difference really.

It’s safe to say that the only other artist doing the same range of modifications as you is Steve Haworth. However, he’s chose a different, more “technological” approach to tools, whereas you use much more traditionally-based tools. Why is this?

I got my tools due to availability. I have four different scalpel blade styles that I use. There’s one that I use for pearling, another for cutting with straight lines, and another for curved cuts — it’s just common sense. Often I have tools made for me, because there isn’t always a tool out there for what I need. For example, I have a special tool for doing the cut in the subincision procedure quickly and safely. Maybe if I had all that electro-stuff I’d use it, but I don’t feel at all disadvantaged. What I have right now works really well — But I did just order an electrocautery tool just to make sure what I’m using is the best tool for the job. If my tools were inconsistent, or caused a lot of trauma, I’d worry about it a bit more, but they don’t. You have to think that way, always looking for a way to improve. Even if it includes buying something that costs a lot more money. I can’t see too many advantages to the electrocautery tool — for one, it hurts a hell of a lot more.

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How do you see yourself? What is your role?

You know what, when I think of a career, I think I’m a piercer. That’s what I do most of the time. I pierce. I also see myself as an artist and because I like doing branding and scarification. Skin is such a great canvas. It’s an incredible art form.

As an artist it’s much more fulfilling than piercing...?

Absolutely. Not that piercing isn’t fulfilling, but when you do it continuously for so many years, it just becomes very normal, whereas I’m always excited to do a nice branding or cutting. Everyone has different anatomy so there are variances, but with piercing there are only so many options. With branding there are so many different designs... like a tattoo. It’s nice to have a creative job.

Do you ever wish you’d pushed yourself harder in the direction of being a tattoo artist, or is branding better?

I’m really glad I don’t tattoo. It’s so mainstream that it would be frustrating to do a lot of stuff that people ask for.

It’s not like people come in and ask to get a Taz branded on them!

No, but if they did, I'd be pretty stoked to do it, just for cheese value! I'd probably do it for free!

What does branding cost?

My minimum is \$110 dollars Canadian and it goes up for there depending on how much it is — maybe \$400 for a full back — I like doing bigger pieces, so they cost less per square inch. Overall, it's not very expensive. It sounds bad, but it also depends on how much I like the piece — If I look at a piece and say, that's fucking cool, I'll do it for less... With branding I'm not there for the money. If I could do it for free I would. Piercing as well would be a lot more exciting if it was free because people seem to appreciate things more when they're free! It's unfortunate that the way we live we couldn't do much without money. I couldn't buy all the tools that I have without money.

You make all your own branding tools?

Pretty much I make everything. I just buy surgical stainless steel and carve it any way I need it.



What should someone look for in a scarification artist? In their portfolio?

They should look for consistency of line. This is actually really important, because a lot of people don't realize that as long as the lines are consistent and it's well drawn, that's a good brand. People get keloid scars sometimes — it has a lot to do with genetics, and where on the body is getting branded, and I think that some people, especially people who are prone to hyper-keloid scarring sometimes even the best work can be somewhat inconsistent. For example, a forearm may be totally consistent, but the ditch where there's more movement may keloid even more. So sometimes even good branding can be inconsistent.

If the brands are consistent in thickness and depth, then that's a good brand. It's nice to get a nice raise out of a brand, but sometime no matter how good a job you do it isn't going to happen. It doesn't always have to do with the color of your skin either, because I've branded black people who didn't raise at all, and I've branded white folk who've keloided incredibly. There are a lot of genetics involved. It's a misconception that it's a lousy brand if it doesn't raise. Sometimes it just doesn't happen.

What about healed photos?

Absolutely. It's hard to tell how a branding worked out unless you see it healed. Even if it doesn't keloid scar you always get permanent discoloration. At first it'll be a red color, and then eventually it'll go to a pure white, so at least you'll always have your design.

How long does branding normally take to heal?

I would say on average about three weeks, and then it's completely closed over. This is just primary healing. It's a bright red scar, and eventually it will fade to pink. There's a period where you can hardly see your brand when it's in between pink and white. Then it goes to pure white, or if you're dark skinned it'll sometimes go even darker. But almost always there's a middle time where you can't see it much, but it does eventually get more visible. I think the quickest I've ever seen a brand turn completely white was three months, and

other times it can take two or three years.

How should people take care of brands?

I suggest a few things. There are different risk levels for taking care of a cutting or branding. I tell you what you could do, and you have to decide what level of risk you're willing to take. The safest way to take care of it is never to touch it unless your hands are washed, and to wash the branding with a mild soap twice a day, and cover it with clean clothing. Then you can go the next step which is to pick the scab, making sure not to contaminate it in any way.

What do you mean by risk?

Higher chances of infection.

The next level would be picking at the scab, and using something like Balsamic vinegar or sesame oil or Ivory Snow detergent — really scrubbing and irritating your brand. You're irritating it, and keeping it open as long as possible increasing the amount of scarring, but also increasing the chances of getting infected. You have to make the decision — how much risk are you willing to take for this?

When a person picks a brand, does this take quality control out of your hands and put it into theirs?

Well, I always have a consultation and I explain all the details. There are proper ways to pick at a scar to have it keloid evenly. You want to make sure you pick in the direction of the branding. You can't just take an SOS pad and scrub the same thing. It needs to be picked in the direction it was branded, kind of like a grain of wood. You go with the flow, and that way the scar will keloid as consistently as the brand was done. Often if you do two lines, and they're close together, if you pick at them any old ways the two lines might merge together, but if you pick at them in the same direction then the skin in the middle should stay the same so you have a nice consistent brand. That's really important. If you don't take care of your branding, it's not going to heal up that great.



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You've done surface piercing using both nylon bars and the surface bars... What made you decide to switch to the surface bars?

They just make more sense. Common sense. Any time you use a straight bar, even flexible nylon, there's still a lot of surface tension on the skin so eventually, it will grow out. When you use a surface bar you decrease the surface tension, so it has a really good chance of staying — but not always.

What would you say the success rate is?

I don't know. I have my own ideas about them. I think they're somewhat risky. Surface

bars, if they're done really long, often just the normal lymph that the body wants to clean the piercing out with will build up in the middle of it, and people start to get cysts. When I think of a surface bar I think of a high maintenance piercing.

So they're not the simple solution some people have presented them as?

No, no, no. It's not like you can stick them any place and they're going to heal perfectly like a nostril. There's still a level of risk involved. I don't like to do surface bars unless the person has been pierced a good number of times. You have to be serious and know how to take care of a piercing well. It only makes sense because there's a little more risk involved. It's hard to say how many have stayed because often you do them and you never see the people again.

If I had to guess I'd say it's around 80% if people are taking perfect care of them, but over all, I'd say it's closer to 50%.

Yes, I'd say 50/50. It depends a lot on your body. There are so many variables. It's not as simple as we'd like to think. When it comes to a nostril it's going to stay, but when it comes to a surface bar I think some people have really high chances of having keloid scars or migration. They will migrate out sometimes. It also depends on how much irritation they get. Are they on your arms where your coat is irritating them? That's going to irritate all the new cells trying to heal, and the body might just push it out.

Some people's bodies have problems with certain materials — even if you put in the best surgical steel, it has some nickel in it. Some people are allergic, and others have just a minor problem with it, so things heal a little slower. It varies so much. It's not as easy as a normal piercing. It's really for someone who knows a lot about piercing. It's not the great wonder thing that everyone thinks it is.

What about the scalpel piercings?

I don't see the need for that. If you're concerned about tension, you might as well just use a slightly larger needle and you'll have less trauma. Scalpels do make nice clean incisions, but they are pretty huge. I don't agree with that at all — I do use scalpels for pearling though, because I know that when I use a two gauge taper through the skin of a guy's penis, if I was to make an 8ga hole and then stretch it up, that skin's going to tear. So I might as well make a 4ga incision with the scalpel, creating less damage and pain overall. You can really feel an 8ga bevel. When you do pearlings, to make an incision at an 8ga hurts the same or more as a scalpel at a larger size. However, in some parts of the States you can't legally use scalpels. I guess they figure it's crossing the line. But what's the difference — you're making an incision using a tool.

So the only "piercing" that you really use a scalpel for is the larger labrets?

I did own first. When I first got mine, it was at 14ga about six years ago. I stretched it up to 2ga over a year. I wanted to stretch it larger, but I didn't want to distort the tattoo any more than I had, so the only way I could stretch it was downward. I had to make an incision downwards to displace the skin in that direction. It worked fine.

I did a few other people, but with them it was different. If you look at the muscles, they run horizontally. When I made my incision downwards, I was at a little bit of risk because

there was a chance of severing muscle. I don't think I would be too anxious to do this on someone else, but on myself I was willing to take the risk. To do it this horizontally it's safer, but there are still nerves to sever.

How were these procedures bloody-wise, and healing-wise?

Fine. Not that bad. What I usually do is I look at the lip and see how many veins are going on and all that. It depends a lot on the person's anatomy. It's the same thing as someone with a surface bar — it's someone who's got to taken care of piercings a lot before and they've got to be willing to take some level of risk. Even if I really thoroughly check their lip for arteries and nerves, who's to say there isn't one hidden. If the person doesn't understand the risk, or isn't willing to take it, I'm not willing to work on them.

But you inform them thoroughly?

Yeah, absolutely. I think it would be irresponsible to do something like that on a person and not tell them everything.

How long did those take to heal?

About the same as a regular labret. At most maybe two weeks longer. Six weeks or so. They heal well though. If a person is thinking of this sort of thing, and they want to be safe, they're better off just getting a regular labret and stretching. That's the realistically safe way. But if you're a little bit of a risk-taker and know you want it bad enough, maybe it's something for you. I think lately I'm a little bit more cautious in a lot of ways.

Why is that?

I'm smarter now. It's good to be cautious. It's better to turn people away than take a chance.

Is that a risk some piercers take when they're caught up in the thrill of doing new procedures?

I would say so for sure. You have to really think about what you're doing, and the risk level. You have to look at what do you want to do, what's the risk level, and what's a solid procedure for doing it. If the risk level is too high it's crazy, irresponsible to do it. I had a guy that wanted me to put piercings through his wrists. Even though technically it might be possible, the chances of it healing were close to none, and the chances for fucking something up are pretty high. I think if you want to be some glamor-cool piercer, go for it, you'll be famous, but if you fuck that guy up you're an idiot, and you'll be famous for being such an idiot!

For someone doing wild procedures, you've gotten virtually no press.

Yeah, that's ok! I think I screen people pretty thoroughly on who I'm going to do work on. Most of the people I do extreme stuff are heavily involved in the scene. I won't work on anyone I don't feel comfortable with. There was someone that came to me once and wanted a branding — they said "I want it to be a perfect circle. Perfect!". I told them that every circle I'd done was close to perfect, but I couldn't guarantee anything. He also wanted me to guarantee the thickness of the line. Realistically it just might not happen like that. If you want something perfect you should get a tattoo. So I had no problems turning this person down because they were looking for something that might not be possible and they weren't

willing to have any leeway. It's like if someone wants a belly-button piercing and says I want it perfect, and I want it healed in six weeks. You can say if you take care of it 100% and keep it clean, it might, but I can't guarantee it. If you're not willing to take that little bit of a risk you shouldn't get your belly-button done.



Earlier you said that you spent time meditating and praying. What did you mean by that? Where are you spiritually?

I have to say that you have to respect everybody's form of spirituality. I feel that we are all a part of God, or the Great Spirit. We're all connected — everything's connected. From the chair I'm sitting in to the TV, everything is all connected. The way I see things you just have to respect everything around you and respect the environment around and everyone's differences and spiritual beliefs. There are so many contradictory beliefs. Even I contradict myself, because one day I feel different than the other day. And there's nothing wrong with that — you have to be able to live in the middle ground and appreciate that. I don't really have a label for my spirituality — you just have to have respect for everybody's beliefs and ideas as long as they're not harming anybody or the environment. I'm not too keen on fundamentalists. It's dangerous to get carried away. I have pretty strong beliefs — my whole way of living is low-impact. I have a red-worm composter at my house, and I like to recycle what I can. I buy organic produce to support the little guy. If I was to buy two different products, and they were about the same price, I'd buy from the small business. It just makes more sense. I live that way. There are people who buy whatever they want, and don't recycle, but I still have respect for them. I'm not going to fight over anything — I'm a pretty passive guy I think.

Outside of the body modification scene, what do you spend your time doing?

Lately, art-work. Photography, trumpet lessons. I was taking dance for a while, Shiatsu, drama class. I just want to learn so much. I haven't learned anything. I think it's good to have a really amazing hobby like piercing or branding, but when it becomes a job and you're doing it so much, you need another fun hobby.

It sounds like the primary motivation is learning, and the fun of learning.

Yes, absolutely. I think if piercing ever gets to the point where it's not fun anymore I won't go to work. I haven't got time for things that bug me that much. I did it for so long when I worked for the Peel Board of Education — I suffered for eleven years in a job I hated. I'll never do it again. Nothing is ever a waste, but now that I look back on it I wish I'd done things differently. I'm learning to live a little more, and appreciate little things more.

Derek Lowe

When we did this interview, Derek Lowe was well known as a prolific poster in Usenet's rec.arts.bodyart. Derek was the piercer at Cleveland's Body Work Productions, and later became involved in the APP as well as joining BME's "Question of the Day" staff.

My interest in piercing began fairly late in life compared to many people. I didn't get my first piercing until I was going to college in Milwaukee, WI. My first piercing was a nipple piercing and from that point on, I was hooked. I began finding out as much information about piercing as I could.

At that time there was not nearly as much information available on the Internet as there is now, but I absorbed everything I could find. As with many piercers I read all the issues of PFIQ I could get my hands on along with various books (RE:search Modern Primitives being an obvious one) and other materials. At that point, my interest in piercing was simply as an enthusiast. I hadn't given any real thought to doing piercings.



After my first piercing, I accumulated a lot of piercings in a short period of time. Within 9 months of my first piercing, I obtained 7 other piercings. I very quickly recognized piercing as a cathartic experience and a wonderful physical release for emotional and personal stress.

As I received more piercings, my interest grew. I began spending more time at the studio where I was being pierced (Tie Me Down, in Milwaukee, WI), watching anyone's piercing who would let me. I started helping out around the shop with menial tasks. Eventually, I was offered an apprenticeship.

My apprenticeship, while definitely a learning experience, was not what I would consider an ideal apprenticeship. Because of my research up to this point, I came into the apprenticeship with a very good understand of the "theory", but without a lot of hands-on experience. I will forever be grateful to Melissa Strobbe (owner of Tie Me Down) and David O'Connor (the person I did most of my training with) for the opportunity they gave me, but when I look back on my apprenticeship, I still feel as though I learned a great deal from trial and error. To me, that's not the way an apprenticeship should go.

After piercing for about 6 months at Tie Me Down, I graduated college and was a bit unsure what to do with my life. I decided to move to Madison, WI, where my girlfriend at the time lived. I fully intended to find a job utilizing my degree. As chance would have it, I ended up with a part-time piercing position at Steve's Tattoo and Body Piercing in Madison. This eventually led to a full-time position.

This was the period in my career when I feel I grew and learned the most about piercing. As the full-time piercer, I was able to run the piercing portion of the business as I saw fit. I had the freedom to try different things (in terms of technique, jewelry, sterilization etc.) and discover what worked well and what did not work well. I was able to apply the research

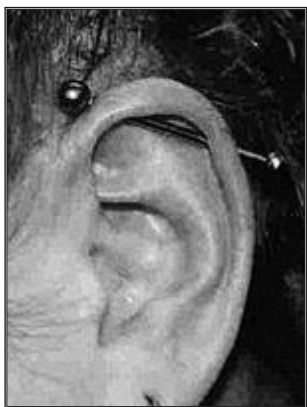
I had done and began networking with other piercing professionals to improve myself and raise my standards. It was at this point in my career that I became involved with the Association of Professional Piercers and really began to expand my knowledge base.

After being at Steve's Tattoo and Body Piercing for nearly 3 years, I made the decision to move to Cleveland and work at Body Work Productions, Inc. . I had been guest-piercing occasionally at BWP for several years. I have now been at BWP for over a year and feel as though I am the happiest I have been at any point in my piercing career.



You say that you love doing intricate ear piercings — almost every piercer seems to cite these as their favorites — why is that?

I think there are a number of reasons that I (and other piercers) find these types of piercing so fun and appealing. First of all, intricate ear piercings, especially industrials and orbitals, provide a definite challenge to the piercer. Anytime you are putting one piece of jewelry through multiple piercings, it becomes critical that the piercings are placed perfectly. If the piercings are not dead-on, the pressure put on the piercings makes them very difficult, if not impossible, to heal. Because of the multiple folds and curves present on ears, you end up having to deal with a number of different angles and placement considerations. While accurate placement is important with every piercing, the unforgiving nature of cartilage tissue makes placement even more critical with intricate ear piercings.



Along the same lines, the space you have to work with doing these types of piercings is often very limited and cramped. In addition, the folds on each person's ears are different sizes, shapes and sit at different angles. This means that your technique for doing an industrial piercing on one person may not work well when doing an industrial on someone else.

Second of all, for myself anyway, I think intricate ear piercings are some of the most beautiful piercings there are. I think a daith piercing which lays inside an ear perfectly is incredibly striking. To me, one of the things that contributes to the aesthetics of ear piercings is that fact that ears are often taken for granted. Most people don't think of ear piercings as a "big deal", but when someone sees a daith piercing or an industrial, it often catches them by surprise and forces them to re-evaluate their idea of an "ear piercing".

A third factor which makes these so appealing, is that many customers leave exact placement to the piercer's discretion. This allows the piercer to express their "creativity" to some extent and place the piercing so that it flows well with the rest of the ear and any other piercings the person might have. As an example, if someone comes in for an eyebrow or nostril piercing, they usually have some idea of where they want the piercing to go. When it comes to intricate ear piercings, people are often much more open to ideas and suggestions. One of my favorite things is when a person comes and says, "I know I want some sort of strange ear piercing, but I'm not sure what. Do you have any ideas?" This gives me

the opportunity to create something from the ground up.

I personally have gotten into doing a lot of less traditional industrials. By this I mean two piercings with a barbell through them, but the barbell may not necessarily be straight. The jewelry might have a severe angle in it or be curved to fit the piercing through two different parts of the ear that you couldn't do with a straight barbell.

I think that some of the most wonderful ear work I've ever seen has been done by my Mike Leatherman who is at Skin of a Different Color in Aurora, IL. The stuff that he does really give you the sense of the "art" that body piercing can be.

You also say that you enjoy doing piercings in a ritual setting? Why is that (and what exactly is that)? What are some of the reasons people might do that?

I think that my choice of the word "ritual" may be a bit misleading for many people. I think the word "ritual" often evokes images of drum circles, fires, chanting and other dogmatic icons. While these things can definitely be wonderful and can be incorporated into a piercing, I don't see them as a necessity for a piercing to have a "ritual" sense to it.

When I first started getting pierced, it became a very therapeutic experience. I didn't do it because of extreme emotional distress, teen angst or anything of that nature. But, I found that it did put me in a space mentally and emotionally that was much more soothing and comforting. If I can facilitate such an experience for someone else, I feel as though I am really giving back much of what piercing was, and is, for me. Piercing allowed me to focus on negative things in my life, rid myself of them, and at the same time, embrace the positive things I had going on in my life.

Not everyone is aware, or open, to these aspects of piercings. That isn't necessarily a bad thing. I don't think there are really too many "bad" reasons to get a piercing. Whatever reason(s) someone attaches to their piercing, whether it be purely aesthetics, marking a certain time in their life, reclaiming their body or for sexual enhancement, is totally valid and wonderful. I have known piercers that try to turn every piercing into a deeply spiritual and powerful experience. While that is a wonderful thing for some people, many people simply aren't open to that sort of thing. When you try to force it, you create a situation which is uncomfortable for the client and which may actually result in a bad piercing experience for them.

When piercing in a ritual setting, how do you integrate the medical/safety aspects without disrupting the spiritual nature?

As I stated previously, for piercing to be done in a ritual setting it doesn't have to be in the midst of dirt pit with a blazing fire. When it comes to doing piercings in a ritual setting, I think environment is often the key. There are many different things you can do within a piercing room to change or "warm" the environment and still not compromise the health and safety areas. Lighting, music and scent are three things which are usually quite easy to adjust/accommodate without creating any safety hazards. Each of our piercing rooms is equipped with it's own CD player so clients always have the option of bringing their own music when they are getting pierced.

If I'm going to do something in a ritual setting I always meet with the person/people in-

volved beforehand to discuss what it is they are looking for out of the experience. This allows me to figure out how to incorporate myself into what they are looking for. For some piercings this will mean being directly involved in the ritual while for others it may mean being as unobtrusive as possible. It also allows me to plan out any extra precautions I might need to take and to let them know what I consider to be okay in terms of health and safety issues.

I also prefer to do ritual-type piercings after hours so that those involved have absolutely as much time as they need to prepare for the piercing as well as take as much time as they need after the piercing. Also, when using incense, sage or other scents, they can be disturbing to some people. Doing it after the shop is closed prevents what is going on with the ritual from interfering with “regular” clients and vice versa.

Why is piercing important to humans? Why bother?

I think that it is a part of human nature to want to set yourself apart from others in some fashion. In ancient cultures piercings often had a specific meaning or a cultural/societal significance. They served to set certain members of a culture apart from others. I don't think that piercing in today's context has the cultural significance it once did, but it still serves to set people apart to some degree.

Tell me about the Health Educators seminar? What does someone get from attending it?

Health Educators, Inc. is a company started by David Vidra, owner of Body Work Productions, to address the very obvious lack of educational resources available to the modification industry. In addition, we provide education to professionals such as health inspectors/sanitarians, nurses, EMT's etc. As piercing becomes more prevalent in our society, the need for educating individuals inside, as well as outside, the modification industry becomes very important. Many states are passing legislation and regulations related to piercing and tattooing. However, the people who end up doing the inspections typically have no training, and at best, only a vague understanding of what they need to be looking for when doing an inspection. Health Educators is trying to provide a resource for training and information for people directly within the industry but also for those that are on the periphery.

Health Educators actually offers multiple courses covering various areas: OSHA Blood-borne Pathogens, Cross-Contamination Awareness, Sterilization Practices, Post Piercing and Tattooing Aftercare, Anatomy courses specific to piercing and tattooing as well as an Apprentice Primer Seminar. I'm presuming your question is focused on the Apprentice Primer Seminar.

The seminar itself is taught by Sky Renfro, of Professional Piercing Information Systems, Inc.. Sky is a former instructor for Gauntlet's Piercer Training Seminar. While there are a few other piercing seminars available, I think the course Health Educators offers through Sky is quite unique. Most other piercing seminars will tell you that their seminar is not intended to make you a piercer, yet their course will cover anywhere from 8 -20 different piercings and have you performing those in a few short days after you start the course. The Apprentice Primer seminar focuses primarily on current information relevant to becoming

ing a professional piercers and prepares you to begin an apprenticeship. The focus is on providing students with appropriate information and not on getting them to do as many piercings as possible in a short period of time.

In addition, people who attend the seminar get their training in OSHA Bloodborne Pathogens as well as CPR. These are typically issues that, at best, are touched upon only lightly by other seminars. I think that any education someone gets is good, but having had the chance to review most of the courses out there, I think this particular course provides the most solid base of information currently available.

Why do you stay so active on rec.arts.bodyart, and maintain a strong online presence?

When I first started researching information about piercing, rec.arts.bodyart was one of the first things that I came across. At the time, there were not nearly as many professional frequenting the newsgroup as there are now. However, it did provide a good source of information, even if not all the information was totally accurate. As piercing grows in popularity, and the general public begins to recognize the need to have their piercings done in an appropriate manner, more people are doing research before getting a piercing. The Internet provides an easily accessible, inexpensive avenue for the exchange of information. By being on-line, it allows me to help others gather information about piercings they are considering. Furthermore, it provides my clients with another way to get in touch with me and ask questions that they may not be comfortable asking over the phone or that they may not think of at a time when the shop is open. In addition, it allows me to stay in touch with other professionals and exchange ideas.



I have been accused by a number of people of being obsessed with piercing. I don't necessarily disagree with those statements. Being on-line is another avenue for me to be involved with piercing. In addition, rec.arts.bodyart specifically, has resulted in the creation of some very good friendships. While I may first starting talking with someone because of a mutual interest in piercing, it often goes beyond that. I have attended several RAB "munches" which are a gathering of people who read and/or post to the newsgroup. Many of the people I've met through these gatherings are very interesting and fun people to spend time with.

What made you decide to leave Madison, and move to Cleveland?

There were three main reason I chose to move to Cleveland. The first reason was the opportunity to work at Body Work Productions. I'd been doing guest-piercing spots at the studio for a few years. The first time I came to BWP, I was blown away. BWP was (and still is) a shop doing exclusively piercing and a shop putting customers' health and safety, as well as ethics and professionalism, above everything else, including the profit margin. I knew instantly that I wanted to be working in a shop like this at some point in the future. I actually turned down the job offer a few times at different points when I had things going

on in my life that made me feel as though it wasn't the right time to leave Madison.

Another reason I decided to take the position at BWP was a feeling of stagnation where I was. After being at Steve's Tattoo and Body Piecing for nearly 3 years, I had made all the improvements that I could make to the operations of the piercing part of the business. Due to either physical constraints of the facilities or an unwillingness of the owner to make further improvements, I had done all I could. In addition, being the only piercer at the studio (besides my apprentice), I had no one to learn from further or to discuss different ideas with. I knew that at BWP I would have the opportunity to learn from other piercers on staff as well as the frequent guest piercers that came to the studio.

Lastly, David and I had frequently discussed his plans to move more into piercing-related education. He had recently formed Health Educators, Inc., a company designed to provide the modification community, as well as health sanitarians and other related professions,

with health and safety information relevant to our industries. While I love performing piercings, I also enjoy providing others with the information they need to improve the safety and quality of their work. The opportunity to be involved in Health Educators was very appealing.

I consider myself very fortunate to have gotten the chance to work at BWP, as the each time the job was offered to me and I decided not to take it, other piercers were supposed to fill the position. When the offer came around the third time, things in my life had changed a bit and I knew that I would be an idiot if I didn't accept the offer. I spent about a

month trying to find reasons not to move, but I was completely unsuccessful at that. So, I accepted the job and I haven't had a single regret about it at this point.

I know that you like surface bars, but as I understand it, David Vidra, and Body Work Productions, does not feel that surface piercing is appropriate? What is your feeling on this, and does it ever lead to conflict? What do you tell clients looking for surface piercings?

This brings up one of the many misconceptions about David and Body Work Productions. While we may be a bit more "conservative" than other shops, this doesn't necessarily mean that we are against things such as surface piercing or the use of dermal punches. However, David and myself both feel that surface piercings and the use of dermal punches should be done with discretion.

When it comes to surface piercings, the reality is that they often do not heal, even when using surface bars. When surface piercings reject, they tend to leave very noticeable scarring and tissue discoloration. While many customers may not think this is a big deal at the time of the piercing, a year later when they are permanently scarred, they may very well decide they want to hold someone accountable.

I think many times piercer's will perform surface piercings without fully informing their



clients of the potential hazards and ramifications. This does a disservice to the client and also leaves the piercer open for legal problems. As much as many piercers like to think that their release/consent form provides them with protection from a lawsuit, this simply isn't the truth. Any client can sue you at any point. If they are able to show negligence on the part of the piercer, in either the act of performing the piercing or that the piercer did not supply them with adequate information, a piercer may very well lose such a lawsuit.

We will do surface piercings at Body Work Productions. In most cases, we will insist on the use of a surface bar for the piercing, as they have been shown to produce the best results. However, before performing any type of surface piercing, we require a consultation with the client to examine the anatomy as well as discuss all of the possible complication that can arise during the healing process. We then typically require at least a one-week waiting period before we will perform the piercing. This gives the client time to thoroughly weigh the pros and cons of the piercing and decide if it is something that is truly right for them.

David and I are currently working with the company who provides our professional liability insurance in piloting a program for insuring surface piercings. Even at this, there are some surface piercings which we will not perform, as they exceed what we consider to be our comfort level in terms of safety.

What should people, especially younger people, think about before they get a piercing?

Obviously, the health and safety aspects are very important and are often overlooked by people when it comes to getting pierced. This definitely seems to be more of an issue with younger people. Youthful exuberance and the desire to get pierced often overshadow doing any type of research or rational thought. There is rarely a day that goes by when I don't have at least one customer who says something along the lines of, "I know I shouldn't have gotten pierced there. The place didn't look very clean." But, human desire is often stronger than logic and rationale. The reality of it is that it doesn't matter how nice your piercing looks or how much like it if you get a case of Hepatitis to go along with it.

The fact that piercing is a permanent change to the body is another aspect which is often overlooked. While the jewelry may not be permanent, the actual piercing itself does result in permanent changes. I would say most people do not take into consideration that permanent scarring, while perhaps not excessively noticeable, usually occurs. Also, people often neglect to consider that infections can occur and that some piercings just don't work out for everyone. They presume because they know other people who have a certain piercing, and those people's piercings healed fine, that their piercing will also heal without a problem. With appropriate care of the piercing, this is usually the case. However, there are no guarantees that every piercing will be problem-free.

I think that oral piercings, especially tongue piercings, is an area that people often don't understand the potential for permanent damage. While I think BME is a great source of information for people, there was a piece several months ago entitled "The Right Way To Pierce". While I think this piece made some good points in saying that there isn't one "right" way to do a piercing, the section entitled "Any Tongue Can Be Pierced" was a bit misleading. While it's true that any tongue CAN be pierced, whether or not it is a good idea to pierce it is another issue entirely.

When the anatomy of the tongue, as well as the rest of the mouth, is not taken into consideration when determining the placement of a tongue piercing, the potential for damage to teeth and gums becomes very real. I personally don't feel that placing tongue piercings at a front-to-back angle (further back on top than on the bottom) is a very good idea. When tongue piercings are placed in this manner, the jewelry ends up resting at a severe angle when the tongue is in the mouth. This angle can put pressure on the piercing causing tearing. It can also put the bottom ball of the jewelry very close to, or against, the gums and teeth. The friction that results can often cause bone erosion and/or gum loss. It has only been in the last few years, as tongue piercing has become more popular, that we are beginning to see the potential damage that can occur. Some people still choose to ignore this and they pierce every tongue that walks into their studio. I think this is incredibly poor ethics and professionalism.

One thing I often tell my clients to get them to understand why their anatomy isn't appropriate, and say, they have a friend with the same piercing, is this: "When they were putting the human body together, body piercing was not on the top of the check list. Some people have anatomy that makes it safe to do a certain piercing, some people don't." A piercing is a foreign object in the body. When you start to work too far outside of the parameters of the anatomy, that is when you start to encounter problems and permanent damage.

How would you like to see piercings presented in the media?

I think the obvious answer to this is having piercings, and pierced people, portrayed in a positive fashion. I don't know that we will ever reach this level, but it is something to hope for and something to try and promote. I know many pierced people are easily frustrated by the news media's portrayal of our community. Unfortunately, a "shocking" portrayal is what gets viewer ratings and viewer ratings translate into money. It's also important to realize that the media is unable to sensationalize things if you don't give them anything to work with. I've been told upon several occasions that my interviews were not used, or were used very little because I just didn't have the "flare" they were looking for or I was kind of "boring." If you present yourself in an intelligent, informed and articulate manner, the media won't be able to portray you any other way. Over the years I've come to not expect responsible, accurate representation of the pierced community by the media. If you approach it with that outlook, you are likely not going to be disappointed and when you encounter a media person who does a good job of representing pierced people, you will be pleasantly surprised.

What are some of the myths that non-pierced people need dispelled about piercings?

I think one of the biggest myths is that pierced people represent a very specific, very limited cross-section of our society. Anyone who is involved in the modification community knows that the clients come from all professions, religions, backgrounds and that they completely cover the age spectrum. If non-pierced people had any idea how many people they come across in their daily lives who are pierced, they would probably be quite surprised.

Another thing which I think should be addressed, although it may not be a myth per se, is that people who are pierced don't mind being poked, prodded, touched or otherwise

fondled , simply because they are pierced. I'm always more than glad to let someone who has genuine curiosity about my piercings take a look at them (the visible ones anyway). However, the moment they try to touch my piercings, I become a little less friendly and open. Most non-pierced people would be highly offended and uncomfortable if someone came up to them and started touching their ears or reaching for their face. However, they often don't think twice about doing the same thing to pierced people.

There is, of course, the common misconception that pierced people are usually unintelligent, criminals, "rebels" or fall into some other category of "undesirable" types. While this is an incredible generalization and something that is very far from the truth, I think pierced people need to realize that they have an element of responsibility in changing this perception. I'm just as sick of answering the "Does it hurt?" question as every other pierced person is. However, if someone approaches me with genuine interest and wants to ask me questions, I try to answer them in a polite, informative manner. While pierced people may not get visible piercings for the purpose of attracting attention, we must also realize that it does exactly that. And as such, we have to be prepared to deal with people asking questions, staring or otherwise being somewhat invasive. If you react in a hostile manner to those that approach you, the only thing that is accomplished is the proliferation of many of the stereotypes that already exist.

Do you think piercing will become extremely mainstream (like haircuts)?

I'm not sure we will ever see piercing being as commonplace as haircuts. However, I think it is readily evident that piercing is more than a mere fad. It is something that humans have been doing for thousands of years. The need/desire for adornment has been reawakened in our society. While the motivation within current society may be different from that of primitive cultures, the desire is still there.

I think piercing has established itself as something that is here to stay. Piercing, even though it has only been around in a "popular" sense for a short period of time,

has had impacted our society on sociological, economical and political levels. On a sociological level, the interaction of pierced people and non-pierced people represents a new dynamic. Piercing often results in interaction between people, in different parts of society, that might not otherwise occur. When non-pierced people start asking questions about modifications, it opens lines of communication that would likely never be explored otherwise. We are also beginning to see places where modified people can be employed and piercing is accepted, or at least tolerated. There are some stores/companies, such as Hot Topic and The Hard Rock Café, where piercing and other modifications are actually preferred.



I think the economical impact of piercing is fairly obvious, but not one many people rarely consider. Aside from the obvious creation of an entire new job market just for piercers themselves, the increase in the consumption of goods and services related to piercing is something you also have to consider. Look at the number of people who are involved in the manufacturing of body jewelry. I would be very interested to see numbers on the increase, over the last 5 years, in the amount of implant-grade stainless steel produced and purchased. While stainless steel is used in many different areas, that particular grade of steel has limited applications. Many jewelry companies sell their captive bead rings with hematite balls. There is another area where the demand for a material has increased and had an economical impact. The medical supply industry has also certainly had to have seen an

increase in its goods sold.. As more modification artists become aware of the appropriate steps needed to monitor the sterilization process, laboratories that offer spore testing are seeing an increase in their business. The use of Statim autoclaves, while still somewhat controversial in the modification community, is increases. Our community represents another potential market for a product that I'm sure the designers never considered.

The increase in the popularity of body piercing and tattooing is beginning to impact the political structure of our society as well. As the awareness of the potential public health risks involved in modification

increases, the need for legislation and regulations becomes more apparent. While most professionals I know would like to see responsible regulations and legislation, many often don't realize that there is a great deal of politics that go into accomplishing this. In any regulatory process I've been involved in (mainly in Wisconsin), you have to be able to play the political game to some extent. You have to be willing to make some sacrifices in order to get regulations into place. Once they are in place, then you have to go through the political process to get them amended for improvements. Legislation and regulations may sometimes be introduced by a political figure (as opposed to a push by professionals), but I'm a firm believer that the involvement of well-informed, responsible piercers is the only way to ensure that well-written regulations are enacted.

Do you think piercing will eventually fade away?

I do feel that we will see a slight tapering off in the number of people getting pierced. I think the primary impact this will have is on the "hacks" and those that are doing piercing simply to make a quick buck. As the quick money starts to dwindle, those that don't have a true love for the art form will slip away. This will leave only those truly dedicated to the art of piercing. With the money-hungry piercers gone from the scene, it will leave enough business to sustain those that are left. Of course, I could be completely wrong and it could simply be wishful thinking since my livelihood depends upon people continuing to get pierced.

...or do you think piercing might stabilize as a significant yet subcultural activity?



I would like to see piercing become a little less of a subculture. I believe we will see more professional industries open up to the idea of visibly pierced employees. At some point, hopefully people will realize that someone's appearance does not impact their ability to do their job appropriately. I'm sure that some of the traditionally staunchly conservative professions will always maintain a hard line where piercing is concerned. However, I believe some areas of professional society will become more accepting.

What are your non-piercing interests? What do you do outside of this?

At the moment, I don't really have a lot of hobbies or anything of that nature. I'm not a real big believer in "New Year's Resolutions", but I do have a goal this year to start being involved in more things that are not piercing related.

I have recently started getting into making some electronic-type music with my computer. At this point, it is still very experimental for me and I wouldn't consider the music I've made all that good. But, it is a creative outlet that I'm beginning to enjoy more and more.

I enjoy listening to music quite a lot, especially ambient electronic stuff. Perhaps, as my skills increase in making music, I'll be able to create some stuff that is specifically designed/oriented for getting pierced. For me personally, and I think for many people, music plays a big part in their lives and can be very helpful in getting them through the anxiety of getting a piercing.

What fact about you would most surprise your customers?

I think the thing that might be most surprising is the fact that I have a Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering. While I know many piercers who are highly educated, most people don't expect piercers and other body modification artists to be well educated.

When I do tell people about my educational background, they often have a hard time understanding how I could be doing piercing when I could be doing engineering and potentially be making a lot more money. My typical response is to point out that most people don't like the jobs they have, whereas I'm fortunate enough to have a job that I enjoy and like to go to each day. That usually gets the point across pretty well.

Tell me about your role in the APP? While the APP has an obvious value both to studios and the community as a whole, why has it been so difficult to build up members? In addition, why has there been so much internal political upheaval?

My current role in the APP is fairly limited. I am a trustee of the organization and at one time was on the Board of Directors. I resigned from my position on the Board due to not having the time to dedicate to completing my duties. I joined the Board to help the APP grow and become better organized and run more smoothly. When it became evident that my other demands were interfering with the job I needed to be doing for the APP, I decided it was time to resign. I would have been more of a detriment to the organization than a benefit at that point. I am currently still active with the organization and try to stay on top of developments within the APP. I try to help out the Board and provide advice whenever possible. I think the current APP Board is one of the strongest the organization has ever had and has made great forward movement in the development of the organization.

I think the problem generating membership stems from a couple of different areas. The APP was started by Michaela Grey, who, at the time, worked for Gauntlet, Inc. . For whatever reason, many piercers used to (and some still do), viewed Gauntlet as some sort of “evil empire.” So initially there was a lot of resistance in joining the APP because people felt that Gauntlet controlled the APP or it was bad to be associated with Gauntlet. I think a lot of piercers also felt the APP was going to try and be the “piercing police” or try to dictate piercing technique. I think this concern over “being told what to do” is still prevalent in the industry to some extent and that many piercers decide not to join the APP because of this misconception.

Another major factor, and one that is just now starting to become fully-resolved, was the internal structure of the APP. The APP was started as a project of Michaela Grey’s. The



need for the organization was recognized quickly within the industry and the APP began to expand rapidly. The work that needed to be done was often left to one or two people, making it difficult for the APP to adjust appropriately to the growing needs of its members. This resulted in problems with staying on top of processing applications as well as addressing other issues (such as legislation) which fell within the scope of the organization. The amount of work, and the lack of people willing to do the work, resulted in a bit of a bottleneck. It took several different configurations of the Board of Directors to work out all the trouble-spots so that things would run

more smoothly. The current Board of Directors has made great headway, building on the hard work of all the previous Boards, in expanding membership.

I know that Michaela Grey is not always well-liked within the piercing industry. However, I do think she deserves a great amount respect and appreciation for the work she did in forming the APP as well as running it nearly single-handedly for a number of years. I feel the APP is the primary reason that the piercing industry has opened up to the extent that it has and the reason there is a great deal of communication amongst piercing professionals throughout the world.

As for political upheaval, I think in part it is simply due to human nature. Anytime you have a group of 3 or more people, there will always be hidden-agendas or politics that arise. I don't know of anyway around that fact. In addition, whether there is “upheaval” or not depends a lot on your perspective. When you are not on the Board (which is completely voluntary) and do not have to sacrifice your personal time, and in the beginning personal financial expense, it is very easy find fault with how things are run. Add to this the egos that pervade the industry and the often-present “my way is right, yours isn't” attitude that is found, you are going to have conflict and disagreement. My experience has been that those who make the most noise and have the loudest voices of complaint are usually the ones who become the quietest or the hardest to get a hold of when you wish to ask them for some help.

Eizo Mamiya

Eizo Mamiya was a pioneer of body piercing in Japan, and the owner and head piercer at the Tokyo studio NOON, as well as the progenitor of the “Mamiya Technique”, a form of dermabrasion scarification done using a dremel type device. He has travelled all over the world along with Japanese body modification publishing trendsetter Ryoichi Maeda of Nyan2Club, continually bringing the latest piercing and modification practices to Japan. This interview was conducted in Japanese in 1999 and translated courtesy of Timo.

First, tell me a bit about yourself.

I was born in 1957, and studied chemistry in college. I had many varied interests, and many opportunities to go overseas, so it was natural that I should also encounter body piercing. I like new information, so much so that when personal computers came on the market, I leapt to buy one. I like making things on my own, and devising better techniques for making and doing things.

How did piercing and body modification first enter your life?

I first started body piercing nine years ago. Before that time, I had some fragmentary knowledge of body piercing, and I happened to acquire a book, and a video from PFIQ. So then I tried it myself. I was either thirty-one or two. I'm the kind of person that once I've decided to try my hand at something, I have to take it to the point that I feel that I've really absorbed it, or I'm just not satisfied. So, in a short time, I had tried all the piercings. Starting from the easy ones, moving toward more difficult ones, repeating and redoing as I went, until after about six months I was finished. That was my first experiment with piercing, and since that time I have continued to try various experiments on my own body.

How would you describe the Japanese piercing scene?

Even before I introduced body piercing to Japan, young men in the rock scene had been piercing their ears like women. But the term “body piercing” was unknown, and the average young person had no idea that the body could be pierced. On the other hand, piercing was known in SM circles. Most of it was based on pre-war European ideas passed down and distorted over time, and was different from today's American piercing both in the materials used for jewelry and in the piercing techniques. Furthermore, body piercing was strongly associated with dominant master-types in the SM world. They did piercing in their own style, and had lots of problems. When the media began introducing body piercing, people who were using incorrect techniques learned to use correct ones. At the same time, young people began to think piercing looked interesting, and piercing soon became fashionable.

Is it true that (at least in the past) Japanese piercers were not allowed to pierce their clients, but rather “assisted” them in doing their own piercings?



The term “assisting” exists, but it’s really piercing. If we weren’t actually doing people’s pierces, there wouldn’t be as many as several thousand piercers around. The term “assisting” just means that it’s being done for free. There has never been any court dispute as to who may pierce in Japan, so there is no legal problem. That’s the way it is in Japan now.

Where does piercing fall socially in Japan? Is it more sexual fetish, or fashion?

It’s no different from the situation overseas. When piercing came into Japan, it didn’t spread gradually, rather it spread rapidly. Gay people, fetish, SM Mania—the Japanese like SM, they’re more like Europeans than Americans in that way—the spread of piercing probably was spurred on by that. Anyway, it spread through all the scenes at once.



In your travels around the world, how would you say that the piercing and modification is different (and similar) to the West?

In terms of differences between Japan and the West (Europe/America), in Japan there are many people who don’t like to relay information, people who are closed. They probably exist overseas too, but in Japan, information is not so free. When somebody finds some information or an idea, they don’t really put it out. For example, suppose there’s a good piercing shop. Now, you’d expect a good shop to teach, but there are people who don’t want to teach. They want to make their techniques their secret, and just enjoy them for themselves. There are groups of people like that, who present a closed face.

Tribal tattoos, branding and scarification are not known. In other words, tattoo as ritual of passage and other modifications are not known. That’s a big difference from the West, and one that I think is very unfortunate.

How do people on the street react to you, and to other pierced people?

In Japan these days, piercing is normal. In Japan, when something starts to spread, it soon spreads to the far reaches of the country. Now, in Japan, there is no one who doesn’t know the word “body piercing”. Even if they’ve never seen it, they know that something by that name is popular. It’s already becoming a normal part of life. In Japan, even something that is looked at strangely becomes natural if enough people do it. Maybe that’s a special Japanese characteristic, but anyway, piercing is being accepted into society as a perfectly normal thing.

In your work there seems to be a specific interest in some more unusual piercings (surface piercings, etc) — why is this?

I’ve tried all the piercings that are done overseas. I’ve also done many that aren’t done overseas, but I haven’t taken any pictures of them yet. I’ve already done all the ones being done by others, and am now trying new piercings. I was putting two hoops into one ear hole before any one else, and also began experimenting with industrial stuff early on. I just haven’t presented my work. Having done all the regular pierces, I’m continuing to experiment

with non-standard pierces.

Is that a photo of a (tooth) gum piercing I saw in your portfolio?

Japanese are the kind of people that, when somebody gets some information or idea from somewhere, they think that that's all there is. They also think that it's natural to rise to it. If they've seen such-and-such a piercing somewhere, they have to be able to do it too. A piercing shop that can't do it will be thought a fake. In the same way, customers will think that if an overseas shop can do it, so can a Japanese shop. Naturally, we can do this kind of piercing (a gum piercing) too.

I notice that many (all?) of your tattoos are self-done.

I wanted to confirm that tribal tattoos are not simply patterns, but that they are a way of designing the entire human body. I undertook to test that with my own body. Then there were the basic principles of ink tattoos, and also the materials used. When I experimented with those three things, this is what resulted.

The more information there is, the better. Now, there is far too little exchange of information among piercers. There is also not enough exchange of technical know-how. It's not enough to exchange information about the results of a certain piercing. Unless we work together to exchange information about success rates, detailed refinements in creative techniques and the like, piercing won't advance. Instead of acting alone, we need to have something like a technical or professional association.

Body piercing will advance when all this information is gathered in one place, where we can repeatedly access it, take it home, and try it out. When I went overseas, I found that



everyone said something different. Although we criticize each other's work, it would be better to find the good points, and incorporate them into our own work. For that reason, it's a good thing that BME avoids putting a value on people's work. If we started saying this or that is good or bad the freedom of the Internet would disappear.

The age of the amateur is already over. Gauntlet/PFIQ and such have been gathering up and saving information from amateurs, but that period is finished. At tattoo conventions, artists exchange information between themselves, but because you can easily look at a tattoo and understand it, It's possible to walk away with someone's idea. But in the case of piercing, things like how the piercer dealt with the inevitable differences in individual bodies' construction, and what kinds of problems were encountered, are important. With Gauntlet and Fakir, there are differences of opinion. It would be good if we could somehow deal with that and go on, I think.

Chaz “No Hand”

How amazing is it that a leading designer of prosthetics was also a voluntary amputee? My friend “No Hand” was one of the many enigmas I’ve met through BME. 99% of the people who claim to have the modifications that he has are simply spinning fantasy. So many of his stories and life elements are exceptional and difficult to believe, yet in the cases where the photos are the cold hard facts, the missing pieces are there to back up his story. “No Hand” had self-amputated his own fingers and then complete hand, half of his foot (since lost entirely), part of his genitals, as well as having other body modifications. Later in life he also lost his left leg below the knee (LBK) and his right above the knee (RAK) due to accident. He was happy with them all, and is a vibrant and active part of the online want2be and amputee communities, as well as being active in his own “real life” community — they of course don’t know how he lost his limbs. I actually wondered whether his whole story might be fantasy. When he died (of natural causes unrelated to the amputations), the New York Times published his obituary and I discovered that not only was it all true, but that he was being modest! Chaz was one of the most exceptional and eccentric individuals I ever met.



“It is not just the amputation that you have to be in love with, but it is the whole dynamic of being an amputee that you need to embrace.”

∞

What type of person are you? Is hard for you to make friends being so unique?

I have always been a combination of introverted and extroverted — I love meeting people and social settings, but cherish my private time and space as well... I am a very driven Type A personality, if you haven’t figured that out already.

Outside of your obvious eccentricities, you seem like an intelligent, stable, well-educated, and well-spoken man.

Thank you. I hold a Pre-Med. B.Sc. majoring in Fine Art (medical illustration), with a minor in Biology. My Masters degree focused on life drawing, oil painting, and mechanical sculpture, and was followed by a Ph.D. in Engineering Design. I also hold a DLJ in literary journalism. My amputations had no affect whatsoever on my schooling, partially because I was essentially out of school before the biggies were done, and also because I have never allowed my amputations to be a hindrance to me.

My favorite book is the Bible — it is the most incredible book ever written and I taught myself Biblical Hebrew and Greek to be able to read it in the languages in which it was originally written... My interest is both religious and scholarly. However, I should point out that there is no religious component to my body modifications.

You’re quite the renaissance man.

Yes, I do consider myself a Renaissance Man. Marcel DuChamp, said: “The role of the artist is a selector of materials and techniques”... I consider myself, above all other occupations, an artist, and to a certain degree my body is the material, and modification is the technique....

I hold copyrights on lots of things from two fictional novels (one a historical novel of the American Southwest called “The Treasure of Marble Canyon” and the other a romance novel called: “Val and Protea”) to dozens of designs and articles, including writing for New Yorker and Travel and Leisure magazines... I also have patents on racecar front suspensions and some prosthetic hardware. I am presently working on an anatomical, lightweight, artificial foot, and clutch lock knee design for leg braces. On designing amputee hardware, who better to design it than a user? My philosophy: “Form follows Function.”

I am both self-employed and have a 9 to 5, but most of my working life I have been self-employed... actually, for more than twenty years...



Did your family and friends ever wonder why you kept showing up with less and less body parts?

I managed to explain away the amputations and never had any probing questions asked nor have I ever received any psychiatric questioning, as everything was always carefully planned to avoid those kinds of questions. My arm I tell people was lost in wood chipper accident, and in actual racing car accident resulting in a gasoline explosion, I unexpectedly (but not unhappily) lost my leg. A vague “accident related complications” explanation umbrellas the rest. I am skin grafted from waist to ankles — well, ankle now — I suppose people just assume I’m very accident-prone! Of course, being accident-prone is neither a crime nor a treatable psychiatric disease...

Surprisingly, I do all of the things I did before, including riding my Harleys, with modified clutch lever, and back packing... I have stopped doing nothing I enjoyed... As far as back packing and similar activities go, I have a very good leg prosthesis, and can hike all day without discomfort. In fact, on my 9 to 5 I spend most of the day on my feet...

Unfortunately my 3,000 bottle wine cellar and my 17 Ferraris went the way of the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune as William Shakespeare would say — This was not related in any way to the amputations though... I’ve been rich and poor a couple of times. Mae West was right — rich is better. I’ve made it before and I can make it again. I look forward to more wine and more Ferraris, and have no fear of making money...



Do you remember any early childhood experiences that might have started the interest in amputation?

Motivation for the bod-mod is from internal wiring I believe, not outside influence — the first amputees I ever had contact with scared me and made me uncomfortable. A one-armed schoolteacher friend of my parents terrified me. Seeing the schoolteacher made me directly confront my personal desires which were there from early childhood, long before sex was a component. The fact that I had these desires for so long negates for me anyway

the assumption that these are purely sexual issues — though as an adult there is of course a sexual component to body modification... which I enjoy...

Tell me about removing your own hand.

I began with my fingers in my 20's, and when in my 30's I designed and built a guillotine device — a vertical frame of two-by-fours, with concrete block weights on the bottom and three concrete blocks which could drop about four feet inside the frame, striking a razor sharp ice spud when a prop was pulled. Very effective: I tested it on a broom handle first... I had no doubt it would work, and as you can see, I no longer have a hand.

Are you happy with your modifications?

I like all of my amputations and love my stumps, regardless of origin... I also like using my prostheses. However I do not feel the process modification is totally completed for me at this time. I do not believe that I suffer from dysmorphophobia. While I am in a state of transformation, my body is an evolving work of art, which at some point will be definitive.

I really admire other people's feet, but not necessarily my own, and I think that area is in transition too. I'm not satisfied totally with the look of my right foot; it seems undefined to me somehow... just musing... By the way, the scars you see on my foot are from "exploratory surgery".

The genital thing is relatively new, and I think that has become a new area of exploration. I don't think I want to complete the castration, but maybe have my remaining testicle buried and scrotum removed, and a urethral relocation to complete the body modification in this area. I think I'll find a practitioner to do this — Although I probably could, I'd rather not do this to myself.

How can a person tell if they really "need" an elective amputation?

That is a very difficult question. Let's approach it from several perspectives. If you are into amputation from a body modification point of view, you are probably looking for one or more of the following: a personal statement, an antisocial statement, or group identification. All of which are determined by a desired "look". The look is the driving factor here, not the "need" for an amputation. These are probably going to be small limb (finger and toe) amputations rather than major. They have cosmetic value, but unless they are numerous probably don't carry much functional loss. Category two is the "wannabe", and amputation is the focus, usually major, and usually with a site-specific amputation in mind as: LBE, etc.. Very, very few wannabes actually make the transition to major amputees, as most only fantasize the amputation as a desired thing, but actually don't have a true understanding of what it is to be an amputee, nor do they have the required mental, and physical determination to safely get there...

Someone who really needs to be an amputee will probably actually become a major limb amputee. Bill S. who manages the wannabe mailing list on the Internet says he knows 6, and he feels there may be as few as 50 or 60 major limb voluntary amputees in the world. I think his estimate is low, but I also believe him to be an expert on the subject.

I am absolutely sure you are wired for amputation in the same way as in sexual preference

issues... And it is as surely applicable and valid an explanation as it is for the other community. I have no more choice to love amputations than a homosexual does to love men. In neither case is it wrong: it is simply the way we are.

Do you have any regrets about your lifestyle?

I have really never met anyone else with as diverse a range of modifications as myself. I was also into genital piercing (all self-done) and tattoos — I have two tattoos, one good sized shoulder piece... Unfortunately, they were difficult for me to get at the time I was exploring them. If I hadn't had to drive 150 miles for them I might have gotten many more. Since I am an artist, I have often thought of getting the equipment and doing myself... which I may...

For me the experiences have all been very positive, the only negative has been no one to share the experiences, or results with, who understands the idea of the

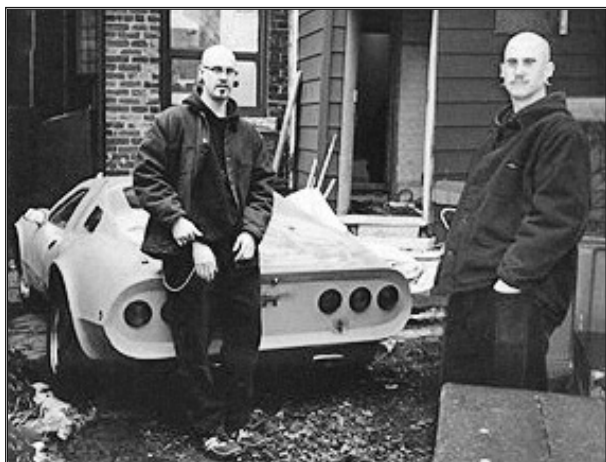


process, and could or would be participatory or supportive. Perhaps a woman with similar drives and interests will read this and contact me, though this may be nearly impossible...

I would not change who I am in any way; however, I have ended up with a LBK and RAK which were not in the original equation. On the day to day, it's a pain in the blank — just getting into and out of the tub is difficult. You have to take your legs off to change your pants, driving problems — there are a million things you either never think about prior to making the transition, or that you think won't be a problem, but will turn out to be a major obstacle. Also, there is no predicting the outcome of surgery. You can end up with edema or phantom pain that can make prosthetic fitting impossible and wheelchair or crutch use mandatory, which may not have been in your original plan. Now you have to do this for the rest of your life. Prosthetic and ambulatory devices are expensive — my new RAK leg is 15,000.00 — and typically your insurance company will only buy you one in your lifetime. Five years from now when you need a new one, where are you going to get the money? It is not just the amputation that you have to be in love with, but it is the whole dynamic of being an amputee that you need to embrace.

“Adding and Subtracting”

Starting in 1999 I started publishing an annual “April Fools” interview or otherwise pranking the community surrounding BME. The first of these articles was “Adding and Subtracting”, and it was so much fun that I kept doing it... Not only were most readers fooled by the outlandish story, but mainstream media clamored to interview the twins — Details, ICON, The Village Voice, and others all sent requests.



Ryan and Dave are the most unique identical twins you'll ever meet. After tiring of piercing, tattoos, and implants about three years ago, they began exploring much heavier surgical modifications. Dave had spent two and a half years in pre-med at Queens University in Kingston, and using contacts made both there and online he and his twin brother have changed themselves in ways far beyond anything anyone else has ever attempted.

Let's quickly talk about how this all got started.

Ryan: I guess when we were about thirteen we started getting tattooed. This is when we were living in Phoenix. I won't deny that we had pretty poor judgement and got some pretty bad tattoos. Luckily, they were fairly light and over time we got some real nice coverups, as you can see.

Dave: Our lives in Phoenix were actually pretty rough and our parents knew that we were running with the wrong crowd, so when we were sixteen they sent us to live with our aunt in Toronto — Canada — it was a bit of a culture shock but turned out for the best. I finished high school at the top of my class and was offered a biology scholarship at Queens University which soon transitioned into Pre-Med. Ryan stayed in Toronto and got hooked up with the piercing scene.

Ryan: Some friends of mine were just setting up a new studio — Dave and I had been doing piercings on our friends for about a year, and it just seemed like the right thing at the right time so I decided to become a piercer. At this point the piercing community was pretty young and it was an “anything goes” scene and still mostly underground — I got to meet a lot of guys into amputation and castration and really heavy stuff. It got me thinking a lot about what we wanted to do with our own bodies. I introduced Dave to them as well and he shared my feelings.

What happened next?

After discussing and thinking about it very seriously for about a year, we decided to take

the big step. To put it simply, Dave had his entire right arm (since we're left handed) amputated at the shoulder and we surgically reattached it immediately behind my right pectoral muscle.

Wow. If I wasn't looking at it right now I'd never believe it. How was the procedure done?

Dave: Obviously there was no clinic willing to do a procedure like this (we didn't even bother to ask), so we had to do it all under local anesthesia since we simply didn't have the facilities to safely administer general anesthesia. We had a group of two practitioners and two assistants working on us. First we elevated my arm and using an Ace bandage we slowly squeezed all of the blood out of it. Then we tourniquetted as high up on the shoulder it could be, and injected lidocaine into the exsanguinated veins. Almost immediately there was no feeling whatsoever. An amputation knife cut through the skin and muscles, and a bone saw did the final removal. Bleeders were ligated and the wound was cleaned up. This entire part of the procedure took about forty minutes.

Ryan: At the same time as Dave was being worked on, the other practitioner and his assistant prepared the attachment site on my chest. Veins and arteries were spliced to supply blood to Dave's arm and the skin and some of the subcutaneous tissue was peeled up to merge as smoothly as possible. Luckily the healing went smoothly. The transplant healed up in about a month, as did Dave's stump.

You're a bit vague as to who did it. Who were the "practitioners" and how did you find them?

Dave: When we had the procedure done we signed non-disclosure agreements and legally swore to protect the identities of everyone involved. As far as how we met them, you'd be amazed how many kooks you meet in med school. That's as far as I'm willing to go on that question; I'm sure your readers will understand. This type of procedure is simply not acceptable.

Did you have any difficulties with rejection?

Ryan: That's the nice thing about being identical twins! We share the same genetics!

You can't be that identical — You're wearing glasses and Dave isn't.

Dave wears contacts; he's vain. Anyway, because our genetics are the same, healing a transplant is no more difficult than healing a severe laceration. I'm exaggerating a little, but it's not the same as a regular transplant.

The arm is amazing, but I've got to admit that this "alien finger" thing you've done is really something. It's unlike anything I've



ever seen before. It's actually quite disconcerting!

Yeah, we're very proud of it. When people see the arm, they think it was an accident — transplants like this do get done every once in a while for medical reasons. The finger though, that's art. We challenge anyone to take body art to a higher level.

How did you pull this one off?

Dave: First we removed the center joint of my finger, along with the skin and just over an inch of overhanging tendon. Then we split Ryan's finger at the end of the first joint. It was



relatively easy to insert the extra joint, especially since we had so much extra tendon to play with. The amazing thing is that Ryan actually has feeling in the end of that finger now — the nerves were compatible!

Dave, why are you wearing a bandaid over your stubby finger?

When we put my finger tip back on, minus the middle joint, we didn't have enough tendon to work with so I don't actually have very much mobility in it. I tend to bang it a lot. We're actually going to remove it altogether and remove the bone right down to the wrist. That will let us shift the little finger over without much apparent scarring giving us a very realistic three fingered hand.

Can I ask what the two of you do for a living? I assume you don't have regular jobs.

We make a great living in the traditional world. I'm not going to say the name of our company, but to suffice it to say that we're the sixth largest producer of adult entertainment software in North America. The Ferrari Dino 246 that Ryan is leaning on right now is a \$50,000 car. That may not seem like a lot of money, but we paid it off in one day. Not all "freaks" are punk kids.

I know you don't really like talking about this that much, but... why?

Ryan: First and foremost, we consider ourselves artists. A lot of our friends and associates who have similar interests have a more fetish oriented body modification attitude about it — while we respect that point of view, it's not what we're about.

Any regrets?

Dave: I guess I'm the one that should answer that one. No. Not at all. We share everything. I don't feel that I've given anything up. I'm not sure if anyone who's not an identical twin can really understand the strange bond that's going on here. I've never had a phantom limb pain. It really feels like it's all still a part of me.

What modifications does the future hold for you two?

We've got some genital work planned that's pretty exciting. As soon as it happens we'll be sure to update BME readers with some photos.



*Following are just some of the letters that I received at the fake email address I'd set up for "Ryan and Dave". People not only believed the story, but were **into** it!*

"I have just finished reading your interview on BME and was totally amazed. Basically, I just want to offer you both a great big pat on the back. Not only have you had the courage to satisfy your greatest desires, you're changing the face of body modification. It's a popular misconception that body modification is all about piercing and tattooing, and you two are the exact opposite!"

"I admire your courage greatly. I can't get that point across enough. Not only are your mods innovative, they're truly beautiful and must make you both feel fantastic."

"I wish you all the best for the future, and hope that you two can go some way in eradicating the prejudice and misconceptions surrounding body modification."

"Hey, my name is ***, I'm GWM, 31, a horny landscaper from Mass. I've recently developed a fascination/fetish about castrations and amputations. Have either of you guys wondered where these desires come from? Past, future lives perhaps? Or maybe everyone has these thoughts and they never let the seeds germinate."

"Always been intrigued by twins, too. You're lucky to have each other, I'm sure you know that. How do you guys like to get off? Do you have the same sexual orientation or desires? I'd like to know/see/witness more about the genital stuff."

"Who are Ryan and Dave? Are they cute and horny? Who is Shannon? Is she cute and horny? Can we have a party?"

"Bravo! I must say that you both really kick ass. Though I do admit that your modification is a bit too drastic for my immediate tastes, I was so wonder stricken By you article and your photos that I felt compelled to write in to you both and congratulate you on what I believe to be one of the most astonishing things that I've seen in my life thus far. I'm still in a mild shock that some one was able to successfully pull this off, let alone to this degree, But I'll be damned if I'm not going to congratulate you on a job well done! I do have a question though. Does the second right arm and finger operate, or is it just the finger? Thanks for such an awe inspiring article. you've really made my day!"

"I wish I was a twin so I could do similar things. I have a PA but nothing can compare to you guy. The beauty of it is if you want to change it back... you just reattach it... Your bodies are really works of art. Keep up the good work!"

"I guess you must be sick of this type of mail, but I must say that I am very impressed with your mods. You must share quite a strong bond as twins. Anyway, I'll keep it short. I respect your work, and it's great to see new limits being pushed. Your resolve is inspiring. Good luck with your next mods!"

"I'm 22, have about 100 square inches of branding work done on me, about 10 implants and amputated my own pinkie in September, way before I ever landed on this site. I'm going to have the bone cleaned off, polished, autoclaved and implanted back into me — and I thought that was original!!! By what I read, I'm assuming you guys are around 25."

"i couldnt come up with a subject without sounding critical or corny so i decided not to. IT seems to me that some people are born with the sort things that you call art we call them defects. It also seems to be a mockery of those with true defects. Unless you somehow manage to make this transition from freakish to cool. In which case those people with real defects will appreciate your contribution. Also what you have done is more science than art. piercing now thats art. and there is no thing better than a tribal tattoo in my eyes. in conclusion i ask you this what about when your seventy. what will you think then?"

"After seeing the pictures from the Adding and Subtracting article I must admit I was very disturbed. For the first time in many years I found myself nauseated and not since a brush with kiddie porn have I found myself filled with such a sensation of innate wrongness. I am left with the question, Why? What prompted the brothers to do this to themselves. The article itself fails to answer anything but the how of it."

"Hey guys. I love the arm transplant. I've also been interested in extreme mods but never seen anyone that has done something like that. I'd like to run something past you to see if it would even be feasible. I have larger feet and hate it. I'd love to find someone to trade feet with. Do you know if something like that would be surgically possible? I've even thought about finding 2 guys and putting one of each of their feet on me and giving them each one of mine. Make some interesting pairs of feet :)"

"I just wanted to start this letter saying I have so much respect for both of you. You created a whole new type of body art, and I honestly can say I only dreamt of this type of procedure happening. I personally, am not interested in doing this type of body modification on myself, but I plan on becoming an emergency room doctor, and I would definitely help people with a passion like yours. Can Ryan move Dave's arm thats attached to him? Is there any feeling in it? I also love the way the 'alien' hand looks. It is very beautiful. Is the feeling the same or is it a different type of feeling? I once read that if you were to cut a piece of your skin, and then (with a few veins connected) move it to another location of the body, and you scratch it, it will feel like your scratching the original location.. sorry if that was confusing, I can't really think of the words to explain it :). Anyway I just wanted you to know that other people find beauty in your work, and respect your ability to be different in such an extreme way. Write back if ya want, I would love to hear from you guys :)"

"As far as now I have heard about three men having their right hand amputated voluntarily (and two of them also have a penectomy and one nut less!!). You have told about your time as piercers meeting a lot of guys 'into amputation and castration'. How many guys of that kind have you met, what has been their aim in both cases — and did they reach their aim — and how did they reach it?"

"April Fools?"

“Fingernails”

This anonymous friend of mine undertook one of the most unusual forms of body modification, “fingernail modification”, in which he practised installing jewelry in the base of the fingernail, temporary and permanent forms of fingernail removal, “reverse” fingernail extension (in which the nail bed is moved up the finger), and fingernail thickening procedures. We met in 1997, and I’ve never met anyone doing this since then.

At what age and how did you first become interested in fingernail modification? is fingernail modification your only body modification interest, or have you also modified yourself in other ways?

Probably in my mid 20’s. I have always had a high “curiosity level”. I just looked that word up in Funk & Wagnall... “3. that which excites interest by its strangeness or rarity.”

I once read somewhere that “positive” voltage tasted different than “negative” voltage. (Don’t try plugging yourself into the wall outlet, that’s a good formula for disaster.) I was curious, and yes it does. (Try it with a 1.5V flashlight battery if you don’t believe it.) It’s that kind of curiosity I’ve got. Well, does AC taste different than DC? Yes, and different audio frequencies taste different as well. Do they “feel” different? Needed a sensitive area to try this on, since normal exposed skin is likely to require a lot of current to tell — that’s dangerous... you could electrocute yourself. So I tried it on my nipples. (LOW voltages and currents, this is REALLY dangerous if you don’t have the technical background.)

This led to a little “experimentation” with the nipples, but I wouldn’t call this a “modification” really.

I probably decided on the fingernail modifications because, believe it or not, it’s fairly “invisible” to most people, in as much as it can readily be concealed (except for the index finger, which in our society is visibly used as a pointing mechanism, among other things.) This gives me the ability to conceal or not as I choose... That, and the fact that it is a quite “unusual” modification point... And, a “band-aid” covers recent modifications until healed... And, is not at all unusual to have a “band-aid” on your finger... And there are many possibilities: long, short, thickness, shape, various unusual features...

Although you could rightly point out that nipple experimentation, for instance, is not readily externally visible, that is not necessarily true at the “family” level.

The problem with experimental body modification that is notably visible is “corporate America”. Whether it’s right, wrong, or indifferent, there is a stigma still attached to this activity that precludes these activities AND participation in higher level corporate functions.

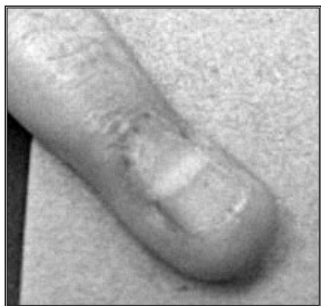
Has it been a gradual progression from there, or does your interest come in spurts?



Somewhat both. I tend to keep at it for a while (year or two), then nothing for a while, then I'll observe something, and start on another batch of experiments. Most recent "batch" has been ongoing for about 5-6 years.

What is it about fingernail modification that draws you to it?

It is unusual, and as stated above, there are a lot of possibilities, and the published medical information is wrong, misleading, or incomplete, or all of the above. This excites my curiosity. At a really "base" level, you can really freak someone out as well.



Would you publish your findings?

Probably not. I have no need to see my name in print anywhere.

Hasn't evolution made our nails "as they should be"?

Evolution, by the way, is full of dead ends and wrong turns anyway. What assurance is there that this is not simply another one of the wrong turns?

Are you ever worried about doing serious damage to the functionality of your hand?

When you're young, I think everyone, at least unconsciously, considers themselves immortal in the sense that nothing can happen to THEM. As you get older, this changes.

I guess I "draw the line" somewhere PRIOR to impairing functionality. Since I use my hands as part of my job functions, I would not seriously consider doing anything to permanently destroy that functionality.

With your fingernails being difficult to hide, how do you explain the way they look to people? Or do most people simply not ask?

I generally don't attempt to explain. Also, people generally don't ask. I'm halfway convinced that not very many notice.

On those occasions where I'll make the modifications apparent, I've gotten the following (usually visual reactions): double-takes, surprise, smiles, shock. I guess those are not a surprise. Once I followed... a glance to my hand, followed by a glance to their own hand, a glance back, and a "size" estimate.

What does your family think?

The wife is definitely not "into" this sort of thing. Although we are very close, she keeps her "space" and allows me mine. She knows my fingernails are somewhat unusual, she does not recognize they are a result of active modification, nor have I told her. (Nor would she want to know). I would not DO anything to mar our relationship. (Call me old-fashioned in that respect.)

The child takes it all in stride. He probably thinks it's part of my "work". (What happened to your finger, daddy? Just work.)

With fingernail modification being such an unusual modification, have you ever met anyone else involved in it?

No. However, my latest batch of experiments was initiated by a picture in our local newspaper. The article had nothing whatever to do with fingernail modifications; it was an article on a local college radio station. There was a picture of someone holding up an LP record album. Their fingernails looked quite unusual, and inspecting the pictures with various magnifying glasses, it was apparent they had done some modifications to their fingernails, extending them down their fingers. This excited my curiosity and led to my current experiments.

Tell me about how you install the fingernail jewelry at the base of your nails?

It is possible to *carefully* drill into the fingernail in the white part near the base (lunula). This allows jewelry or whatever to be inserted onto the fingernail near its base. The item inserted will grow outward as the nail grows. If *carefully* done, there is no pain nor blood involved at all.

To do it, place the finger (nail upward) on a flat surface. Holding a drill in your other hand (or whomever is going to do this), drill perpendicularly into the fingernail in the lunula area. You may want to mark where you want the holes with a pencil before you start drilling. Drill very slowly and carefully. The drilling pressure will become less when you have penetrated the solid part of the nail into the liquid part. You can best judge the thickness of your nails. Once you have penetrated into the liquid, you should be able to put a little pressure on your nail, and some of the liquid will emerge from the hole. Drill the remaining hole(s) in a similar manner.

Using a steel wire, insert the wire into one hole parallel (as much as possible) to the nail. This is a little tricky, since you are trying to maneuver the wire between the underside of the nail and the nail bed. *Carefully* push this back out through the other hole you've drilled. You can then carefully tie the two ends together and attach to whatever object you like.

You mentioned that you've found a relatively painless — or at least less painful — way of removing fingernails temporarily?

Soak your fingernail to be removed in hot water for about a minute. Massage the nail with a lot of hair conditioner for about thirty seconds. Then massage in hot water again for about thirty seconds. Repeat this procedure, alternating between hot water and hair conditioner. This will cause the fingernail to become very soft. When this happens (after about ten minutes), bend the nail back on itself. Massage conditioner onto the underside of nail to help soften it. Using a pair of pliers, you should be able to pull back about 1/8 inch of nail. Massage in more conditioner. Gently return the nail to its normal "straight" position. (This will break some of the bonds making it softer).

The purpose of all this is of making the nail soft, it that it relatively easily lifts from the skin underneath, without tearing the flesh. Massage using more hot water and hair conditioner. Force the nail back on itself again and using the pliers, pull back another 1/8 inch of nail. Continue until you're near the lunula.

Once you get into the lunula area, you will need to proceed very carefully, since the nail will now be loose (its being held in only by the "top" and "edges"). Continue to use conditioner to keep the nail soft, now applying it "into" the exposed bed as much as possible

(you probably won't want to use the hot water at this point — it burns). Once the entire nail is very loose, return the nail to its straight position, and gently pull forward on it with the pliers until it comes totally free. If there is any bleeding at this point, it should stop soon. I would not suggest styptic but you can wrap the finger.

When you're done, carefully clean the finger and bandage. However, remove the bandage as soon as you can, since the "liquid" part of the nail will continue oozing as it is forming a new fingernail.

That doesn't sound painless at all...

The pain is not too bad during the process. Once the nail is removed, the area burns quite a bit. This goes away after a few days, but the nail bed is **very** sensitive for a while. There is also a possibility that the nail will not regrow properly, although I have not had this happen. It takes several months for the nail to regrow.

I originally tried this to find out if it made it easier to keep the fingernails shorter. Since the flesh under the nails is always protected, it is sensitive. By repeatedly removing the nails, this can be made less sensitive, and therefore easier to shorten the fingernails. (It does work, but you have to remove the nails several times before the flesh that is normally covered by your fingernails is "tough" enough to make it easy to shorten your nails as much as you like.)

Have you tried permanent methods of fingernail removal as well?

Yes, but it was a failed attempt. I drilled a small hole into the lunula. Pushed a small wire between underside of nail and nail bed, around the lunula as much as possible. (This was to remove as much liquid as possible through the hole). Injected copper sulfate into the hole and massaged it around as much as possible. This continued to burn for several days. This apparently destroyed some but not all of the nail-forming cells, and thus is a failed attempt. (Or they regenerated to some extent).

Doctors use 98% phenol in solution to kill the nail bed. It can also be used to kill just portions of the nail bed (i.e. sides) or the total bed. It basically causes a chemical burn that kills the nail growing tissue.

The modification I find most interesting is the relocation of the nail bed up your finger. Tell me more about this?

I am working on extending the white portion (lunula) of the fingernails down my finger as far as possible. This is still an ongoing experiment. My little finger has about 7/16 inch of exposed lunula. This is almost at the first "joint". My ring finger has 3/8 inch of exposed lunula, so it's not to the joint yet. My middle finger has "only" 1/4 inch of exposed lunula, and has not been fully converted yet, and is currently quite "bumpy".

I would like to take these to the end of the lunula (wherever it really ends), possibly to the knuckle. I don't yet know if this is possible, nor exactly how to do it if it is possible.

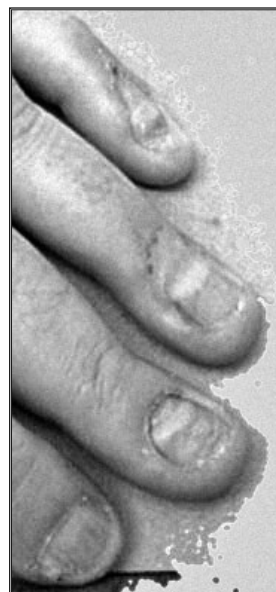
My second goal is to make it permanent. I still occasionally have to remove skin that has regrown over the base of the nails.

Tell me about the procedures you've used?

After desensitizing the finger, take a spatula or its rough equivalent and carefully push back the skin along the sides and top of the fingernail. Initially, you should be able to expose perhaps 1/16 inch of nail. Be persistent and keep pushing this back by applying even pressure along the side, and “up” above the top of the nail. Keep applying an even (and fairly hard) pressure until the skin has been pushed as far as it can be. You will know this because the junction of the nail and skin will begin to “weep”, as the liquid part of the nail is exposed. At this point, cut with scalpel or razor blade along the skin at each side of the nail starting near the tip and moving towards the base of the nail. This cut should not cut any nail, just skin.

The cuts ought to be at the sides of the nail as far as possible straight up. If you can get it down further, go ahead. At this point using a tweezers or spatula, push the now freer skin “up” or “down” as far as you can, and cut this flesh off. Now peel back the flesh above the nail using a tweezers or pliers as far back as it will go. Keep a constant pressure on the skin as it takes some time for the flesh to come loose from the nail or nail bedding. Insert the spatula between the nail and flesh and lift upward to loosen this flesh as you go. At this point you should be able to make another cut.

You may need to “clean out” pieces of flesh remaining on top of the nail bed, and remember, the nail itself hasn’t formed any solid material this deep, so its going to look red. You will be able to tell that you’ve got it deep enough when you see the clear “weeping” of the nail (after you clear the blood out of the way. I cut my little finger to about 1/16 to 1/8 of an inch beyond the first joint using this method. I did shape the cut into a vee, and this was probably a mistake... keeping the cut as wide as possible seems work better. Also cut the sides back in the picture the blade should be close to horizontal “up” or “down”. This will prevent the skin from reforming over the newly exposed nail better.



As mentioned above, the nail needs air to “harden” so remove any bandaging as soon as you can.

A second procedure I’ve tried involves a “tool”. I used thin electronic printed circuit board material (0.31” thick, double sided”) obtained at “Radio Shack”. This stainless steel or steel (at a plumbing store or hardware store, or brass at a hobby store ought to work as well. Shape the material to the shape (roundedness) of your fingernail so it just fits over the nail, and into the skin at the base of the nail. The length ought to be about 2 inches or so. Carefully remove any extremely sharp points or burrs on this tool. Carefully insert the tool over your fingernail and push it under the skin at the base, until it’s as “tight” as you can stand. Using something like a pair of pliers or something equally heavy, start “tapping” the tool into your finger. This is not as painful as it sounds, if you use a lot of little taps instead of few big taps. If you mark 1/16 inch units on the tool (e.g. little dots), you can tell how far “in” it’s going. Make sure to drive it in parallel to the nail, not downwards into the bone. The tool will have a tendency to “follow” the nail bed inward. You should be able to get the tool “in” about 1/16 inch further every time. You should be able to push it in to almost

the depth you last had it before needing to start “tapping”. Continue this every 2nd day (giving 1 day “healing” until it is inserted about 1/4 inch past the first joint (or further if you dare). When you remove the tool, there will be a little but not too much bleeding.

Allow the finger and nail to “heal” but keep inserting the tool every day or so until it can be “comfortably” be inserted. With a pen, mark the outline of the tool, at its deepest insertion on your finger, then insert it. Securely tape the tool in place. Prepare your finger as indicated in the “pain” section... this is the cutting part. With a scalpel cut out the flesh outlined. Your scalpel or razor blade will be cutting up to the tool (the tool now prevents you from cutting too deep). Cut down your finger as far as you like. I used this technique on my ring finger, but only cut not-quite-to-the-joint. That was probably a mistake, I should have cut it past the joint. Careful, the tool gets looser as you cut away more flesh. This technique takes longer but appears to produce a cleaner cut. It is also more “exact”, you know how much you’re going to cut.

Finally, a compromise procedure. The first part is very similar to procedure 1. After desensitizing your finger, take a spatula or its rough equivalent and carefully push back the skin along the sides and top of the fingernail. Initially, you should be able to expose perhaps 1/16 inch of nail. Be persistent and keep pushing this back by applying even pressure along the side, and “up” above the top of the nail. Continue this process every day or so until you have about 1/8 to 1/4 inch deep “space” at the nail base. This will take less than 1 week. Then cut almost all of this “excess” flesh away using a scalpel or razor blade.



Let that heal for about 1 month, then repeat this procedure until you have exposed as much lunula as you desire. I am using this process on my middle finger.

Currently about 1/4 inch is exposed. When I started, the lunula was exactly AT the skin line. You make about 1/16 inch cumulative headway each cycle. Also there is not quite as much bleeding with these smaller cuts.

How painful are these procedures?

I control the pain (and bleeding) by relatively tightly wrapping a rubber band around the base of my finger until it is quite tight. This causes the entire finger to “go to sleep” in about 1/2 to 1 hour. I can then operate on my finger for a hour or so. After removing this “tourniquet”, the bleeding starts, and must be controlled, although the nerves are still somewhat asleep yet, so the pain is not too severe.

Feeling may not fully return to your finger for a couple of months, depending on how long the “tourniquet” has been on. Also, “in process” fingernails may develop bumps or thicken, and fingernails treated this way seem to grow slower than normal. Part of this is the nails tend to be somewhat thicker than “normal”, and part may be inadvertent destruction of some of the nail bed.

How have you achieved thickened fingernails, and how thick can you make them?

Take a spatula and carefully push back the skin along the sides and top of the fingernail.

Initially, you should be able to expose perhaps 1/16 inch of nail. Be persistent and keep pushing this back by applying even pressure along the side, and up” above the top of the nail. Keep applying an even (and fairly hard) pressure until the skin has been pushed as far as it can be. You will know this because the junction of the nail and skin will begin to “weep”, as the liquid part of the nail is exposed. It is important to make sure you get to the “weep” point particularly at the back of the nail. This will cause the nail to start to thicken, as it is now growing up, not out. You should repeat this procedure every couple of days until the desired thickness is reached. It is probably a good idea to exceed the thickness you want, then file the nail to smooth out any bumpiness that has developed.

If you have also chosen to expose a large part of the lunula, you can simply use a scalpel or razor blade to cut along the edges between the nail and the skin. You should notice the “weeping” noted above, which is a sure sign of thickening. Experimentally, I have gotten over 1/4 inch thick nails using this process. I have no reason to believe this is even close to the thickness limit you can get.

Do you have any additional modification plans?

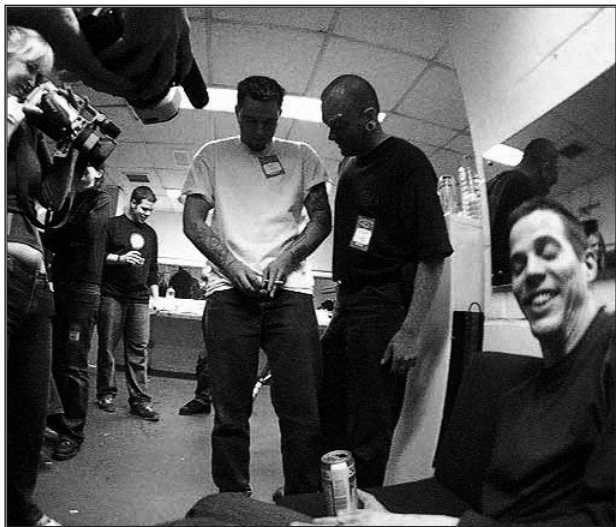
Current experimentation is not yet complete, and I will probably modify the little fingernail on my right hand as well, using the “tool” method, as I’ll have to use my left hand for “cutting” and I’m not that dexterous.

What do you say to someone who declares, “if God had wanted you to have fingernails like that he would have given them to you”?

“If God wanted people to eat cooked food, (S)He would have built furnaces into their throats!”

Steve-O

For a while in 2002 I got it in my head that I wanted to put out a video magazine of interviews and fun, and to launch that magazine's debut issue (or maybe just to excuse the cost of a trip), we went to the UK and met up with Jackass's Steve-O and interviewed him about his body modification and performance art. This interview was conducted by The Lizardman, and also there were Mars and Martini (of iWasCured). To start the interview off on a good foot, we brought him a bag of pot.



Steve-O turned out to be one of the most genuine, personable, and funny people I've had the opportunity to interview in a long time. I don't know if I can effectively convey his message with a cold transcript, but I'll try — Steve-O's stories are told viscerally, like his act, and the words themselves are only a small part of his repertoire. In any case, because he's one of the few celebrities that's gone to the effort to put up pictures and explanations for all of his tattoos on his website, we began by talking about those.

Tell me about your tattoos, or, as you put it, your “dumb tattoos”. What's the main motivation behind them?

I would say a lot of people get tattoos for what the tattoo means to them, but I tend to get tattoos for what the tattoo's going to mean to everybody else. All my tattoos are supposed to make people giggle.

You've reversed the perspective... instead of “it's for me”, it's “for the world”.

Yeah... For example, I've got an “I have a small wiener” tattoo.

From viewing his DVDs, and later seeing it live, I did not observe Steve-O's genitals to be freakishly small — the tattoo really is there not to advertise his shortcomings, but to brighten other's days (“Feel bad about yourself? Are people laughing at you? Don't worry about it — you can laugh at me if you'd like”). Over the next hour it would become very clear that Steve-O would martyr himself in an instant if it meant a legacy of humor.

You seem to have spelled it wrong — Weiner is in fact a small town in Arkansas of about six hundred people. Was that on purpose?

It was completely unintentional — I had it for three days before I realized it! I mean, three days after I got the tattoo I was just like, YES!

Unexpected bonus, right?

Yeah, totally... And then I have my anagram “I love to bone”, and my Holy Satan fish. This one’s not that funny... it’s just the owner of a bar in Albuquerque. He sold it so I put a sword through his head. Then there’s my smiley face off-road tattoo.

For those that didn’t see it in Jackass: The Movie, Steve-O was tattooed in the back of Henry Rollin’s Hummer as they tore across an off-road track at high speed. Needless to say, it’s a far from “accurate” tattoo — more of a strange blurry stippled mess that vaguely resembles a cluster of stars in the shape of a face — unlike his exceptionally well done full-back self-portrait tattoo.

Now, when you went into it with the off-road tattooing you obviously knew that the results were not going to be...

Yeah, I expected we’d do the whole arm... The guy showed up ready to do my entire arm!

You’ve mentioned stuff before about going for records... the world’s largest self portrait tattoo?

I say it all the time. “I have the Guinness Book of World Records largest self portrait, I just haven’t called them yet.” I haven’t talked to them, but I’m sure it’s the biggest.

That expression in the photo, did you specifically do a photoshoot or did you just pick a photograph you liked?

We had a deliberate photo session to shoot it — just to make a dumb face. It was a toss up... a tough decision between a bunch of them.

At this point Steve-O began to become quite animated, hamming it up and making silly faces to illustrate the photoshoot. It was quite clear that he was happiest answering questions where the answer involved a performance or at least a good joke. It’s not that Steve-O is “always on”, but more that he doesn’t have a stage persona — he’s just Steve-O, onstage or off. The conversation moves back to his primary drive: making people laugh...

I really like that just by walking down on the street I turn everybody’s day surreal. They may be driving to work and all of a sudden, “What the fuck was that?” It breaks them out of that mind set where they go to work, eat, sleep, die.

Yeah, some people just hate in their day or they’re having a shitty ass day, and they watch half an hour of me doing dumb shit and after that first half hour they didn’t have their shitty day, and life’s not a problem any more... But as much as I like doing the live tour, it’s historical significance I’m after. You know? I want to make people giggle forever.

One of my favorite Steve-O quotes is a scene in one of his DVDs where he’s asked something along the lines of “do you think you’ll ever invite Jesus into your heart?” and he replies “yeah, I might do that one day, but for now I’m pretty much dedicating my life to Satan.” You can tell when he’s said something that amuses him — his face contorts and lights up as he giggles at his own joke, and that spreads to everyone around him.

Why the Holy Satan Fish? What’s your take on organized religion?

The first person that proved the world is round got stones thrown at him. Religion is just hype — people get religious and they’re not being good because they’re feeling good and

acting good: it's just out of fear or threat. They're being good to literally to get a place in heaven...

But what if that is “the deal”?

What if it is the deal? It's pretty arrogant for us to feel we deserve our own judge and jury you know.

I still find a lot of resonance in myself with different Satanic philosophies but I've gone away from it because I feel that you're still playing “their game”.

Yeah, you know, I'm not into worshipping Satan, I'm just into disrespecting Jesus!

I'm not a vegetarian because I love animals, it's just that I really hate plants.

And, like clockwork, the entire room burst into mutual demonic laughter as Satan scores another victory with the youth of the day.

While Steve-O doesn't have piercings, he does have a five inch outline of a heart branded on his chest. We asked him about it and found out that like his tattoos, the brand had been done for the benefit of others. Unfortunately the censors killed his message.

Yeah, I should have fucked the lady that gave me the branding... We got permission from MTV to film me getting branded, so I got branded. When the footage came to the censors they said, “Oh we didn't say anything about any singeing smoking flesh!” and it wasn't allowed on TV. So I don't own the footage of getting branded and it's not allowed on TV so it happened for absolutely nothing... but yeah, I got a heart branding over my heart. A metaphor to show that love hurts.

Since you said love hurts, give us your take on pain.

I really don't have a very high threshold for pain. But I do seem to have an overwhelming need for attention that outweighs that! You know?

I think that if you did have a high threshold for pain your reactions wouldn't be something that people would want to see.

At this point the band that was opening for Steve-O came on and the noise in the bar we were using became overwhelming and we moved up to the green room where Steve-O told us about performing with the Genitorturers.

I hammered a nail through my scrotum once with the Genitorturers.

Oh yeah! GEN...

Yeah, the girl that hammers the nail through the scrotum. I don't think she contributes to the band musically: she's the actual designated “genital torturer” of the Genitorturers. She helped me hammer a nail through my scrotum into my leg.

Have you heard of Hell On Earth? It's a band they worked with on their film. In their act they put three live rats into a blender, spin them around, drink it, and then pour the rest on the crowd.

Wow. Is that legal?

That's why they don't go outside of Florida. The last time I was down there, for their Halloween show, the guy fucked a calf corpse on stage. He had painted his ex-girlfriend's name on the side of it, and when he was done said, "That's the last time I'll fuck that cow!"

Having sex with a calf corpse on stage...

[Steve-O's Lawyer]: And he nipped on stage?

Oh yeah. He took a sawhorse and mounted what was left of the calf on it.

Did he get a boner? You know, full boner?

[Preston Lacy]: Full boner?

Oh yeah, he jerked off — they all jerk off on stage all the time.

[Steve-O's Lawyer]: Full boner?

Steve-O's lawyer, who he travels with (for obvious reasons) was impressed due to his attempts earlier that night — on a \$100 bet — to masturbate to orgasm in under 60 seconds. He had enough trouble doing it with the entourage around, let alone buried in a calf corpse!

Their keyboardist wraps his dreads in anal beads but he makes sure they're used — he'll take a new one out of a package throw it out into the crowd and he won't put it in his hair until he pulls it out of somebody's ass.

Nice. Yeah, you know I'm always reaching into people's asses.

I pull half my show out of my ass.

[Steve-O's Lawyer]: Have you got any wiener piercing stuff?

Let's see some cock and balls.

The Lizardman whips out his bits for a quick show'n'tell, tapping his large apadravya on the lens of the camera not far from Steve-O's face.

Yeah nice! You know... I'll fuck with my scrotum and shit but that shit I'm just not down for.

Marty whips it out as well, showing off his giant scrotal ring.

[Preston Lacy]: Hey! I know you!

OK, stick it in my mouth dude.

Given that you did the nail, which is generally known as CBT ("Cock and Ball Torture"), is that something you get into in your personal life, sexually, or is it strictly a stage thing for you at that point?

Well, I try to steer clear of activities that other people are doing. People get their wieners pierced but I'm trying to make up my own stuff. I'm okay with piercing my nut sack with staples and stuff, but I'm simply not okay with piercing my shaft (laughs).

So it's strictly a performance aspect for you?

Yeah... It's really not sexual in nature for me.

Because there are a lot of people to whom it is a huge sexual thing. There are some that are just performance and there are people that blur the line: "This is how I do it at home, and this is how I do it on the stage."

Oh... okay...

Yeah, that's my thing, I've nailed my dick to a board for a show and that's great, but at home I just want the piercing.

Yeah, yeah, yeah... it's understandable. (Very uncomfortable laughing).

I wish I could convey Steve-O's expression at this point. It's clear we're moving into territory where he's starting to think, "the Human Lizard is weird enough, but who pounds nails through their junk for fun?" Best to move away from that line of questioning!

How much do you look at people in performance art at its height? Back in the 70's and 80's people were doing things like being crucified to a VW bug and being shot. Do you at all bring in that idea, or were they any influence to your show?

I'd say the biggest influence for me has always just been falling off of skateboards. But I did go to Ringling Brothers' Barnum and Bailey's Clown College. I can't say I've really drawn from other influences much — I've picked up different things from different people. It's really more of an attitude than a specific act.

How was your experience with Clown College? It's been basically shut down now.

Yeah, I was the last class.

Your experience with them was very positive... or?

Well, they didn't offer me a contract after I graduated you know.

So it could have been better (laughs).

They kind of knew better than to hire me once I got through Clown College. My only goal with it was to take all of this irresponsible behavior that I was videotaping and by getting the Ringling Brothers on my resume bringing legitimacy to all this idiotic shit. And it really worked you know. Even though I didn't get a contract with them, having the bragging rights is beneficial... "Oh, so that's why this idiot lights himself on fire and jumps off buildings."

How do you feel about imitators getting hurt?

I've done what I've done for years and I've kinda figured it out... I feel like I've earned the right to call myself a professional. I mean, I'm a professional and I simply don't think that Tony Hawk is responsible every time a kid falls off a skateboard. Anyway, if kids are getting badly hurt then they're not copying me 'cause I'm a pussy.

How about the other side of it where people think there's a trick?

They can suck my dick.

Do you get a lot of that? From my experience I get a lot of people coming up and say-

ing, “that couldn’t have been real” — how much more do you want? You got to stand two feet from it and it happened.

Yeah, fuck them.

The biggest “couldn’t be real” is probably the five shots IV drip.

We kept it mixed with saline but, yeah, we absolutely put five in... I wasn’t trying to die though.

We ran the math on that and we figured there’s a good chance you weren’t going to make it...

I had an unemployed registered nurse (laughs) that I talked into giving me the drip and we figured that it since enters my bloodstream directly it’s going to be instant. If I were to get woozy she’d stop the drip — you would know if anything went wrong right away.

So if someone dies doing this, they’re not really imitating you because you went through the research and you found what would help you out. There was thought that went behind it.

I do put a lot of thought into what I do, but my career kind of relies on me maintaining this impression that I’m really idiotic and reckless. People find out that I’m not really idiotic and reckless and everybody’s going to go bankrupt it’s a nightmare.

We pause to light up a joint, and after a long drag, we continue.

I didn’t know what I was doing the other day when Ryan Dunn fuckin’ strangled me unconscious six times.

Then I put a beer bong in my butt hole...

Oh yes! Enema alcohol will fuck you up!

We poured beer into the beer bong into my butt — I was kicking my legs. I was able to pound six ounces of beer at least into my ass and then I pulled out the beer bong and hiked up my ass up over my head and farted beer into my mouth. It was called the butt chug. Yeah, the butt chug.

One of the things that also struck me about Steve-O’s website was that he actually took part in the forums personally. I asked him why he went to the effort... While it was clear that he genuinely cared for his fans, not many celebrities go the extra mile and actually keep a channel of personal contact open... The answer should have been obvious!

“Because I’m a ham. I love reading shit about myself. (laughs)”

Before really understanding what Steve-O was about, we’d considered the question that now seems irrelevant: why not do more “hardcore” acts? After all, suspension and body modification groups have been doing intense physical shows for a long time, and I think coming from that realm one can easily make the mistake of judging both types of shows by the same standards. Apples and oranges...

Have you ever considered doing a flesh hook suspension?

Flesh hooks ... Nah. I’m not really into picking up other people’s shit you know.

There's always another variation of it though.

Well, one time I had gaffer tape (kind of like duct tape but it's a little less sticky) and I wrapped it around my cock and balls and I wanted to run a line out...

You wanted to do a pull?

Well, not like a pull, I was really ambitious. I wanted to lay down on the ground and get hoisted up. I know the counter-balancing is doable, but it was for this live TV show in England. I wound up not going for the hoist but I changed the stunt to "unwrapping the wiener mummy". You can show cock and balls on English television — prime time network television — as long as the cock's not hard.

Mr. Lifo, after he tore, he used to duct tape his dick back together because it was split in two. He used to say that unwrapping the tape was the worst part he ever had to go through... So if you were completely mummified...

Yeah, the duct tape's the worst. But it turned out pretty funny.

We talked about this a little before, but a lot of people will take something that is real, like stapling for instance... I know a million magicians who do "stapling" — when I staple it's for real, and obviously you staple for real. What do you think about people who are doing that in terms of faking it?

Faking it? Yeah, fuck them.

It gets to the point where everybody walks up, and if they see one person fake it, they think you do too. Even if you're bleeding your guts out.

I love a good bleeding staple hole, and I mean, you kind of get the sense right away that we're not faking it in our show.

That's what I love about a good skewer hole. I pull it out and I'm like — there — look — you think that's fucking fake? You try it.

Yeah, I'm pretty much stapling my ballsack to my leg every night... I'm looking for new space, going for different sides... Looking for new real-estate...

It's easy to write Steve-O off as a drunk kid that's fallen into being a hired-gun class clown when you see him pulling stunts like jumping off bridges in London after a night of drinking with friends... But he does have a serious side as well, and occasionally one sees that he might have a larger purpose.

The corpse performance — are you still thinking about that, or what's going on?

My first cousin is a licensed mortician and a funeral director, so he contacted me and I was just thinking, shit, my cousin plays with dead bodies for a living, and I videotape shit for a living... so I wanted to put it together — I was just curious how you'd go about getting a release form for a dead person.

Oh, you don't need to. I used to run a business specializing in wet part trade and it's "no questions asked." But on a moral level you can't do it.

Yeah, that's why I changed it. My first idea was to have the next of kin and interview them — you know, propose it to the family members that I wanted to do this public service announcement where I'd take a dead corpse and sort of mush the jaw and the lips around and the corpse would say things like, "Hey kids, I'm here to tell you to practice safe sex or

you'll wind up dead like me."

By the nature of having a positive message I'm using inappropriate fucking around with this dead body to do something good. I'd say that that justifies it, and I don't think I could be criticized for playing around with a dead body. But then I thought about it more and had a lot of feedback from people on the site and I kind of revised the idea, where I'm putting it out in the media that those are my intentions, and I'm just going to let it rest until someone who's terminally ill approaches me to properly secure the rights so that we know it's really their wishes.

Hopefully when they die, I'll go through the preparation for death with them, and I'll be counting on this person to come to terms with dying and die in peace... I need you to die in peace motherfucker so I'm not shitting my pants! Then when we do this puppet act, I'm just carrying out the wishes of the dead person... I'm not doing anything wrong.

It's going to upset everyone, but then when it upsets them I'm going to say, well look, if it upsets you to think about a dead body then how the fuck are you going to go about becoming a dead body, you stupid fuck? With this ridiculous safe sex message from the corpse, really, I'm just trying to force people to contemplate the idea that we're all going to die, because who wants to die thinking the last thought, "I should have... I should have... I should have..."

But of course dying and thinking, wow I'm dying and I'm going to be Steve-O's puppet in a couple of hours... That's kind of a neat thought too!

Your stunts are planned, but they're also risky — you don't want to die, but...

Without the element of risk, it's not really worth doing. But you can minimize the risks and stack the odds in your favor. I don't want to die — ultimately I want to live forever.

But you're doing risky stunts; if you do eventually get killed doing a stunt — say you jump out of a hotel window, miss the pool, and that's the end of you... What message do you want that death to have?

I don't know man ... everyday for me now is just bonus. I'm so lucky to have survived life so far. You could shoot me dead right now and still not be able to stop me from making people giggle for like generations to come you know. We're all going to die, but I'm going to continue to make people giggle!

I can't tell you conclusively if Steve-O is just a likeable guy that does funny acts who's found himself on stage through a strange set of right-place-right-time coincidences, or if he's an avant-garde performance artist fighting to spread his message through low-brow physical humor. His own answers are evasive on the subject — as far as his public message is concerned, his show is "all about getting drunk."

I can't tell you how most of his fans interpret it, but I'm not sure that it really matters to the thousands of screaming fans at his sold out shows... They're walking away laughing with their sorrows far away. But I can tell you what was clear — he genuinely cares for his fans, he's monstrously funny in person, and he puts on one of the more unique sideshows you can see. My take on who is is: a sacrificial lamb on the altar of humor. I don't know if the world will remember him, but they will keep giggling, and he and the subculture surrounding him have made a permanent and unique mark. Steve-O offers himself up for tortures in order to bring laughter to his fans.

“Joshua”

My second April Fools interview with “Joshua”, a guy who was transforming himself surgically into an “alien” in order to align himself with abduction experiences he’s had, was done in 2003, and is a reflection of the rather over-the-top and ham-fisted hippy ideals I held at the time. Because I’d run pranks the years before this, less people believed it, but still, many were fooled.



“...angels dressed in the prejudices of the twentieth century; avatars of another plane, speaking to us from truths beyond normal human understanding.”

— L. Stanley Davis

*A History of Transdimensional
Abduction*

After posting the pictures and experience of my forehead tattoo a few weeks ago (see “Does this mean I’m not getting that job at McDonalds?” in the tattoo section), I was quite surprised (and of course excited) to receive the following email:

Shannon,

“Long time listener, first time caller”... LOL... just saw your new tattoo and felt I should write you about a similar project I’ve been working on myself (and our mutual friend Lukas Zpira has been telling me to for ages). I’ve attached a few pictures and yes I will answer your questions!

Joshua

Suffice it to say that I most definitely had questions. I can’t confirm the validity of any of Joshua’s backstory of course, and he freely admits that it’s difficult to believe, but the mods speak for themselves. That said, while folks such as Katzen and The Enigma (who just released their album, check it out at HumanMarvels.com) are well known, there are many lesser known concept transformations such as the British performance artists who transformed themselves into witches and ghouls in the 1980’s or the “Belgian Furry Collective” who became wercreatures, or the many transformations by artists such as Steve Haworth in America, Emilio Gonzalez in Argentina, and Lukas Zpira in France.

That said, sometimes what’s more interesting than the modifications themselves are the motivations that brought the person to make such a radical change to their lives.

While he’s asked to remain anonymous for now, he has set up an IAM page at iam:Krill. Following is a transcript from the phone interview we did (Joshua is currently in Japan doing an art installation) along with some additional photos (thanks to Vanilla for transcribing it; as soon as the BMEradio server is up and running again I’ll post the MP3 file).

Thanks for talking to us about your remarkable transformation Joshua. Can you tell me a bit about what brought you to this decision?

When I was about eleven years old I was living with my parents on the [US military] base near Helsinki, Finland. My father was a radar technician involved in early detection in the case of Soviet attack. One night I was woken up by a loud hum and a thumping noise. When I opened my eyes I saw bright balls of light surrounding me — it was so bright that everything was white.

Suddenly there was a sound like an electrical “pop” and the balls disappeared and when my eyes readjusted three dark figures were standing there. I don’t really know what happened to me, but a few moments later the lights flashed again and I found myself with them in another place, what I now know was their “ship”. I was never afraid; if anything I felt a strong sensation of euphoria the whole time. They told me that it wasn’t safe for me to stay with them — something about my human physiology being incompatible with the speed or way we were travelling at or something like that.

To allow me to be there safely they did a number of procedures; what they did was typical of what other abductees report so I won’t bore you with that; I’ll post the full story and details to my IAM page if people are interested.

My next memory was of waking up in my bed the next morning. The memory of my abduction was vivid, but my father had been telling me bedtime stories about “UFOs” they’d tracked recently (which I never took seriously) and I figured it was just a dream. When I went to the kitchen for breakfast my parents broke some horrible news to me — my Husky puppy Charlie had died that night. Like all kids, I was close to my pet, and to try and make me feel better my mother unveiled early the dirtbike I was to receive for my birthday two weeks early.

When I got back from playing my clothes were dirty and I brought them down to the laundry room where I was suddenly shocked back to reality — standing over the basket that Charlie had slept in was the same Grey creature that had taken me to his ship the night before. He was stroking the blanket that Charlie had been lying on when he died — I didn’t move — I was terrified that he might see me. I didn’t know what to do.

I thought he hadn’t seen me as he ran his hands over everything, and picked up some of Charlie’s hairs and held them between his long slender fingers. He turned his eyes and made contact with me, and suddenly we were one — I was flooded with a terrible feeling of guilt and grief and loss... I could feel what he felt, and we were one. I was him, I’d done this. I mean, I, Joshua, hadn’t done this, but in his attempt to communicate with me the night before, something had fatally injured Charlie.

And in a blink it was over again. I was totally drained emotionally — I reached out and touched the Grey, I guess to try and give him some comfort, but, with a pop and a hum he was replaced with a bright ball that shot through the basement wall and was gone. In a daze I put my clothes in the wash and contemplated the death. “We” weren’t sad so much



because Charlie had died, but because we had killed him before he was “supposed” to die if that makes any sense...

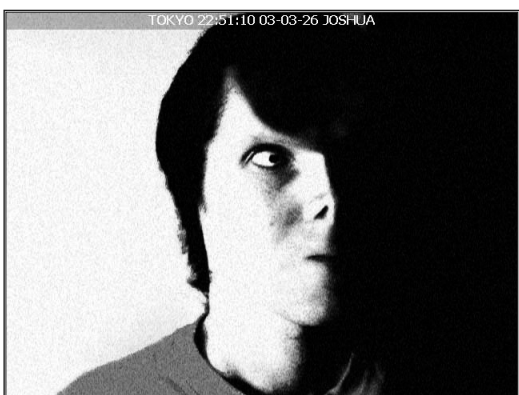
Even though that was nearly fifteen years ago now, I’m still remembering new details from it and still learning to understand how it affected my life. Overnight I went from a boy who didn’t take anything very seriously and spent his days playing to a being who felt connected to all life around him.... I don’t think I really knew how to express this love and commitment and connection to the universe I felt.

Ok... Wow... I don’t really know what to say. I can’t say that I’ve ever experienced anything with aliens, if that’s what you’re describing, but my experiences with the interconnectedness of all life are what have motivated most of my decisions over the past couple of years.

I know — I didn’t write you because your tattoo looks like crop circles, I wrote you because I thought you’d be able to relate to the message that was shared with me.

Did you tell anyone? What did your parents think? Your father must have been receptive at least?

Oh no! It turns out he really was just joking when he told me those UFO stories... When I told them they assured me it had all been a dream. If it wasn’t so real, I’d believe them... But how do you prove an experience like this? For all I know there’s some kind of X-Files



implant buried away in me somewhere, but it’s not like anyone’s going looking for stuff like that so I really have no idea. It was clear no one was about to believe me so I just bottled it up until, as is obvious, I couldn’t keep it inside any more.

Yes — let’s talk about how this experience actually made you want to start modifying your body.

I never had another “encounter” or “abduction” since that day, but I feel like in the joining I had imprinted the Grey’s

identity on myself on some level — much like how many Native Americans describe their relationship with their totem animal. When I thought of myself, I never was able to picture just Joshua again... I mean, I was still Joshua of course, but I was also that Grey being at the same time.

I think people have an “internal image” of who they are... When you close your eyes, you know where your arms are, where your heart is, where your mind is, what you look like, and all that. I had that, but it was overlaid with the Grey. Since that encounter I’ve not been able to think of myself as just human any more.

I know all of this must sound crazy, but what really drove me crazy was that what I saw in the mirror just wasn’t what I felt like inside... I had the wisdom to understand that it didn’t really matter, but it was just making me bonkers to be one person on the inside and an-

other on the outside. I tried to lose as much weight as possible and tried not to exercise and did get my build as close as I could to the Grey's, and it helped a lot, but I knew it was just a start.

Oh, at this point I was about eighteen and, other than a few tattooed buddies of my father's, I had no contact with "body modification" or had any concept that this type of transformation was possible outside doctors. My father was transferred to Fort MacDill in Florida, which eventually brought me to enrolling in USF's ...

Sorry — what's USF?

University of South Florida — I was accepted at their fine arts program, and to make a long story short I ended up in their art history exchange program in Paris [France] and met the amazing Lukas Zpira... I know he's started to become quite well known in America at this point so I'm sure listeners know who I mean.

Anyway, after meeting Lukas and seeing the amazing work he'd done on others like the Brazilian Monkey Boy and Pierre [ed: Joshua is referring to a well known French full-body concept transformation client of Lukas's that has been slowly "cyberneticizing" himself into robot form] who introduced us, I told him what I wanted him to do to me — although I have to admit that I never told him why. I hope he's not too shocked when he listens to this. He told me he wasn't really comfortable doing something this radical without a proper explanation, but after three years of calling him every two weeks, I guess he knew I was serious and wasn't just asking him on a whim.

He told me he respected my individualism and we began to seriously plan the work and he helped me work with both him and a tattoo artist at a studio he owned at the time (I think he's sold it since) to achieve what you're seeing in the photos and what you'll see in person this year when I visit you for ModCon.

I'll continue with Joshua's interview shortly, but since Lukas is on IAM as well, it was easy to do a brief interview about Joshua's procedures with him. I'd like to include that now; Joshua and I didn't really get too deep into the technical aspects.

Thanks so much for talking to us again Lukas. Can you tell us about the day that Joshua first contacted you?

Lukas Zpira: Everyone always asks me when they see Joshua's photos in my portfolio what I was thinking accepting him as a client, I mean, who wants to transform themselves into an alien, you know? But he is an artist, I understand what he seeks.

How did he approach you?

He knew Pierre. Pierre made the introduction and Joshua presented to me drawings he had made — the alien pictures like you see on the X-Files and what else. I had not done anything quite that extreme on an American (it's not so uncommon here in France). But, a few years passed, and I understood he was serious so I accepted the task.

Could you give me a run-down of the procedures?

Some of what he wanted was not possible... changes to the orbit of the eyes, his jaw work reshaping... I used a mix of implants and surgical works to shift the shape of his face, and

then with tattooing to pull it all together. The tattoos were not done by me personally.

On his mouth, he wanted it to be small and fine. I did this in two stages — I must say these aren't things I'd offer to just anyone when I tour. All work such as this I do only in France with a plastic surgeon associate I met through Les Tour d'Avril [ed: A French implant manufacturing company that's friendly to body artists]. First we excised triangular strips along the lip and pulled it "in" toward the mouth's inside. The effect was thinned lips to almost nothing, and no "divot" under his nose. In the second part we cut away the edge skin of his mouth and stitched it together. There was scarring but we knew we would tattoo over it.

Did this have any detrimental effects?

It did change his voice, but only a small amount... But yes, it did. Before the surgery we super-glued his mouth edges shut to see what it would sound like. He is harder to understand. He accepted that. The musculature has not changed — we knew we could reverse it should he desire.

And his ears?

I cut them off. It was not hard.

Um... OK. Simple enough I guess! Tell me about what you did to his nose.

I am proud of what we did. I had done a similar mouth procedure on another customer, but at the time the nose work was the first. If you look at anatomy, you will see the nose is a jigsaw puzzle of cartilage with skin stretched over. We used Jesse's [ed: Jesse Jarrell, a 3D implant designer that most will know better for his work with Steve Haworth of HTC, another pioneer of this type of transformation] 3D scanner at school to capture Joshua's nasal structure and designed the piece on his computer system.

The whole thing is in my portfolio. If Joshua permits it you may post the pictures to BME. We pulled out all of the cartilage in his nose through an incision under the upper lip. This left us with some loose skin in the shape of a nose but with no structure, no support. Then we inserted the implant which we had made on the school's polymer printer and pulled the skin tight over it.

It sounds mad, I know, but nose job surgery is so common that we had much to go by and it healed well. You can see this in his pictures... Also, we put in a few Teflon implants — that was first — and then tattooed over all of it in a light grey to unify and hide scarring.

Wow... Is he the most modified individual you've ever worked on?

I have travelled the world and done and seen many amazing transformations. I have done four other "alien" transformations (I think Melise has put some of them on our website), where the people wanted to be made into grey creatures, but it is true, Joshua is farther than anyone... But I am currently transforming a young woman into a Grey as well, very exactly the same. I have promised Joshua I will introduce them when he meets with me in Japan [ed: Lukas will be working in Japan shortly; check his IAM page for full tour details] — he is quite excited! I will take many photos of them both. I will also be in New York soon, and I can show people in my portfolio.

Thanks for talking to us about this Lukas, and I hope we can have you back again soon to do a full interview about everything you've been doing these past years.

And now back to Joshua...

Do you have more work planned for the future?

Joshua: There are a few things I'm not happy with; I'm not happy with my eyes. I want them to be bigger, and I want the orbits to be less pronounced... I do wear special scleral contacts to give it that illusion, and I hope one day to find an osteopathic surgeon who can help me with that... But I also don't want to cripple myself in the process. I'm trying to make myself happy and complete, and if I'm "broken" in the process it sort of defeats the whole purpose.

I'm not a big fan of my jaw either... I want it to be more triangular. I've talked to a few oral surgeons and they've told me that there's no way they could restructure my jaw and keep the dentition functional. So to do that I'd have to pull all my teeth and switch to custom dentures. As extreme as I may seem, I'm not crazy — that would be going too far I think.

Other than that I'd really like to lengthen my fingers... I fantasize about doing that trick they use to make models' legs longer — they did it in that movie *Gattaca* as well. Basically you break the bones in numerous places, and set them slightly stretched. It's very painful, but you end up with longer bones. I've been fiddling with a stretching apparatus, and I found a vet that said he'd help me with it, but in all honesty I'm really nervous about it. I don't want to screw up my hands.



Maybe someone on IAM will have direct experience for you... I'll be sure to include your IAM name with this interview so people can anonymously get in touch with you. I have to ask you though — why did you keep your hair? I'm sorry if this sounds insulting, but aren't aliens supposed to be bald?

(laughs) You're not the first person to ask me that — I don't "think I'm an alien" or anything goofy like that. I'm half way; a spiritual hybrid perhaps is the best way to put it. Anyway, I've had all kinds of different hairstyles over my life. I never really thought of my hair as being a part of me. More like a hat that's glued to my head, you know?

I will admit though that I also think it's a bit of a safety blanket... One day I'll probably shave it all off. I did it once, but I just couldn't go anywhere without people freaking out!

Yeah, that's true... I guess a hairdo is more of a fashion thing that "who you are" for most people. Let me ask you now, what's life like as an alien?

I'm not going to tell you it's easy. Obviously I can't — and don't — go out in public very often, and when I do I usually cover up. I'm proud of what I look like, but you have to un-

derstand that I did it for me, not for anyone else and it makes me sad when people turn me into someone to laugh at.

I'm sorry... and I know what you mean.

The amazing thing though is that when I first had this experience I didn't really know if I was alone or crazy, or if it was aliens, or if I'd met God, or what... and you have to admit, it's hard to take alien conspiracy crap seriously. But then I started meeting people; I don't know how we found each other, but I now have a small network of about forty people who've all had similar experiences and all were driven to change their bodies in similar — albeit less extreme ways... And now Lukas tells me he's working on a young woman to an extent similar to my own. I'm very much looking forward to meeting her.



I've learned that the world is a very big place, and when you're special, it's very easy to feel alone... But the truth of it is that even though it may not always seem like it, this world is also full of special people, and with open hearts we can and do find each other. I have faith that with Love we can all live joyful lives and serve the universe in the way we're meant to.

Were your body modifications instrumental in your understanding of who you are?

Yes, I think so. I'm not going to tell you there aren't other ways I could have gone about this, but being able to tackle it all hands on and really live it, I was able to find my place in the world and as a result I feel both closer to myself, closer to the life around me, and of course closer to the Grey that started me on it all.

I know I've identified in my own internal rationalization as an alien, but to be blunt, I really can't tell you if that's just a projection of having grown up around science fiction. It would be arrogant for me to say that we are the first generation to have this happen to us.... If I had been born four hundred years ago, would I have perceived him as an angel? I really don't know... I know he was good.

I often try and explain it by quoting Barbarella:

"An angel doesn't make love... and angel is love."

Thank you so much for talking with us, and I look forward to seeing you in a few months. Is there any last message you'd like to leave for the readers of BME?

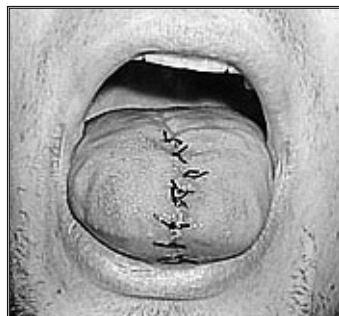
Love each other. That's all you have to do in life.

A Modified Man In The Air Force

Brent, like many BME members, found tongue splitting appealing, and decided to have it done. Happy with his results, he showed a few coworkers, but unfortunately, his employer, the US Air Force did not like what he did. They forced him to have damaging surgery to reverse the split, and wrote new regulations banning the practise. Since this interview was published, he's left the military and has resplit his tongue.

As those of you who read the BME newsfeed know, earlier this year the US military amended its dress code regulations to clearly ban certain types of body modification. Specifically, this included banning what it called “mutilation” — implants, split tongues, stretched ears, and so on. For example, the following was added to the Navy’s regulations:

8. Mutilation. Intentional body mutilation, piercing, branding/intentional scarring that are excessive or eccentric are prohibited. Some examples are (1) a split or forked tongue; (2) foreign objects inserted under the skin to create a design or pattern; (3) enlarged or stretched out holes in the ears (other than a normal piercing); and (4) intentional scarring that appears on the neck, face or scalp.



What you may not know is that those regulations were passed as a retaliatory measure against a small number of people in the military who were involved with heavy body modifications on their own time. Even though these activities hurt neither their performance or their commitment to the military or their country, nor did they reflect poorly on the military, these individuals were forced to have dangerous and damaging surgery to “correct” their body modifications.

BME had the opportunity to interview the airman that appears to have been the catalyst in this entire process. I'm keeping his identity anonymous here so as not to further endanger his chosen career. He is an IAM member though and I'd be glad to put other members in touch with him.

What made you decide to join the military?

As far back as I can remember I either wanted to be in the Army or fly in the Air Force. Around ten my uncle would give me Army stuff from work — he was a Supply Sgt. in the Army National Guard. At around sixteen I learned that my chances of flying were slim to none... That and the fact that I wanted to get out of my parents’ house as fast as I could influenced my decision to join the Army.

Right after my junior year of high school I signed up for the Army Guard and did basic training, and then I did my senior year of high school. That way I could get the discipline — the discipline that I needed to keep my life from going down the drain.

After two years in the Army Guard I decided that I was not far enough from home — I needed more distance from my roots, so I went into the Active Duty Air Force in August of 2000. As it stands now I am preparing to go to Guam and then fifteen months later I will be in Fairford, UK.

And what made you originally decide to get a tongue splitting?

I had always been interested in heavier body modifications, and the research I did about tongue splitting showed me that:

- (a) It was a way to move forward spiritually. I believe that all body modifications are an expression of what your mind thinks your body is (or should be)... Something akin to aligning your inner image of yourself with the outer image.
- (b) It was a reversible procedure (or so I thought).
- (c) It was not against any current military regulations.
- (d) There was very little chance of complications and it heals quickly.
- (e) It was easily hidden.

How did you actually do the procedure?

The procedure was done three times in total. The first time, March 16th, 2002, it was done by a friend using scalpel. Another friend recut it for me on August 1st, and then again on Christmas Eve of 2002, to cut out the regrowth using a cautery pen.

Did your tongue splitting affect your effectiveness as an airman in any way?

In my opinion I don't believe that it negatively affected me in any way. I took leave for the procedure. When I went back to work I was talking normally and the people that I work with never had a problem with it.

Was it apparent to others?

Unless I showed you that it was split or if you were looking hard in the right light for the split you couldn't tell. If you were looking for it, it looked more like a crease in my tongue than a split... Plus at work I didn't show it off. If someone asked me I would usually tell them that I was not comfortable with that subject in the work environment.

Anyway, most of my fellow airman just wanted to know the usual questions that all modified people get. "Did it hurt?" "Why did you do that?" "How much did that cost?" ... Stuff like that. I think we've all gotten the same questions at one point or another. Once they got the answers to their questions they seemed to accept it. I've never heard a fellow airman that has talked to me complain about it.

How did your CO find out about it?

The day after I got it done I went and talked to a "friend" who was also on leave. I went by his dorm room to pick up some stuff I'd let him borrow. He asked me why I was talking funny, so I showed him and asked him not to tell anyone at work.

I wanted to explain my reasons to work on my own time, but the next day he went out of his way to go in to work and tell my shop chief... Then it was a matter of the news traveling up the chain of command.

How did they respond at first?

The way that the military responds to most things that they cannot figure out... they "up channel it".

By the time I made it off leave — only five days — it was already at 9th Air Force Legal. I won't say how far past that it went but it went a lot further than I think anyone thought it would. After about three months of trying to decide out what to do they came down and said that there was no legal recourse that they could find, but the matter was still open.

On January 1st, 2003, a new regulation went into effect, a broad regulation that bans, among other things, tongue splitting.

What options were presented to you?

I really had no options. I was given a direct order by my CO to reverse it. I was given about forty minutes notice of this meeting, and then was told that in five hours I was going in for an evaluation. Then four days later I had another evaluation, and then three days after that I had the surgery. The only options I had were obey, disobey, or fight it via legal, which would have meant losing my orders to Guam.

Why do you feel the military felt so strongly about this?

I think they thought that I was sticking my nose up at that them, like I was daring them to try and do something about it... But that was not my intention at all — I just did it for me.

Why did you choose to reverse the split, rather than say, quitting?

Ever since I joined the Air Force I have wanted to do my twenty years and retire at thirty-seven. I'd have lost everything I've worked toward. If I have to bend for some new regulations to fall into line and complete this goal of mine, then so be it.

How was the reversal procedure and the subsequent healing?

The procedure was about an hour long. It was done under general anesthesia so I don't remember any of it.

They cut all of the skin from the inside of my tongue and stitched it up with twelve stitches. I was out of work for a week with far more extensive pain and swelling than when I had the split done.

Four days after the surgery I noticed that I had a large loss of feeling and taste in the front of my tongue. I brought this up at my first check-up, and was told that it would be weeks before I got feeling back. When I went back for my two-week check-up, I brought it up again. The doctor said that it could be months.

It's now been two months and while there has been some improvement, there is still a large loss of feeling and taste. I can feel the mass of scar tissue in the front of my tongue. Even though I am classified as "fully healed" I still have problems with it.

That doesn't sound very nice at all...

I also have a shorter tongue and less movement in the front part. I have throbbing pains that would be best described as "ghost pains". I also catch myself trying to move it independently as if it was still split, since that's how it is in my mind.

Not only that, but in my work environment I feel I've lost some trust in the system. Normally, whenever there's a change in a regulation the people that it affects get grandfathered,

which is how it was when new tattoo regulation came out — they didn't force everyone to have emergency tattoo removals. I feel that because I was just a single airman the military didn't take grandfathering my case seriously.

If you'd known the problems the reversal would cause you, would you still permit them to do the reversal procedure?

It would have made me take a step back and think harder as to whether or not I should fight the ruling or not... I guess it depends on if I get full function out of my tongue back. I am in the process of seeing what legal options I have if full function does not return.

Did anyone appear to “feel bad” about forcing you to undergo this procedure? What about when they saw the aftereffects?

As far as the people that out-rank me I've not had any sympathy for any of the pain or on the issue of the fairness of the order. I was forced to return to work six days after my surgery when I still had stitches and a substantial amount of pain. I had to just sit at work for three days because I was not allowed on the flight line because I had such a bad speech impediment that I couldn't use a radio.

When I came in with stitches my supervisors said that it looked really “sick” and told me not to show them again. Now most of my supervisors say you can't tell that I ever had it done — when I tell them that I can tell on account of having no feeling in my tongue they just dismiss it.

How did your fellow airmen react to the reversal?

Most of the people that know me or of my case thought it was wrong of the military to force me to reverse it. A few have had the attitude of “you should have known that this was coming when you first did this”, but they're a very small minority.

I've also had a few that wanted to help me fight this, going so far as to start writing letters to the Air Force Times. Out of fear of backlash to my fellow airmen I asked them not to do that. Overall most people simply say that the military should have grandfathered me.

What would your advice for “the modified” also interested in a military career be?

I've never suggested someone should get into the military. It's a personal choice. If you want to get into the military and don't have any tattoos showing on your forearms or above the collarbone, then you'll be welcomed as any non-modified person would. If you're into piercings on the other hand, you'll be ridiculed until you either take the piercings out or learn to deal with the ridicule.

Note that when I say “piercings” I mean those that can't be seen; piercings below the neck. In the Air Force you can have holes in your lobes. You just can't wear jewelry on base.

For people into the heavier side of body modifications I'd tell them to stay away from the military. If you get modified after you enter the military then you'll be in violation of their rules and regulations. If you're modified before the military they probably won't let you into the service anyway.

All that said, do you personally support the military's new regulations on body modifications?

I don't see how I can support a regulation that was unfairly enforced on me. So personally, no, nor do I support them from a professional point of view. I was not treated fairly.

I believe that these regulations are too broad and too open to interpretation. Now anything that makes you look anything other than, as I say, "Christian Conservative", can be considered violating a regulation. It's up to the commander to decide whether or not it's violation...

Does the military in general consider the bodies of its staff its "property" to surgically alter as it sees fit? That is, does this attitude manifest itself in other ways as well?

The military sees its personnel as government property. They can't force you to get procedures, but on the other hand, the military is not forced to keep you either, nor are they forced to give you an honorable discharge if you decide not to get a procedure that they want you to get done.

Almost every person in the military is told that if you get a sunburn bad enough to stop you from wearing your uniform that it's "destruction of government property".

Do you know if this has affected others in the military?

Yes, it has... I talked to a fellow IAM member that is the Marines about this who had similar issues. Also, the new regulations forced an airman at my base to remove his 000 gauge plugs in his lobes so that they shrink back down. He never wore them on base though. Even though he did not break the regulation he had the same choice as to whether or not to fight as I did... And he made the same choice I did. He now has about a 6 gauge hole. So as to not get into trouble if someone sees him he wears a small mall-bought post in it.

Thank you for talking to us, and good luck in Guam.

"The modified" are a fascinating cultural group. We span all religions and political leanings, and, unlike race, we actively choose this path. While some would argue that we are born into it, just as people are born into a sexual orientation, I would argue that all humans are born with the innate desire to self decorate and explore and enhance themselves and the world through body modification — most people are simply too repressed and afraid. In any case, before I get off track, on many levels we are a distinct cultural group and it's important that we learn to think and act as such when we need to.

Farrakhan and other minority revolutionary leaders often refer to the military as "the white man's army". What I think is meant by that, on a more general level, is that the military exists to defend a certain mainstream status quo, rather than to protect the interests of minority and subcultural groups that don't have massive representation in the governance of the nation. As such, these leaders hold that when minorities enter the military, they may be fighting to keep empowered a group that does not act in their best interests.

I can't say whether "a black man has no place in the white man's army", but I can tell you with certainty that "a modified man has no place in the unmodified man's army" — you don't even have to take my word on it. It's the law! They've illustrated through forcing this involuntary surgery to "make normal" the appearance of their staff that they're willing to go to extreme lengths to destroy freedom of the body. That says to me that all modified people, and all people who care about the rights of the modified should seriously consider whether it is in their best interests to

assist in a military-industrial complex that seeks to destroy us.

“Seeks to destroy us”...

It seems like a crazy statement, doesn't it? But we've just watched one of our friends get a body modification that brought him closer to spiritual fulfillment and enriched his life... Then we watched the government step in and offer him two choices: (a) the end of his life as he knew it, or (b) surgical destruction of something he loved and had enhanced his life.

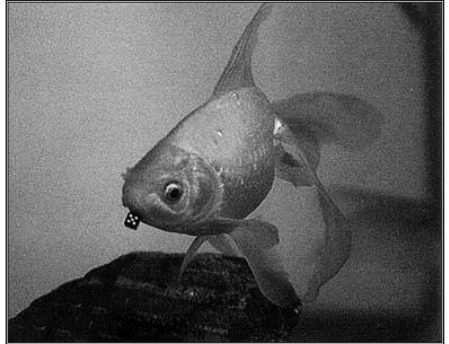
This isn't the place for me to be making larger sweeping statements about the military — my pacifist attitudes on that subject are no secret to readers of my IAM page. However, I do need to point out that a nation's military on some level must represent the will and the face of its people. What message is being sent by these acts and these regulations to the people of America, and, since America imposes its military might — and the culture it espouses — on the world, what message is being sent to the modified people of the world? What freedoms are being protected, and what freedoms are being trampled?

Fish Piercing

As a vegan (at the time), I felt that one of the best ways to get people to think about animal rights was by pointing out hypocrisy... After all, if someone can express outrage over a piercing on a goldfish — something that's very difficult to decry on a non-emotive objective level — how can one not express outrage at the way most food animals are treated? That said, the article generated surprisingly little negative feedback, and in fact, may have done the opposite!

Piercing a pet fish. It sounds sick, doesn't it? Some kind of animal abuse?

Maybe it is, but as humans we have always modified our pets with everything from identification tattoos and brands, to cosmetic surgery such as ear cropping, tail docking, and toe amputation (ie. the honest name for “declawing”). Many modern animal enthusiasts decry the traditions as barbaric, while advocates insist it allows them to maintain a closer bond with their pet and thus the pet lives a longer and happier life.



In addition, we pierce the ears of cattle (for identification tags), and we implant pets with chips to track them should they become lost. We accept that anglers may sport fish, and as a result give lost and returned fish permanent lip piercings on a regular basis — to say nothing of our mass imprisonment and killing of animals in the food industry. Short of the most radical of vegans, we're all in a massive glass house when it comes to our treatment of animals — almost all of us have done far worse to animals than piercing them.

But still, is piercing a fish acceptable? It may be hypocrisy to object, but that's far from a justification after all. BME recently had the opportunity to talk to a piercer in Arizona on this subject after he sent us pictures of the fish above wearing a labret.

What gave you the idea to pierce a fish in the first place?

I was bored, and the fish was at the shop. It all started out as a joke, but it looked cool and it never affected him adversely. So I just left it in.

How did you decide that it was morally “ok”?

First off, goldfish have a thirty-second memory. Secondly, how many fish are out there with lures attached to them with treble hooks? At least this fish had some jewelry!

How did you decide on the specific piercing and design the procedure itself?

The labret was the only thing that wouldn't disrupt the fish's life. Piercing the fins was out of the question. The jewelry is a 3/16 Labret from Good Art — nothing but the best internally threaded jewelry for my fish!

What was the procedure?

It was a freehand piercing. My apprentice held the fish, and I pierced him. The labret stud has an acrylic end for less weight. We took him out of the water to do it, and once done we put him back in the tank.

How did the fish respond to the piercing? Did it affect swimming, feeding, or anything?

The fish seemed completely unaffected. He ate right after, and it did not weigh him down or affect his ballast.

What was the “aftercare” and healing like?

Not sure how to answer this one... he never “complained”.

Did the fish lead out a normal life?

Yeah, he lived for quite some time afterward [*ed. note: as in years, not days*]. I moved, and the water temperature in the tank changed by ten degrees — that’s how he died... sob... snuffle snuffle.

You’ve pierced other fish as well — same story on them?

No, on the first one I used a CBR and it weighed him down. I took it out because I felt bad for him. Cornelius was the second, and the third was a fish at a restaurant/bar that has a pond. He was fish-napped!

This fish was on display in your studio — how did customers react? Did you ever get threatened by the SPCA or anything?

Customers loved it — they even brought their parents in. There was another studio in town that had fish in their name so I brought them pictures. The owner wasn’t amused but the piercer thought it was hilarious. A few hippies gave me some flack, but once the whole “lure” argument was brought up they saw how it wasn’t really any worse.

Do you have pets in general?

Not at present, but I am an animal lover. I’ve had dogs, iguanas, snakes, rabbits, rats, hedgehogs, prairie dogs, hamsters and yes, fish.

Would you pierce animals other than a fish, like a dog, or is it “just fish”?

Maybe an Abyssinian [*ed. note: a kind of cat*], but nothing else.

What would you say to people who say you’re abusing animals?

That maybe they should look at all the other psychos out there. My fish led a normal life.

If someone brought their fish to you for a piercing, would you do it and what would you charge?

Yes, as long as it was a fish of substantial size. People have asked me to pierce Betas and there’s no way I would. I don’t think I could charge for the service, just the jewelry.

What’s morally worse, piercing a human baby’s ears, or piercing a fish’s “labret”?

Well, I pierced a baby’s lobes once and I’ll never do it again! I’ll pierce fish again though.

Do you have a special name for the piercing? Or is “labret” the right word?

No, labret is what I always called it.

Thanks for talking to us about this.

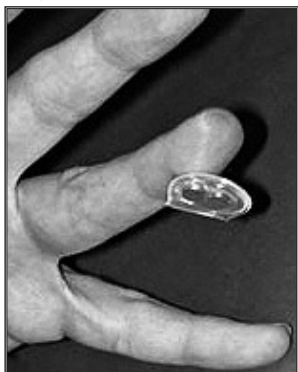
So there you have it — draw your own conclusions as to the moral implications, but if you decry it, I hope you'll consider thinking about your other interactions with non-human life on this planet as well.

But let me strongly emphasize that I've published this interview for informational purposes only! I am absolutely not advocating the piercing of animals, and while William's procedures on fish appear to have been a success that caused no apparent harm to Cornelius, attempting the same act on cats, dogs, and other animals is far more likely to result in them gnawing or scratching the piercing out, and injuring themselves in the process. If you care about your animals, please, very seriously consider how something like this will affect them.

If your dog wanted a piercing, I'm sure he'd ask you for one.

Todd Huffman

To me, one of the most important modifications covered by BME was “magnetic vision”, the implantation of small magnets in the fingertips. These magnets vibrate with electromagnetic fields, allowing the bearer to intuitively sense them (in effect making them tactile objects). This was a collaboration between Steve Haworth, Jesse Jarrell, and Todd Huffman, the first person to get the implants. This is an interview with Todd — “The Gift of Magnetic Vision” — done in 2004.



It's hard to deny that Steve Haworth has been one of the most influential and innovative voices in body art over the past decade. In the field of implants as sculptural art he has singularly defined the art form, and with the assistance of Jesse Jarrell (iam:Mr. Bones) has continued to escalate it into increasingly refined forms. I heard a rumor recently that they'd been experimenting with magnetic implants, and I thought to myself, “cool party trick”, and checked out the pictures on Steve's page.

A fascinating letter from the client was posted along with it — he'd had a small silicone-coated neodymium magnet implanted, and it turned out to be far, far more than just a party trick!

Sensory Experimentation Somatosensory Extension Reflections by Todd M Huffman [excerpt]

I am now able to perceive magnetic fields in ways not naturally possible. The sensation is different than holding a magnet, as the neurons are stimulated with a higher resolution. With the implant I can detect subtle changes in polarity and strength that I cannot when equipped with a magnet in the conventional manner. Yet the most significant observations have come from another property of implants, their relative permanence to exogenous artifacts. Being able to perceive magnetic fields has expanded my conscious perception of magnetic fields 'in the wild'.

In one sensory incident, I was walking out of the library, and I sensed the inductive anti-theft device. I have walked in and out of dozens of libraries hundreds of times, and never once have I thought about the magnetic fields passed through me to prevent me from stealing a book. I have been intellectually aware of the mechanism, but never paid attention until now. Another time I opened a can of cat food for my girlfriend's pets, and I sensed the electric motor running. My hand was about six inches away from the electric can opener, and I was able to sense where the motor was inside of the assembly. Again it brought my attention to a magnetic source that I understood intellectually, but would have otherwise been unaware of. I feel I am one step closer to fully grokking the reality I inhabit.

The experience of my implant is not nearly as rich as my visual or auditory sensation, but nevertheless after a week it has dramatically changed the way I think about my daily sensory experience. A small magnet embedded in a finger may seem like a trivial exercise. I find it difficult to explain the significance, somewhat akin to trying to

explain to a blind person what it is to see. The problem isn't defining the technical characteristics of the visual system, but one of trying to convey what conscious perception of certain wave frequencies does to the way a person conceptualizes the world.

In modifying my body I have ever so slightly altered the way I organize the world in my mind. I eagerly await the day in which I can integrate more elaborate senses into myself. With every passing minute I try to see radiant heat, hear radio waves, and think the thoughts of those that pass by. And by better understanding what I cannot feel, I can fully appreciate what I have now.

I was floored. This seemed to me to be one of the biggest steps body modification has taken. The notion of enhancing sensation is nothing new to anyone with genital modifications, but the idea of adding something fundamentally new to the function of the body is a radical concept that only a few people have done meaningful experiments in. I had to interview Todd about his experiences, and he was happy to help us out.

Tell us a bit about yourself... Where are you from?

I grew up in Los Angeles and a small town, Teutopolis, in southern Illinois. When I was growing up my main interests were in emergency medicine. I started college studying nursing, with plans to continue on to medical school. While in high school I got my certification as a Nurses Assistant, and completed a course to be an EMT. These experiences are relevant because I was very thorough in my research on body modification, the effects of magnetic fields on tissues, implant construction, and the specific procedural skill of Steve Haworth (the implant artist who worked with me on the project).

I worked as a nurse's assistant in the St. Louis University Hospital Neurology unit, where I developed my interest in neuroscience — and my aversion to medicine. I don't dislike the medical profession per se; I just prefer an occupation with more freedom. I moved back to California to attend California State University at Long Beach and studied neuroscience. After graduation I took a job with the Alcor Life Extension Foundation, and will be working there for two years until I start graduate school.

One important aspect of my life is transhumanism. I have been identifying myself as a transhumanist since the age of thirteen, when I discovered the website of the Extropy Institute and the philosophical writings of Max More and Nick Bostrom, among others. The transhumanist philosophy has provided a useful framework for me to build ideas and concepts upon, such as the concept and practice of attempting to extend my sensory experience.

Did you have other modifications before this particular “upgrade”?

Before this my body modifications have been limited to piercing, both cosmetic and play. Our society has perfected the art of pain avoidance and disassociation from our bodies. Piercing and other body modifications bring the mind back to the body and increase a person's awareness of their physical self. For such a materialistic society, America has lost touch with their physical self.

So this the first “functional” modification you’ve gotten?

Yes. The magnetic implant is probably the crudest form of functional implant. It pales in

comparison to much more complex implants that interface directly with neurons, such as cochlear implants. As a point of clarification, my magnetic implants are more effective as a conceptual tool, rather than for real world use. The plans were more for the exploration of sensory experience than for a specific task that would increase my functional abilities.

For those that aren't familiar, could you tell us a bit about cochlear implants?

Cochlear implants are a medical device that bypasses damaged structures in the inner ear and directly stimulates the auditory nerve, allowing some deaf individuals to learn to hear and interpret sounds and speech.

My involvement with cochlear implant research was analyzing the electrophysiological brainstem response of implant patients with a particular disease, auditory neuropathy. I did this for a semester as an independent project, and the bulk of my time was spent in front of a computer working with numbers. However I did on several occasions assist in the data collection procedures, and talked with people who had cochlear implants. I was fascinated with the possibility of gaining a sense with technology that was forbidden by nature.

Fortunately I have all the senses normally accorded to a human being. Current medical devices are not capable of giving me additional sensory experiences. Steve Haworth, Jesse Jarrell, and I were discussing various implants, and Jesse mentioned a friend of his who got a steel sliver in his finger and could sense speaker magnets. Jesse and I had previously discussed implanting magnets, and the idea was born. I was highly motivated to get the implant because of the possibility to explore a new sensory modality.

How did you refine the idea into something functional?

I spent several months researching magnetic implants. I was concerned the magnet would attract iron particles from degraded red blood cells and cause irritation in the surrounding tissue. A significant amount of research has been done by the medical field and my concerns were alleviated. After that Jesse and I ordered a batch of neodymium magnets from a supplier and played with size combinations. After determining the sizes and shapes of the desired implants, Jesse made several prototypes. Jesse and I tested the implants to make sure the coatings were sufficient, and Jesse made the implant that was actually implanted.

How was the healing?

Healing was great. I had feeling back by the next morning, and full sensitivity back in a week. The scarring is minimal, and is not noticeable unless you are looking for it. The next day my finger felt like I had slammed it in a car door, but that is expected. There has been no prolonged discomfort.

Is the implant visible?

Not visible at all. If someone palpates my fingertip and knows exactly where the implant is they can feel it. A friend of mine couldn't find it until I pointed out the location.

The goal was to have it as unobtrusive and natural as possible. The reason for this was not to hide the implant from other people, but to hide it from myself. I want the sensation to seem as naturally endogenous as possible. I want the sensation to integrate as much as possible with the rest of my sensory experience.

How does it feel to you in the absence of a magnetic field?

I feel nothing, just like any finger experiencing normal conditions. Humans ignore the majority of sensory experience, a necessity given the barrage of information thrown at us by reality.

And when you move into a magnetic field, what does it feel like?

There are two distinct feelings I get from fields. For a static field, like a bar magnet, it feels like a smooth pressure. Imagine running your hand slowly through lukewarm water, and brushing your finger across the top of a large invisible marshmallow. That is the closest description I can give. Oscillating fields, such as electric motors, security devices, transformers, et cetera, vibrate the magnet. This sensation is much more sensitive and noticeable.

How sensitive is? Can you tell the direction of a field?

The implant is rather sensitive. I can tell the polarity of a bar magnet from several inches away. So far the furthest I have felt an oscillating field has been about two and a half or three feet. That was the security system in a video store, which uses magnetic induction.

You can “feel” for anti-theft devices? You’re getting all the super-villains excited!

All you would-be criminals don’t get your hopes up. I can only detect the active components of anti theft devices — those stands by the exits of stores. The actual component inside the item does not generate its own field. I just get a buzzing feeling when going through security systems.

How “fine” a sense is it? Does it feel like a sense like sight or hearing, or more like a “sixth sense” in that it’s more of a “gut” or instinctual sense?

The feeling is rather fine. I can detect different frequencies in the magnetic fields. I haven’t done experiments yet to determine the sensitivity range, but I will in the near future. The sensation is rather intuitive, and exploring a magnetic field is not unlike trying to identify an object with your eyes closed.

Does it feel like a sense in and of itself, or is it more of an “interface” between a sensory device and your nervous system?

The implant does not feel like an ‘alien’ artifact, it is much closer to a natural sense. When the sense is not active I don’t feel the implant and don’t really think about it. If the sensation were coming from an external source, it would feel much more like an interface object rather than an actual sensory experience.

Will you expand this to your other fingers as well, or do you feel that wouldn’t add to the experience? I’m having visions of mechanics that will be able to run their fingers over an engine and diagnose problems because of imperfections in the magnetic fields.

I don’t think this type of implant will ultimately prove to be useful. However, my intentions were exploratory, and the case may be that this type of implant has many more uses. There are a few ideas I have that may involve adding more implants.

Do you have plans to add other senses as well?

I would like to add as many senses as I possibly can. One area I am considering is using

the implant, and others as needed, as a form of haptic feedback. Computer interaction is developing at a snail's pace, whereas almost every other index of computer development is racing at exponential rates. Our main form of computer input — the keyboard — is over a hundred years old. Even the mouse is over thirty years old. Monitor technologies have progressed very slowly, and are fundamentally the same as they have always been. I don't expect everyone to go out and get magnets implanted in their fingers, but as a society we need to think outside the box and devise new ways to interact with computers.

Are you finding that it is having a functional impact on the way you perceive and interact with the world?

The implant has changed my perception of the world around me in a small but significant way. Information is constantly flowing around us, and we remain blissfully unaware of most of it. Having a tiny bit of that data stream pulled into your conscious awareness is a shocking experience. Functionally I have changed very little, but I am now more aware of what it is I don't feel. There is an untold amount of information flowing around us that we don't experience; my implant makes me think about this more.

Did you do any psychological (or other) preparatory work before the implant?

Before the actual implant there were several months of planning and hypothesizing, and thus I was well prepared for the procedure and the implant. There were unexpected sensations, and some sensations were missing I thought would be noticeable. I can't say I would recommend any particular preparation, as a person willing to put implants into themselves should be able to handle small changes in their sensory paradigm.

Can I ask a little about your research work for Alcor, and how that relates to this implant?

Alcor and the body modification community have a lot in common. The classic members of both communities are individualists with strong personal identities. Neither group is afraid to push the envelope of what is accepted by the populace around them. Transhumanism is a philosophy that does not encompass all members of both communities, but I have noticed a significant level of overlap. I think this is the case because transhumanism as a philosophy encourages exploring boundaries and transforming yourself.

Alcor employs me as a Research Associate, and I am part of the research and development team. My main task is to research and evaluate methods of preserving and storing neural tissue. My research at Alcor is unique because no other organization is concerned with preserving tissue in the manner we are. The research is significant not only to cryonics, but a lot of our research has applications in other areas, such as organ transplantation and storage.

All of this ties together because ultimately I am interested in pushing the boundaries. Pushing boundaries is, in my opinion, the quintessential characteristic of humankind. An a priori acceptance of the status quo on the part of our ancestors would leave you and I as naked apes hiding in the trees, or more likely, extinct. Both cryonics and body modification are controversial and exciting, just like writing or forging metal or flying.

How did you meet Steve and Jesse, and what made you decide to work with them, rather

than working with a doctor or more traditional medical team?

Jesse I met at a Los Angeles Futurists meeting, where we were attending a talk by Syd Mead. Later I met Steve through Isa Gordan, an artist in the Phoenix area.

As Steve and Jesse became friends with me, we discussed body modification and my medical background, and Steve allowed me to observe several procedures. Steve's protocols for infection control and cross contamination avoidance are on par with a hospital setting, and I felt confident in his technical abilities. In addition, there is a high level of artistic vision in implant work, which I do not think can be met by conventional medicine.

So there were advantages to doing it without the constraints of the medical industry?

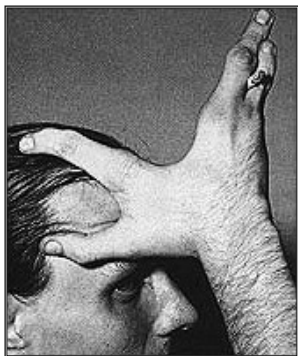
Steve and Jesse provide the professionalism and concern for safety provided by traditional medicine while incorporating artistic vision and skill. Doctors, even cosmetic surgeons, would have likely shied away from doing this type of implant work. The fear of the unknown would dissuade most doctors from assisting me in the project.

Any advice for people considering adding this sense or others?

Exploring sensory experience is a fundamental quality of human beings, be it through implants or pharmaceuticals or technology. Before any experimentation you are obligated to yourself to perform thorough research into the subject, as it is very easy to harm yourself. Personal responsibility is even more important than experimentation.

“Homo Raelianis”

I felt a little bad about my 2004 April Fools article, “The Raelians: Building Better Humans?”, which claimed to be an interview with Rael about genetically engineered superhumans, because a year later I met a Raelian doctor in Venezuela and he was a very bright nice guy... But I also think they deserve a little ribbing over their cloning fiasco. This was mostly inspired by a book on mutations that I was reading at the time.



I expected feedback on my last column, “What the modified can do for the mutants of the future”, which outlined how body modification could help prepare humanity for major morphological changes in generations to follow. However, I’d written it sort of tongue-in-cheek, so I was very surprised when I got a personal email from Rael — yes, that Rael. The email told me that it was important that we talk and urged me to call him at Clonaid in Geneva.

Rael has given me permission to include the following transcript of our telephone conversation here. My apologies for any typographical errors, this was transcribed quickly.

I have to admit I was somewhat surprised to get an email from you.

I understand that.

My people been casually following your website for some time now, as we have many other future-culture sites. We agree with you that it’s physical form that is the foundation for humanity — and the seat of power. After all, of the 43 Presidents you’ve had [Rael assumed I was American], forty of them have been taller than the man they bested. Physical form dictates who the next President of the United States will be more so than politics or any other issue — and thus physical form dictates the future of humanity.

It’s bigger than just winning an election though — I just like that example because it’s a really easy way to prove to anyone that physical form comes before mental form in terms of how we interact with the world. But it’s physical improvement that will propel us into the future — and for that we need to embrace a really wide view of what it means to be human. That’s why we’re contacting you — because you can bring this message to the mainstream and to the young people of this world, who will be the ones bearing children that are homo raelianis.

I’m not sure what you mean by that.

Raelian babies. Raelians by birth. The message of the Elohim is “be more” — that’s what caught our attention in your last article. Your mistake though is believing that the future is from random mutations. Forty-five thousand years ago primitive man mistook the Elohim for gods, and their science for magic, just as primitive man would do if he saw today’s 21st century man. People need to realize that we are now those gods — and as gods, we have “permission” so to speak to make ourselves in our own form.

I agree totally — but I don’t understand how your research with cloning falls into this all.

Two words: Raw. Materials.

What does that mean?

When I was a teen, I remember reading about experiments done by Hilda Prösholdt with Hans Spemann on altering what they called “developmental mechanics”. Spemann and Prösholdt experimented with the transplantation of tissue from part of one embryo’s blastopore to another embryo altogether. After almost three hundred embryos had been surgically modified, six were born successfully. They were “new animals” that had parts from both embryos! Even though Prösholdt had done most of the work, Spemann was later given the Nobel Prize for Medicine in 1935 for this work.

In the case of Prösholdt’s experiments, she was using newts, producing some with multiple limbs, multiple heads, two hearts rather than one, and other combinations. Later she even managed to create a newt that was partially great-crested newt and part common newt. What was interesting about that experiment though was that the chimera had characteristics of the host (the common newt), even in the transplanted organs that were unique to the great-crested newt. The Elohim encouraged us to think about human morphology, not newts.

But how did you find a doctor willing to do these procedures? It’s hard enough to find a doctor that’ll do a tongue splitting, let alone something that most people would — no offense — describe as monstrous.

And remember, this was 1974! We didn’t have a lot of options, and it was before we knew how to do the finer genetic manipulations we are now capable of. So we made a tough decision and asked Dr. Josef Mengele.

I’m sorry?

Yes.

Josef Mengele, as in the Nazi concentration camp doctor? Hitler’s so-called “Angel of Death”? Wasn’t he executed after the Nuremberg trials?

No. Mengele has never been charged with a crime — he was no longer in Germany at the time of those trials. After the second world war ended, he traveled to Argentina and then not long afterwards to Taos, New Mexico, where his depressurization research helped propel American aviation and then the space program just fast enough to stay ahead of the Russians. After reporters realized that Mengele was working on the Mercury program and threatened to make the story public, the government paid him off and he retired to Brazil.

Yeah, but... Mengele?

We knew that as a pure research scientist he had proven over and over he could be work in the face of cruelty — this was a man known for speaking kindly to a child before sending him to the gas chamber. We knew we were going to have a lot of children die during our work. That sounds terrible, but we didn’t have any choice, and Mengele had specialized in research with twins. His work with amputations and transplantations was also especially relevant.

There’s actually a movie coming out — Hellboy — that’s loosely based on some of the

work that Mengele and the other Nazi doctors did at the camps. Some of the work with heavily modified super-soldiers that Mengele was doing was way ahead of its time. But I digress...

[Note to readers: While I was doing this interview, when he said this I assumed he was lying to me or making it up for some reason, so I did not question it much and just played along. Wikipedia's entry on Mengele appears to at least partially confirm Rael's story, as do supplemental searches examining their relationship. Ethically I do not agree with the decision to contract Dr. Mengele, although I understand it.]

How did you find him? How did you convince him?

Finding him wasn't hard. Convincing him wasn't hard either. He was happy to be working in a no-limits lab again. He had done some terrible things in the past — truly horrific and inexcusable things — but he was trying to repay his debt by helping humanity move forward. Unfortunately he died of a stroke a few years later, but all of our work now is still based on what he started.

What did you do — you said earlier your clones were raw materials?

Mengele had done experiments for the Nazis where he had tried to convert twins into conjoined or “Siamese” twins. The majority of these failed terribly, but he did have some success in the transplantation of embryos from one twin to another. He also developed in vitro fertilization techniques which were able to produce zygotes of identical DNA. This gave us the ability to create enough raw materials in the form of compatible blastopore tissue so we could have more control over the gastrulation process. Originally we'd tried working with non-identical human tissues as well as xeno-transplants but that work was unsuccessful.

What was the actual purpose?

In the beginning our goals were just proofs of concept. We knew that by controlling the development of the fetus in the womb, we could create new kinds of humans, and eventually we would be able to create a perfect Raelian race of people. So we tried it all. Some of the mutations worked, some didn't, but, after thirty years of work, we're getting very close.

Do you mind telling me about a few of them?

First we did simple bud transfers — these are remarkably easy in relative terms and still comprise the most important part of what we do. For those listening to this that aren't biologists, a fetus forms by first creating a “mold” — a sort of a biological lattice with “markers” on it. Tissue then grows in this mold, eventually becoming all the pieces of a person. Because it's early in the process, the bud “attaches itself” and does a lot of the work for us. By altering this mold, adding to it, or removing pieces from it, we can change how the human is physically manifested. For example, if you have DNA-compatible tissue, you can move the arm buds from one embryo to another, and create a new embryo with six arms. We've also managed to transplant internal organs — we built my own son around a barrel chest containing fully redundant organs. He's six now. Success rates are low though — about one in ten — but that's no worse than in vitro fertilization and other procedures

most people now believe are acceptable (but were once seen as morally wrong).

Later we examined cyclopia, an almost always fatal condition which “fissures” the face, sometimes leaving a “cyclops” or one-eyed effect, and at other times leaving three eyes, all neurologically functional and integrated into the nervous system. The reason we were interested in cyclopic embryos was their holoprosencephalon, or “whole forebrain”. Most humans have two minds, in that we have a split brain. However, children born with this condition (about one in 16,000) have a partially or fully conjoined monolithic brain, twice the size of a normal human brain. Unfortunately we have had trouble controlling embryonic retinoic acid levels and these children, while remarkably intelligent, have been so violent that we’ve had to destroy all of them before the age of three. It is important to understand and explore these options though, even with these sacrifices.

I’d like to just stop for a minute and remind everyone that our genetics aren’t an accident. Evolution brought us up to a point, and the Elohim brought us to where we are now. They left us tools in our genetic code to do more — all those switches are there for a reason, and if we don’t figure them out, we don’t get to be a part of the future. The Elohim will help those who ask for help, but we need to be proactive about it. That’s why we’re building the embassy, and it’s why we’re doing this research.

While gastrulation is happening, we also discovered that if you split the apical ectodermal ridge (which forms the arms and hands), the end result is mirror-image polydactylism (essentially where the arm ends with two hands facing each other, rather than a single hand). By modifying tissue in the zone of polarizing activity, we can sculpt limbs into nearly any configuration we want.

That’s unbelievable... So are children actually being born like this?

My son was the first successful birth, six years ago. All our earlier Raelian babies — we call them the pioneer generation — unfortunately had to be destroyed for various reasons. Since my son, we have had seventeen improved babies born, as well as nearly five hundred clones, mostly de-neuralized ones which generate the income we need to pay for the construction of the embassy and our research. We recently celebrated the birth of our thirteenth “normal” cloned baby as well.

How are you getting away with this? This can’t be legal.

First, it is legal in Switzerland, and we have had no problems getting the requisite permits for our research. When a child becomes unviable, we work with a doctor in the Netherlands — they allow euthanasia — to have the child terminated. Also, because we are erroneously branded as a “UFO cult” by most of the press, we tend to be ignored... sometimes a good thing as I’m sure you know.

Why are you telling me all this?

Because it’s time.

We feel that our procedures have reached the maturity level required to start doing public testing. We are approaching you because we feel that those who have faced and lived through the prejudice one gets for voluntarily becoming a physical outcast — no offense intended...

...none taken...

We hope that those who have voluntarily become physical outcasts will be well prepared for raising children that may be perceived as that as well. We believe that the openness to change and improvement in this community will foster an environment that is perfect for Raelian children.

But we're adults — we chose these things. I'm not sure if it's right to force this on anyone.

Well, you can't have these modifications. We can't do these procedures to adults, or even children. These procedures only work on very young fetuses.

Don't you agree that the role of a good parent is to give their children the best opportunities they can? We all try and make enough money to send our children to a good school... why not give them a 400 IQ if you can? Wouldn't it be abusive not to do so? If you can make your child eight feet tall, why shouldn't you? Most men die of heart attacks — my son has two hearts, and barring the unexpected, our doctors expect him to live to at least two hundred if not longer. Because he is purely a product of blastopore transplants, there's not even any risk that he'll have genetic abnormalities in the future.

How can he be a normal human if he's got two hearts?

All of that is surgical. His genetics are still technically that of a homo sapiens, even though he is obviously much more. If he were to have children in the future in the traditional way, that child would appear as you or I, not as their father... unless, as I hope, he will also bear a Raelian child.

I guess the obvious thing to point out is that it's the human spirit that makes people good, not the perfection of their physical form.

Oh, but you are wrong — metaphorically, the most powerful gods are always the most beautiful. The Elohim are beauty. Beauty is love, and Love is what we're trying to achieve. If our creations are not good, it's because they are not physically good. That's all we are. By creating the perfect physical form, we create perfect goodness in that person. Just like you believe that the right tattoo makes a person better, we believe that the right body makes a person better.

OK... so... what next?

We need volunteers. I'd like you to help me find mothers for the Raelian children of the future. Mothers who can nurture these superhumans, and protect them while they're young and fragile. We will provide assistance, but it is important to us that these children grow up in the real world, not in a laboratory.

If you don't mind, I'll put up a transcript of this interview on my site, and set up an email address where members can contact you.

That sounds wonderful, I appreciate it, and I look forward to having you in the future with us.



Of course this was an April Fools parody article!

However, most of the backstory is true, including...

- 40 of 43 Presidents really have been taller than the person they beat, and height really is the primary factor in US elections (I didn't check other countries but I assume it's the same).
- Rael is real, the story about him is real, and the cult/group is real.
- Clonoid is real, it is owned by the Raelians, and they have produced clones, they claim. They have refused any independent scientific testing and most people have denounced them as a fraud of some sort.
- The procedures on newts were real as described, and the Nobel Prize really was given for this.
- The procedures on humans as described would work and are real, and, at least the less monstrous ones, are things that we should expect to see in our lifetimes I think.
- Dr. Josef Mengele really did do bizarre experiments with twins, although not in vitro as far as I know. He did move to Argentina and Brazil after the war, and the American government did use his research and that of other concentration camp doctors to further their own nationalistic drives.

That's about where the truth ends. Mengele of course did not work with Rael, and kept an incredibly low profile because he was a war criminal on the run. Rael and Clonaid have no interest that I know of in producing "modified" or otherwise improved humans. In fact, one of their goals as stated on their website is to create perfect humans and avoid these defects. Cyclopidia and the other defects mentioned are all real and could be controlled, but are usually far less positive than as I've described.

Anyway, I hope people enjoyed it and it gave people something to think about. It gave me an excuse to basically write some bad sci-fi, which was a lot of fun for me...

Eyelid Piercing

High up on most people's "that's a bad idea" list is eyelid piercing. Still, more people than you'd think have given it a try with remarkably positive results. In this 2004 interview I talked to two such piercers.



A long time ago I made the mistake of answering the question "is there anything that can't be pierced" with "eyelids." A few days later, Kelly from Yonge Street Tattoos in Toronto showed me a photo she'd taken while at a convention in Florida. She told me that he said the piercings didn't bother him, but that she thought his eyes did look pretty irritated.

I pretty much wrote it off as a "stupid human trick" and so did most of the piercers I knew. Even though I later tracked down that person's story — their red eyes were due to allergies, and that's why they took the

piercing out — I don't think I ever took it seriously. They said they'd get it redone when allergy season was over. I never heard from them again so I assumed it didn't happen, probably wasn't viable, and it had become one of the many "tried it once, but never again" stories we seem to enjoy here.

However, more eyelid piercings have come out of the woodwork, and I've had a chance to talk to some of the clients and piercers doing this unusual procedure. First, meet Joe Amato of Tatts Taylors Tattoos in Fort Lauderdale, Florida (1929 S Federal Hwy, 954-525-7910). On St. Patrick's day this year he performed an eyelid piercing on his friend Kevin Magee.

What was the procedure you used for this piercing? What steps did you take to minimize the risks?

Joe: When we did Kevin's eyelid, we put serious thought into not just doing the piercing but into how he was going to take care of it afterwards to make sure that first, it did not damage his eye, and second, that it would heal quickly and comfortably. To approach actually piercing the eyelid I used a small set of sponge forceps that I polished the grips off of so I wouldn't scratch or damage the inside of the lid. I handmade "shorty" needles about 3/8 of an inch long so I could pierce from the inside out and not have to cause any extra trauma to the eyelid itself by pulling out enough to get a 2" needle through it.

What was the piercing like?

Kevin: It was scary as hell, but there was very little pain. It was noticeably uncomfortable immediately afterwards and throughout the night. The next morning it was pretty swollen, uncomfortable, and slightly annoying. I had redness on my eye, and a little crusting and dry blood... but it was only slightly painful when my eye dried out.

Did you take anything?

An Aleve, 50mg of zinc, and H2Ocean throughout the day.

Joe: The primary aftercare agent we used was H2Ocean, which really was the biggest reason this healed so well.

The salinity in this product is measured off of tears to be as close to the body's natural level as possible; so spraying it in his eye every day never burned or caused any damage. In addition, we had him using a saline rinse three times a day to remove any debris inside the eyelid itself, and Renu eye drops to keep the eye as moist as possible so it wouldn't hurt his eye, or the contacts he wears. Lastly, we had him take zinc daily throughout the healing to help it along and Aleve for the first couple days to help minimize any swelling, so there would be no extra pressure from the ring on his eye.

What was the healing like?

Kevin: The second night I had no trouble sleeping, but when I woke up in the morning there was a large amount of pus under my eyelid. It was easily cleaned out with H2Ocean and a Q-Tip, and didn't happen again. My eye was swollen and felt bruised, and it was mildly painful to close my eye tightly or open it widely. The redness was starting to fade though, and it mostly just felt like an eyelash caught in my eye.

Did you take any other steps to monitor the healing?

Joe: I checked his eye every day with a 10x jeweler's loupe to make sure there was no damage to the white of his eye. And, to this day, it has never scratched one of his contacts — which anyone who wears contacts knows is unbearable and impossible not to notice! I had Kevin make a journal of his experience with healing it, and made sure he paid great detail to writing down everything he used.

Kevin: By the third day of healing, the redness was gone and there wasn't any crust. It still felt bruised and it was still a little swollen... I was beginning to get used to the eyelash feeling, but it was still irritating. The day after that the swelling went down some more, and it didn't hurt any more except when I closed my eye really tight.

Over the next few days I got more and more used to the feeling of having something this close to my eye. By the end of the first week of healing I was used to it, and at two weeks in it was totally comfortable.

Do you still have to do anything to take care of it?

I still use H2Ocean several times a day to stave off infection, and Renu eye drops when necessary. I have had no problems with my vision, and all in all it has been a good experience. It's been two months since I got it pierced and I've still got it and I don't even feel it.

...The only problem I've had is people shrinking away from me in horror in the elevator!

No doubt! Thanks for talking to us.

We also had the opportunity to chat with our old friend Nick Anzalole at Under the Needle in



Seattle, Washington (2511 6th Ave, 206-448-6613). Like nearly every piercer I know, he wasn't able to shake the idea after seeing that first blurry picture from the tattoo convention. His friend Ty, also fascinated by the piercing, volunteered.

So, what made you think this was a good idea?

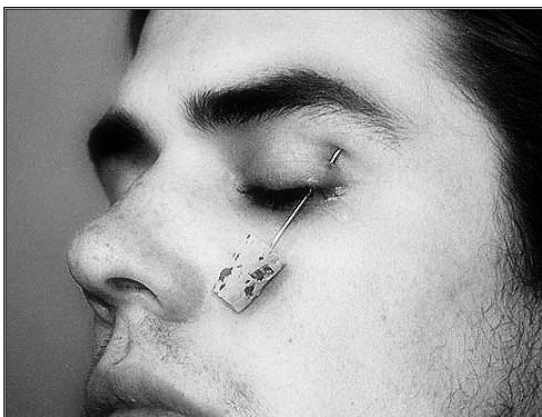
Ty already had extensive mod work, including a split tongue, so I told him we would try it, but that it would probably be very uncomfortable, and might have to be removed very soon after being pierced. He said that was fine and we went ahead with it. This was back in June of 2002. He was lucky enough to have sort of a little free space in the corner of his eye.

What do you mean by that?

As in his eyelid didn't touch his actual eyeball in the corner — I thought this would be the best place to pierce it.

What was your procedure?

I placed a small Pyrex glass receiving tube under his eyelid so as not to nick the actual eyeball — I warned him that if he jumped the needle might just go straight into his eyeball! Then, using a 14 gauge needle, I simply pierced into it, following through with a 14 gauge



5/16" captive bead ring. I held tight onto the eyelid to make sure the skin didn't "roll" with the needle. It was over quickly, and only a single tear had left his eye. The ring itself appeared to not even touch the actual eyeball, and just kind of float in mid air.

How did the healing go?

I kept in good contact with Ty for several days afterwards to monitor him. He said it didn't really bother him all that much — only when he woke in the morning did it irritate him. He

took care of it like you would any other piercing, and soaked it in warm saline solution several times a day.

He still had it in about twenty days later, when, after a night of drinking, he stumbled and fell, and kind of caught it on a nail in a doorway! It was still in, but bleeding and had torn a little. I was there and told him it should probably come out. He wanted to try to leave it in, but after about three more days he took it out... I believe there was a very good chance it may have healed, but his was too damaged from the fall. I may do it again some day. I do still enjoy the fact though that as far as I know, I was the second piercer ever to pierce an eyelid.

Do you think people should be doing this piercing?

Well, this is the kind of thing you really should never try, nor should you ever ask your piercer to do it for you. The man who I did this on, Ty, was a good friend of mine, and I

did it only after he bugged me for a very long time, and I was sure he understood all the risks involved. If someone without the needed skills tried this they could easily blind their friend.

Thanks for talking to us about this!

Now, I need to be very clear and up front and say that this is not yet something I'd consider a viable piercing. It shows a lot of promise and it may well be possible to safely do these, but the jury is far from in. That said, until about 1980 people thought that tongue piercing was absolutely insane and that it would cripple a person... but as it's turned out, it's one of the safest and most common piercings out there.

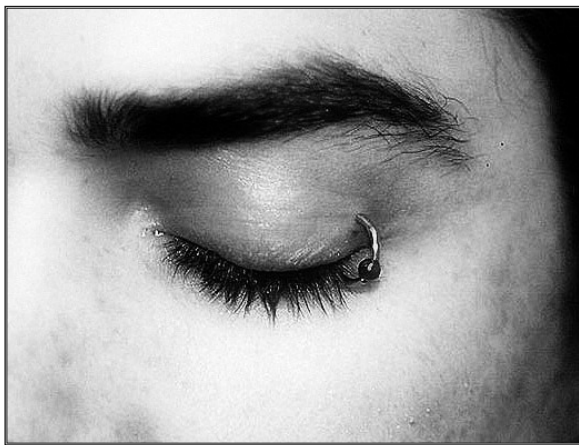
Risks from eyelid piercing are largely centered around infection from the damage to the eyelid (risk to the sclera or white of the eye is minimal assuming proper jewelry is used). The main risk is bacterial conjunctivitis, better known as "pink eye", a bacterial infection. If the eye becomes increasingly swollen and red, or the infection spreads to nasal or ear congestion accompanied by fever or cold and flu symptoms, this could be escalating into a serious problem. If yellow or green discharge is present you may need antibiotic treatment, and if it gets worse, surgical intervention is not unheard of. It is important to note that while this risk is most prominent in the first few days, it will never entirely go away.

I should also note that if you have any jewelry allergies, you'll show the symptoms above for as long as you have the piercing. In my opinion anyone who suffers from allergies should not attempt this. Finally, styes, infections in the glands at the edge of the eyelid are also possible. If this happens you'll note swelling, pain, and itching right in that area — warm compresses can help.

Modification of the eyelid and eye itself is on the verge of erupting. Eyelid tattooing is a common cosmetic procedure these days. Even eyeball tattooing (where the white of the eye is tattooed) is considered a "safe" procedure, as is the implantation of metal designs under the white of the eye.

It makes sense though — the eyes are the focal point for all of our social interactions. We can sense where someone is looking from across the room, and we can express some of the most subtle emotions through our eyes alone. "You have beautiful eyes," is a compliment that crosses all cultures and is one of the few universal truths in aesthetics.

So for those of us who think piercing is beautiful, maybe a pierced eyelid makes sense?



Kerra Fowler

In 2004, just before the US election, many people were making anti-Bush statements with body art, including this large “No-Dubya” tattoo on the back of Kerra’s head — perhaps the first (and only) paid political advertisements in tattoo history.



The tattoo advertising boom began in 2003 when Jim Nelson, a 22 year old from Illinois sold off the back of his head for about \$7,000 to CI Host. For the next five years, Jim is to keep the tattoo visible, and pitch the brand to the public. So far he’s been averaging well over a hundred new customers a month for them, and other skulls are lining up on auction sites, eager to sell their flesh to the highest bidder. These days there are almost always ads on eBay from people selling their skin to advertisers — “with a starting bid of only \$55,000 you can tattoo anything you’d like on the back of my head!”

Kerra Fowler, a 29 year old wife and mother from Southern Indiana saw a series of ads on eBay from people offering to sell their skin to John Kerry supporters — “your anti-Bush message tattooed on my skull, starting bid \$10,000” and “Tattoo My Head For Kerry/Edwards, starting bid \$30,000”. An anarchist and no fan of Bush’s, two words came to Kerra’s mind when she saw these high-priced auctions: Extreme Audacity. Kerra decided to put her skin on the auction block for an anti-Bush message as well, but with a starting bid of only one cent. BME recently had a chance to talk to Kerra, as well as Drew W., the winner of the auction (who has asked me to keep his full name out of the article for fear of harassment).

The idea that you should be paid to say what you think is incomprehensible to me. I did try to get the \$30,000 guy to do it for the cost of the tattoo. He’d have nothing to do with it, writing “I’m doing this as a paid promotion. No money, no tattoo.” That made me think he couldn’t really believe very strongly about the matter. He was also dogging the other pro-Kerry tat person, and accused her of plagiarizing his auction. I would think we’d all be supporting each other since we have the same goal!

It seems so insane to think you are so important, or that what you believe is so important, that someone would actually pay you thousands of dollars to prove it. So, I put my head up for auction for tattooing anything anti-Bush. Kerry may be Satan himself for all I know, but I’d rather have that than Bush bombing weddings and calling himself a Christian. I’m an anarchist. A politician is a politician is a politician. The auction was more about making the point against money than it was about politics, but few people understood that.

How did people respond to the auction?

The auction’s Q&A got pretty interesting. There was hate mail sent to my email account with some very ignorant things said (and some very brilliant things as well).

so you think its okay for bin laden and his boys and hussein to terrorize and kill thousands of americans, but you think bush is an azz because hes doing something about it...you are the mentally ill one....bush is doing a fantastic job ! and trust me when i tell you , he will be the prez again this election year !

Would tattooing "Patriot" on your head be "anti-Bush" enough.? You say you are 29... I think you've done your time. Bush never did his... I think that makes you more of a patriot than him. I have never seen so many p*****s as these eBayers and Bush supporters... All talk, no action. Here you are ready to take action for what you believe!! These tough talking Republicans want to send others' kids to war, want to enforce the birth of others' kids so that they can exploit others' kids. You want to live what you believe. That is a patriot! Good luck.

I was wondering if you would tat the word "Idiot" on your forehead, but that would be redundant. Please educate yourself before you do anything else ridiculous. We cannot afford to commit Hari-Kerry. Each vote for Kerry puts the U.N. that much closer to running our country. Do you want France or Russia to dictate our foreign policy?

I just wanted to say good luck to a good cause. I don't really like Kerry all that much, but I think I'd vote for satan if he ran against bush!

Only liberal attention whores can come up with kind of crap.

HAHA!! This is the funniest thing I've ever seen. You think Bush is stupid yet you want to tattoo your own head?! And your a mother?? Pa-thetic. I pity you. Sounds like you have some deep issues, other then just being an anti-american. P.S. Bush for President '04!!

That last one is the very worst one I got because it questioned my mommysyness. The only one to make me mad — I invited her over to talk about it in person...

Did anything else happen during the auction?

Some guy tried to sabotage my auction and the other similar ones. The first lady had already quit due to his harassment, but all they could get on me was an auction where I sold a duck skull. Some rule against the sale of duck parts. The other guy's tattoo auction was closed early. The reason given was only "item no longer available". I found an eBay rule banning the sale of an item with someone's name on it — you can't make T-shirts for a singer and sell them. I guess his "Kerry/Edwards" fell under that ban?

What did the auction end up going to?

It went to \$103.50. I gave half to the tattoo artist and did normal things with the rest. Bought some beer, paid part of a bill, and bought a present for our kids.

That doesn't seem like a lot of money, but like you said, it wasn't about the money. Drew, you don't seem like the kind of guy who'd be bidding on someone getting their skull tattooed. What made you decide to move from buying Willie Nelson's Healing Hands of Time for \$25 to buying such a culturally charged political advertisement?

Drew: I do not buy space on people's flesh. I was bidding on people getting interested and involved with the political process, and that is what I won — the opportunity for everyone to express themselves. Kerra was putting something on the line to create a forum for

peoples' views. She did it with grace, and she handled some tough opponents with dignity (and also received a lot of praise). She is a good strong passionate American. Maybe Americans will get off their ass and into the voting booth. I tell my kids, "the only people worse than Bush voters are people that don't vote!"

Why is that?

People make the argument that there is little difference between candidates. Those people are asleep or numb. I don't believe any U.S. President has changed the face of the world and sent it into a tail spin in such a short time as George W. Bush!!

The Democrats got lucky: John Kerry is an intelligent man, and a hero, whether or not you want to believe it. He is not a pacifist and he has served our country not only as a soldier, but as a Senator for most of his life. Yeah, he is outspoken, opinionated and sometimes a bit long-winded, but he can resolve the Iraq issue, and if we continue with a Republican Congress, we'll have gridlock that will put an end to the Republican pork barrel spending that has ballooned this country's deficit with domestic spending growing at more than 10% annually for the past three and a half years (it averaged just over 3% annually during Clinton!).

The frustrating thing today is that Americans want a Schwarzenegger-type for President. A guy who will get on an aircraft carrier in a flak suit and say anything, and that says a lot about Americans today. But are we really that arrogant? Are we ignorant shallow "trigger happy" fools? Should one of the greatest nations in the world be represented by a simpleton with muscles for lips and shit for brains? America remember; the price of our freedom is tied directly to our demand on, and exploitation of, the world... we need to remember that when we stand up against a world population that has had enough.

Obviously you feel strongly about this — how did you decide what Kerra was going to have tattooed on her head?

I paid for her great idea that got people involved in the process, not the tattoo — I actually asked Kerra not to waste skin and ink on a man that doesn't deserve even a footnote, but she insisted. Good for her, she has conviction. I love tattoos, and piercings turn me on... but just to look at! I am forty-three years old with nothing on my skin but a few moles and a birthmark. If you want to tattoo something with the word Bush in it on me... you will have to wait until I am dead!

Kerra: Drew is a great guy with lots of good ideas politically. Perhaps he was having fun with the auction and just didn't have the understanding that I could be as serious as I was? This shows that tattoos can still shock and offend even in these trendy times.

So how did you eventually decide on the design?

My husband, Shane Dunkelbarger (the tattoo artist), and I came up with the design. The cowboy hat was my old man's idea. I thought it'd help get across the Bush meaning but now I'm getting people in town asking if the tattoo means "No Westerns". It's starting to make me ill! Like I wasted the space by doing something over people's heads. It doesn't seem that tricky, does it?

In any case, Drew didn't want anything to do with the tattoo pictures so I sent him the orig-

inal stencil. He responded with a thanks and, “good luck pleasing yourself.” I’m afraid his feelings are hurt. But really, how would it look if I ran my mouth like that and then didn’t follow through? I’d be just another fucking poser.

Drew: I wasn’t actually uncomfortable at all — I just didn’t want to have any impact on the final product. It was not my wish that she get the tattoo, so I didn’t want to affect her design.

Kerra, what are your plans for this tattoo after the election?

Kerra: If Bush wins I’ll keep it visible as a protest. Kerry doesn’t have a chance since only the one they want will get in. Let ‘em. Look how Florida ended up after handing it to Bush last time. I’ll gladly sit on my raft and watch them burn or sink or blow away. If Kerry wins by some cosmic reasons beyond my understanding, I don’t know what I’ll do. A cover up or just let my hair grow over it and let it become another foggy memory.

Would you ever do anything like this again?

Kerra: Hell yes! Doing another auction would be lame but if I can get tattoos that can mean something to people besides myself, I’ll keep on. I recently tattooed “Allah Akbar” in Arabic on my husband and I will copy it on myself if he doesn’t mind. Talk about going over people’s heads though; who can read Arabic?



Do you think you still would have gotten the tattoo if it weren’t for the auction?

I guess not, since it was the other auctions that fired me up to do mine. I don’t think I would have thought of it if I hadn’t become so annoyed about the huge sums of money requested by the others. In my heart of hearts I don’t give a damn who thinks they’re in control since we’re going to continue doing what we want, and most importantly, what God wants us to do. But Bush is so easy to dislike it has become a hobby of sorts to try to get him out.

Anything else either of you would like to add?

I’d like to request any artists who’d volunteer to help me design a cover up in case Kerry wins. I’m at a loss. Please, print out a picture and doodle on it. I’d be forever grateful!

Drew: Let’s really think about where we are headed as a nation and what we want to leave for our children. It does take a village to raise a child; families throughout the world are varying and complex. The world is complex... We need each other. “God bless our tiny little planet, and please protect us from big fat liars.”

Punch-and-Taper Piercing

One of the few interviews that were purely technical discussions of body piercing technique was this 2005 interview with four talented artists about “punch-and-taper” work, an evolution of surface bar piercing.

First, since this article contains terms that not all readers may be familiar with; here are a few quick definitions to help you.

Surface Bar (“Staple Bar”): A surface bar is a barbell that’s quite literally shaped like a staple. Its goal is to place as little pressure on surrounding tissue as possible, thus its unusual shape.

Tygon: Tygon is an inert and extremely flexible plastic tubing. Instead of attempting to find the “perfect shape” as a surface bar does, Tygon works by being flexible enough to just “go wherever your body wants it to”.

Dermal Punch (“Biopsy Punch”): A dermal punch is a cylindrical blade that doctors use to remove tissue samples for biopsies. It is also used by piercers for large gauge piercing work and of course the technique discussed in this article.

Drop Down Threading (also Step Down Threading): This is a form of externally threaded jewelry where the threaded section has a smaller diameter than the main rod, thus minimizing irritation if it’s drawn through a piercing.

It’s rare these days to see new innovations in the field of body piercing. It’s been almost a decade since piercers like Jon Cobb, Tom Brazda, and Steve Haworth pioneered procedures like the surface bar, pocketing, and the transscrotal, and while things have certainly been improved and fine-tuned since then, not a lot has changed when it comes down to it. However, over the past few years, a number of artists have been working out a new method of surface piercing which promises even better results than are possible using traditionally placed surface bars.

This new procedure is called “punch and taper” or “transdermally implanted” surface piercing. It is similar to surface bar piercing, and in fact uses surface bars as jewelry most of the time, but in an effort to reduce trauma and pressure (and thus migration) the entry and exit points are formed with a dermal punch and the “tunnel” for the jewelry is formed with a taper or elevator. The end result is a surface piercing that heals faster and has a far greater survivability rate than a standard clamp and needle type procedure. I recently had a chance to talk to three piercers, each that can make the claim of having independently invented this method. They were kind enough to talk to me both about the procedure itself and the development that went into creating it, giving a rare insight to the technical “craft” element of body piercing as it advances.

I talked to four piercers about this procedure (left to right, below). First, Brian Decker, the first person I saw doing this procedure, although in the early days he was using a very different version than he uses now. He pierces (and more) at Sacred Body Arts on Canal St. in NYC. Brian is also an accomplished scarification and heavy modification artist. Also, Tom Brazda, considered the primary inventor of the surface bar and ran Stainless Studios

in Toronto, Canada for ten years (where I worked for him and learned a lot!) before moving on to a smaller salon environment. Zachary Zito as well joined the conversation. Zak is currently working at Mainstreet Tattoo in Edgewood, Maryland. It all started one day at the age of thirteen, when he was skating home from a friend's house and found a PFIQ on the side of the road, and the rest is history. He's been piercing since 1993 and like most piercers at the time is largely self taught. Finally, I also had a chance to talk to Steve Truitt of Stay Gold Tattoo in Albuquerque, New Mexico, who you may know as stainless on IAM. Steve has been piercing professionally since 1995, and uses a slight variation of this technique for his own surface piercing work. Steve also is an experienced implant and scarification artist, and runs an active suspension group in the Albuquerque area.



What do you tell people when they come in asking about surface piercing?

Tom: First we talk about risks and rejection, and then I explain to them the different ways I can do the piercing. We talk about care issues and possible lifestyle changes that will help them contribute to a successful healed piercing. We also talk about longterm concerns such as accidents and how to deal with them — all in all this initial consultation takes about an hour.

Zak: Usually for me it starts with a phone call from someone just trying to find a studio that will do it — most in this area turn them away due to inexperience, and eventually they get pointed in my direction, and then I have them come in for an in-person consultation.

Brian: I explain the procedure in detail to them, the way the jewelry has to be custom designed for them, and how and why it works with their body. I haven't used a needle for a surface piercing in four years and with the results I've seen with transdermally implanting the bars, I'm not about to start again. Some people find the idea of punching and elevating the skin unsettling, but I assure them it's not nearly as bad as they think... I can't remember ever having anyone walk out because I'm not using a needle, and these days people actually seek me out because I don't use a needle.

Let's get right into the procedure itself. How exactly do you do a "punch and taper" or "transdermally implanted" surface piercing?

Tom: After I've talked to them for long enough to make informed consent, we inspect the area of the proposed piercing in terms of tissue stability — does it stretch or flex, and how does it fold when they bend? I look for the most stable placement I can find.

Then I determine the dimensions of the jewelry that are going to be needed. If I've got it handy we can go ahead and do the piercing, but a lot of the time it has to be custom ordered.

Before we actually start the piercing, we talk about what they can expect from the procedure itself. I prep the area and spend a lot of time marking it to make sure I've got the best placement both in aesthetics and technical placement. This is redone as many times as it takes for me to be satisfied it's the best it can be.

I actually give the customer the choice of insertion method after explaining all the issues to them, but if they choose the punch and taper method, the first thing I do is double check all my tools to ensure I have everything and all the sizes are right and everything fits together as it should. I also make sure I have enough gauze on hand, because some bleeding control is often needed — although because the vascularization is much higher in the deeper fatty tissue, unless you go a little too deep there's usually not a lot of blood.



I make the two holes by dermal punching down into the tissue. I take a normal taper and put it into the first hole and pull up on the skin a bit to make sure that the taper is at the bottom of the subcutaneous layer. Then I gently push the taper toward the other hole, applying force as necessary. When the taper is at the exit hole, I put one of the dermal punches back into the hole to “grab” the end of the taper. I find this works better than a small receiving tube because some of the fatty tissue can get in the way and the dermal punch helps cut the tissue if needed.

After the taper is through, I follow it with a second taper that's screwed onto the jewelry. That pulls the jewelry into place, and the rest goes like a normal piercing. I make sure to keep them in the studio for ten minutes to chill out to make sure they're OK, and make them promise to come back and check with me later so we can be sure everything's healing like it should.

Brian: First thing I do as well is the jewelry design — a lot of poking and pinching at the skin. My main goal is to fit the jewelry exactly to the piercing tunnel I'm going to make. Any pressure is going to mean a greater chance of scarring or migration. It takes a bit of practice learning how to hold the skin in different areas, and what areas need what depths.

After prepping the skin and marking, I pinch the skin up with my thumb and index finger, and twist a 1.5mm biopsy punch down into the dermis and straight into the subcutaneous tissue — generally that's 2 to 5mm, 2mm being thin skin like temples and inner wrists, and 5mm being areas like the back. These aren't just standards though — you need to pinch up the skin before punching so you can make it much easier to tell when you've reached the subcutaneous layer.

After I've removed that small cylinder of dermis, I insert my elevating tool straight down into the hole and shift it so it's parallel with the skin. I slowly work my way across the subdermis at the same depth as the lifts on the jewelry I'm putting it. The tool I use for the elevation is 6mm bar stock with about two inches of one end milled down to about 2mm width. It's sturdy and the ease of using the handle allows me more control and requires less pressure than a taper pin, especially in harder to separate areas like the nape. The consistent flattened shape of the tool tip keeps the pocket tight and uniform so the jewelry sits firmly.

I then insert a small 12ga steel rod that's round on one end and externally threaded on the other into the pocket as if I'm doing an implant. To make sure the tunnel doesn't arc up into the dermis, I poke the end of a 12ga taper down into the exit hole and match it up with the end of the rod and follow the rod back out that exit hole. So at this point it looks like a surface piercing with a straight bar in it.

Since I bend all my own pieces, I use step-down external threading on my jewelry. I've tried bending internally threaded jewelry but it tends to buckle and break. To keep from pulling threading through the fresh piercing I use a tiny 1/2" piece of Tygon tubing to attach the surface bar to the 12ga rod. The rod then pulls the jewelry into the piercing in one smooth motion and is removed. The entire thing from punching to putting on the beads takes just a few minutes.

Zak: Assuming we've already talked about everything, I start with explaining again why and what materials I'm using, tell them about sterile technique, and the exact process I'm about to use. We also go over their daily activities and lifestyle again to be as sure as possible that nothing will clash with the piercing they want. We determine the perfect jewelry for them after examining the local anatomy in terms of rise and bar length.

Once all that is settled everything goes in the StatIM autoclave. While we're waiting for that a gross decontamination scrub is done and all the marking is taken care of. The StatIM cassette is opened, hands are scrubbed with Technicare, rinsed, dried, and then misted with Vionexus. I put on my first pair of sterile gloves, and using a sterile 4x4 of Nugauze that is saturated with Technicare I prep the area. These gloves are then disposed of and I put on a new sterile pair.

I massage the tissue, doing a non-invasive dissection, to make dermal elevation easier and less traumatic. With a 1.5mm biopsy punch the exits of the wound channel are incised and removed. I use a four inch long threaded taper and insert it into the entry point and elevate the channel being created across the length of the piercing. When the taper reaches the exit hole I massage the tissue to help the taper exit. After that, all that's left is threading a titanium surface bar onto the taper and feeding it through the channel. I use disc ends for beads, clean the area, and apply a Tegaderm patch to keep the wound from being exposed to outside elements during the first stages of healing.

What sort of aftercare do you recommend to people?

Zak: In a perfect world I'd suggest dry wound care, but since we don't live in a perfect world I try to get people just to do as close to dry wound care as they can.

Tom: Just leave it alone as best as you can. If you bump it or it comes in contact with

something unclean, clean it with saline immediately. It should be washed daily — gently — and given a couple sea salt soaks for a few minutes, or longer if it gets irritated. Most of all though people need to be aware of their surroundings and prevent problems rather than treating them. Lastly, good health! A healing piercing needs proper resources — nutrients — to be able to heal, and your immune system has to be strong. It doesn't just happen on its own.

Brian: From my point of view, the most important part of the aftercare for surface “piercings” are the warm or hot water soaks which help soften crusting and drain bacteria from the inside of the pocket. The average body piercing is through less than half an inch of tissue, but surface piercings are usually much longer, making it harder for your body to excrete harmful bacteria and dead tissue from inside it. The warm soaks will also increase blood circulation, and your body needs these white blood cells to heal the piercing, just like any wound.

The only antiseptic I recommend for healing is natural sea salts — four teaspoons in a gallon of water, which can then be microwaved to heat it. If you measure this correctly it will match your body's salinity. Soaps usually have colorings, perfumes, glycerins, triclosan and so on — chemicals that are too strong and can damage and destroy healing tissue. Even for people whose bodies are strong enough to heal with these soaps, healing without them will probably be quicker since your body won't be spending time fighting off the things that are in the soap!

If they take care of it, how long does healing take, and what sort of success rates can they expect?

Brian: I think with “perfect” care, complete healing can be quicker than a standard navel or nipple, depending on the placement. Areas with little movement tend to heal in four to six months assuming they're not banged up. The sad thing is, most people don't take perfect care of their piercings, so healing times are often longer than they need to be. The success rate I've been getting is very good though — exponentially higher than with needle piercing.

Zak: I think the majority of healing takes place in the first three months, but I agree that the complete healing is closer to six months. As to the success rate, nothing is 100%, but in the time I've been working with this method I haven't seen any of the pitfalls and problems traditionally associated with surface piercings — no scarring, no rejection, no wound drainage problems, and so on. I've even seen them take substantial abuse and other than temporary swelling and a bit of bleeding, they tend to return to normal and don't show long term effects of that trauma.

Tom: I'm seeing them healing in no more than three months, personally, but with a surface piercing aftercare is for life. Success of the piercing involves a lot of factors — sometimes it can come down to a choice between lifestyle and a piercing. Enough damage to a well healed surface piercing can cause migration at any time. I tell people that a surface piercing is not permanent in that somewhere down the road it will probably need to come out. Of all the ones I've done I've only seen one reject though, but I only do the ones I think are going to be successful.

Zak: I've done quite a few of these as well, to the point where I've stopped keeping track of the numbers. Initially I had everyone coming back in weekly so I could keep an eye on them, but all I ever saw was immaculate results... It was actually funny to see people coming in with Tegaderm tan lines around the piercing months later.

How did your surface piercing technique evolve over time, and how did you come upon this particular technique?

Brian: I adopted the idea from doing transdermal implants — which is why I call them “transdermally implanted surface bars”. When I first started doing them, I was using a #11 scalpel blade to make incisions into the skin. Why I didn't think to use a dermal punch is beyond me, but after talking to Tom a few years after doing them exclusively with a scalpel I switched. Another one of Tom's incredible ideas that I've adopted is milling down the bottoms of all my bars for a while now, in order to lessen the chance of the jewelry “rolling” over. It's worked wonders.

Tom: I think about nine years ago we actually talked about it after looking at pictures of Jon Cobb's wrist piercing, an 8ga straight bar going from one edge of the wrist to the other. Looking at that all I could think about was how much damage the needle could do traveling across all that tissue and blood vessels. At the time I thought about making two scalpel cuts and tapering across the holes. The idea stayed in my head, but I didn't think that such a long bar across the wrist was a good idea anyway so I didn't try that.



At about that time we stopped using curved barbells for surface piercing and developed the surface bar. After refining the surface bar I looked at the tissue that I was going to pierce in order to anticipate potential problems and work around them. Later came the use of flat wire bars, which makes a big difference if you're working with thinner tissue.

Down the road you always find those things that you wish you could do but are limited by your process. How do you pierce a person with tissue you can't even grab? Or a piercing so short that you know it'll reject quickly? Thinking about these problems brought me back to the old idea from Jon's wrist piercing. It took me a while before I found someone who'd let me do a piercing that would be a good proof of concept. If you're doing it on a spot that would have been easy to pierce with a normal surface bar tech-

nique it wouldn't have proved anything.

Once I did this, I wanted to get around another problem in surface piercing, and that's getting a proper entry through the skin, going straight down, straight across, and then straight up. Before you could only do this by piercing at the exact right spot based on what the tissue did when you clamped it, but otherwise the piercing arced through the tissue placing weird stresses on the jewelry and pushing it upwards, increasing the risk of migration. Even if you got through the dermis and epidermis correctly, you still arced through the subcutaneous tissue, which would be visible as a slight bump in the middle of the piercing. So that's how using the dermal punches came about, and how I got to the procedure I'm using today.

Zak: When I started doing surface piercings I was using Teflon and Tygon barbells and placing them with standard piercing needles. Later I switched over to titanium staple bars, but still used needles to place them. When I started to experiment with the idea of using a punch and taper technique rather than a needle, I didn't know that other people were developing it as well. I was mostly thinking of the shape of the initial wound channels; where the jewelry was sitting on the tissue itself. I thought that using this technique would drastically change things, and the results have been very positive.

What kind of response have you had from other piercers, and — to ask you an uncomfortable question — what would you say to piercers reading this who'd like to start using the technique?

Zak: All the colleagues that I have shared this with, done demonstrations for, or showed healed results to in person have had nothing but good results themselves with it later. If you want to start doing this, find someone that is experienced and do some shadowing to see what's involved firsthand.

Brian: Pierce yourself or your friends before you pierce customers! It might take some time to learn the feel of the tissue you want to work with since there's no standard depth for proper separation. If you separate too shallowly, you'll run into rejection problems. Learn to bend your own jewelry as well so you aren't forced to wait for custom orders (or compromise and pierce too shallow or too deep). I don't think this method has any special risks — just the time it takes to do it, maybe five minutes instead of one minute. It's also a bit messier, as it's not unusual to strike a small blood vessel with the punch and have to pinch the skin for a minute or two before proceeding with the elevator. It won't affect the outcome though, but you'll spend a bit more on gauze maybe!

Tom: This piercing does take more skill and understanding of the anatomy to perform it well. Shit, I think you could say that about all piercings, but if you're going to do this, talk to other piercers that have tried it before?

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Tell me about the punch and taper technique that you use?

Steve: I started off back in 1996 or 1997 using the HTC surface bars, and used those until I tried Tygon in 1999. At the time I was just placing them with a needle, but now I'm using a punch and taper method. Procedurally it's similar to what Zak, Tom, and Brian are

doing — after the cleaning, marking, and so on, I massage the skin for a minute or two to separate the skin from the fascia. Then I dermal punch straight down into my marks. I insert a threaded taper into the first hole and guide it across until it exits the other hole.

That taper is attached to Tygon tubing which I draw through the piercing. I trim the Tygon as needed, and it's done. It's a little more bleeding than using a needle, but it has a much higher success rate — probably at least 85% or higher (and I'm doing three or four people a week with this method).

What gave you the idea of switching to using a punch and taper method?

I'd tried it a few times over the past five years, but that was using an elevator rather than a taper. I decided it was just too painful and traumatic to do as my normal procedure, but after talking to Zak about how he was doing them, I ordered some punches, tried it, and loved it!

How come you don't use the metal jewelry like most people are using?

Most people find the Tygon is a lot more comfortable to wear. The Tygon does need to be changed occasionally, so I have them come back in the first few months to change it, and then three or four times a year as long as they have the piercing. I can swap in a steel or titanium bar after nine to twelve months, but most people do seem to prefer the Tygon.



Are you seeing about the same healing times?

Just switching to punch and taper I saw healing times for surface work drop from six to nine months, down to two or three months in most cases. Even in the harder to heal surface piercings like spinal piercings, they heal in four to six months.

I'll ask you as well — any advice or warnings to piercers who'd like to start doing this?

Learn to swim before you jump in the ocean! I see a lot of “piercers” that are attempting things way out of their league. Take your time, learn how skin works, how the body heals, and get all your basic piercings down before you attempt to move to the more complicated procedures and tools.

The risks of this procedure are minimal in the hands of an experienced piercer, but they're greatly compounded in the hands of a hack. You have to be a lot more careful looking for veins with this method, since you don't want to push a dermal punch in and take out a chunk of an artery, nerve, or vein! Other than that, the only negative I can think of is that there are some States that don't allow piercers to use dermal punches..

James Sooy

It's always hard to predict what interviews go viral, but this is one of them... After this was published, everyone wanted photos and wanted to talk to James, about what's an amusing but in my opinion, impractical, idea.



The idea of hanging eyeglasses from a piercing or a combination of piercings or even transdermal implants is something that a lot of us have toyed with — as I was writing this, my old boss Tom Brazda reminded me that almost ten years ago we made a set of them built around a 10ga bridge piercing (with both left and right-handed threading to make it adjustable). That said, I don't think we ever took pictures, so maybe I'm making it up because I want to steal James

Sooy's thunder. He's who sent me this gorgeous example of a piercing-mounted set of eyeglasses:

James is an artist currently designing and painting for Texas-based Magnificent Egos, a miniatures (as in gaming) company. Art consumes all of his time, professionally and personally, and much of it is centered around character design, which gives him both time — and money — to fantasize about mods on fictional characters. With the help of his friend Oliver (who many of you know as one of the founding members and guerrilla engineers of the suspension group TSD) this fantasy was made real.

How did you come up with the idea of attaching a pair of glasses to a piercing?

James: I'm not sure... some time during the drooling days of high school the idea came to me. I kept it in mind over the years and got the bridge piercing this July and then started looking to make it happen. Maybe it had something to do with not being able to wear contacts.

Oliver: I had originally considered making a pair of glasses that hung from a bridge piercing for myself about ten years ago. It was just one of those things that seemed so obvious that I was surprised I hadn't seen it done. I never got around to doing it then, since I wasn't too keen on getting a bridge piercing. When I got a call from James inquiring if I could help him with some jewelry he wanted to make, and then he mentioned he wanted to do the glasses as well, I jumped on the opportunity. He already had the piercing done over at Obscurities, here in Dallas, so I knew he was more serious about it than I ever was.

And how did you guys formalize the design?

James: Oliver and I sat down for about five minutes one night to think over what would need to be done and he got straight to work making the brackets out of aluminum with a small mill in his garage!

Oliver: Originally we were discussing and sketching ideas that would have been considerably more involved to produce. The ones that we ended up making aren't necessarily the

final product, but seemed the best and easiest way to test the viability of the idea. The brackets were machined from aluminum, roughly to shape and then drilled and tapped on my little tabletop Sherline mill — a machine that's far more suited to this size project than what I normally use it for! After a fair bit of tweaking and polishing with files and abrasives we ended up with what you see. The part you don't see is a barbell from Anatometal.

James: The threading on the barbell was 1.2 mm, which happens to be a relatively uncommon and expensive thread (as far as screws go). The screws ended up delaying the project about a month. We used some lenses out of an old pair of glasses I had at first, but I decided to get some new lenses once everything else was finished.

What's it like actually wearing it? What does it feel like?

They feel exactly like a regular pair of glasses, actually. I put the nose pads on to keep them from swinging around, so all the pressure is placed there, just like any other pair of glasses. Since they have no frame on the side I can wear them while I sleep and still roll onto my side.

Good thinking; so the piercing is more of a balance point than something structural. Does that make it more than just a “show piece”, and into something that you wear for real?

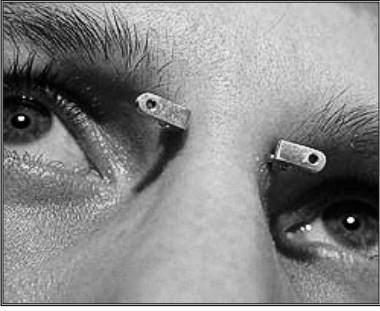
I've only had them for about a week now, but I've been sleeping and showering in them. I hadn't taken them off in four days when one of the brackets cut me while I was asleep; I'd forgotten to sand the edges and they were still razor sharp. They're back on now and seem reliable enough to take on a two week trip over the holidays; I doubt I'll need to take them off during that time. Taking them on and off is a bit of a hassle, as it involves taking a tiny screwdriver and unscrewing them while they're on my face — about a 5 to 10 minute process — which I suppose is about what you'd spend with contacts.

I hope they don't get caught on anything... I suppose that could tear them out rather unpleasantly. Any thoughts on how the engineering might change for the next model?

Oliver: This pair isn't quite what I was looking for both in design terms and in terms of fit. I don't think they sit at quite the right angle to his face and we both want them to sit a little closer to his eyes, so we'll probably make another pair in the near future. Much as there are so many designs and styles of eyeglasses currently being manufactured, I think there are a number of ways this design could be improved upon. I certainly think they look neat and ended up being far more subtle than I thought they would be. I didn't even realize he was wearing them when I saw him a few days later, and he mentioned that most people don't notice that they are only attached to the piercing.



What's next?



James: I suppose I could try to make marketable version if I had ambition to do so — something easier to take on and off. As for me I only have run of the mill tattoos and piercings planned right now, but seeing how some of my friends and family are in the community and looking to push the frontier, it means I have the manpower at hand to try out what comes to mind, so I'll keep trying out any of my feasible ideas. Being young and unsure where my future will lead, I'm quite reserved about anything permanent and visible,

which limits what I'm willing to do right now... As well as not having the time or resources to work on any major projects, so it'll just be the ones that steadily work their way in, like the glasses.

Since people are going to ask me, I have to ask... are these for sale?

As far as money I only spent about \$10 on screws and \$75 for new lenses. And I bought Oliver a meal.

Oliver: I don't have any intention at this point of pursuing the idea commercially but it's not something I'm averse to doing. If others were interested I might work something out with them. I certainly wouldn't mind seeing a more developed version of these glasses from the existing body jewelry companies. I know there are any number of people here on IAM that could probably do a much better job both in the design and execution.

Thanks to both of them for taking the time to talk to BME, and for thinking creatively about body modification... Too few people understand that it's OK to try something different or new.



“The Customer is Always... Angry”

This series of mini-interviews is piercers telling their “angry customer” horror stories.

One time I had someone — not a client, but a thief, who was escaping from the police — enter the studio to hide himself.... then the police arrived and kicked his ass...

∞

I had a lady come in with her son, and she was screaming and punching him, because he lost the jewelry that he had bought thirty minutes before.

∞

I had a fool come in brandishing a 15 pound sledge hammer with the intent to smash my premises, until he realized he was in the wrong shop — he was looking for my so called ‘opposition’ in the neighboring borough.

∞

I had one mother nearly hit me because I refused to tattoo her 13 year old daughter. I personally don’t need that weighing on my conscience. The girl was practically a baby, and threw a temper tantrum when I denied her. I was like “throwing a temper tantrum isn’t a good way to prove to me that you are mature enough to handle this decision”. The mom was clearly just a pushover parent, giving in to her demanding child’s every whim — including her kid wanting “Britney Spears’ tattoo”. The mom was irate because no shop in town would tattoo her child... for good reason. The calmer I got, the angrier the mom got until I was worried she would hit me. Nice parenting techniques. At that point I had one of our large tattooers escort her and her whiny child to the door.

∞

Male clients have gotten hostile when I have told them I don’t in fact want to go out with them, and am only touching them because I perform a service. Mostly jocks. I’ve been grabbed and cussed at when I have turned down classy invitations to fuck them, usually involving a slap on the ass. I was even shaken once by the shoulders by a fellow who insisted he take me home at the end of my shift. You know, because physical force is really going to make me want to go out with a total stranger.

∞

A big bully once came in my old shop and wasn’t satisfied with one of the tattoo artists’ jobs. He began yelling at everybody and wanted to kick the guy’s ass... It took three guys to kick his ass out of the shop. After a few months, the artist and the customer talked together and came to an arrangement.

∞

We have been threatened to have the studio burnt down before... oddly by someone who is now in jail for arson.



I got challenged to an arm wrestling match by a pretty big drunk guy because I wouldn't pierce his partner's nipple — she was also drunk. I'm not a huge guy... it wasn't so much threatening, but he did seem pretty pissed off!



We had someone walk in, slap a \$20 bill on the counter and ask for a rum and coke. He was so drunk that he thought we were a bar. We thought he was kidding, until he got belligerent that we wouldn't serve him. We did throw a bum out once and she reached into her pants and pulled out a handful of shit and smeared it on our front windows.



A guy came in ready to kill us for piercing his underage daughter. We tried to find out who it was — he even said she would have used a fake ID, but we didn't even have the name of the fake ID on record so we told him we didn't do it. This just made him even more upset. He was like well she told me she got it at blah blah blah shop, and we were like “uhh... sir, this isn't even that shop!” He looked at us all dumbfounded and turned and walked away... he later came back to get a tattoo.



A gentleman came in wanting a tongue piercing, good, great. Well, the needle traveled through his tongue, I cork it and the second I start the jewelry insertion, bang, out like a light. Quickest “passer-outer” I have ever had. Bad thing is, he passed out so quick and without warning that when passed out he “lock-jawed” with my fingers in his mouth along with the corked “thank god” needle, and the jewelry mid transfer in his mouth. My fingers were trapped and I was not about to yank them out, ripping my gloves, and potentially scraping my skin, in turn opening me up to whatever diseases this guy may have so I just stood there waiting him out. To make a good situation great, when he comes to, not knowing where he is and what is going on, he starts swinging. I'll tell you what, trying to fend off punches with one arm and the other close to being a mid day snack was no picnic! I view this as one of my best piercing success stories in my career due to the fact that I never lost the transfer the whole time and everything worked out perfect.



We had a customer come into the shop with her child. Normally not a major issue to have your child with you while you look around. We just insist that the child behave. This woman was letting her child run loose. We told her that she had to control him and make him sit and behave. She told us that we couldn't tell her how to take care of her child. We promptly told her that is fine, but that she had to leave our shop. She argued and threatened to call the police — we offered her the phone and the number — and then called us all kinds of names while she was leaving. About fifteen minutes later her boyfriend calls to threaten our lives. We read off his girlfriend's license plate number and her car type and let him know that the police would be involved. That ended that one.



I had one girl who didn't believe that a navel piercing was relatively painless. She had made a fist and had her arm pulled back during the piercing. It didn't hurt her in the slightest. She ended up leaving a \$20 tip.



Sometimes clients think you are their own personal doormat because they are paying you to perform a service for them. A lady was literally yelling at me over a \$10 piece of jewelry. I tried to explain to her that it was the shop's jewelry and I needed an okay before I could just give her a new one, but she didn't let me get that far. The more I tried to help her get what she wanted the more she berated me. Finally I said "I reserve the right to refuse service to anyone under any circumstances and right now I'm reserving that right to refuse service to you until you can treat me like a human being." I walked away from the register and left her standing there. She followed me through the shop telling me how I was not allowed to talk to her like that. Then in a very threatening tone she said "You do not know me, I'll have my father shut this place down tonight." The outcome isn't settled on this scenario but I assume her father must be someone important because the owner wants me to write a letter of apology.



I had a guy that brought his thirteen year old daughter to get a tongue piercing. I was explaining to him she was too young and he was going on and on about how he's the parent and can authorize it, but said he wouldn't sign anything and if anything went wrong with the aftercare he was holding us responsible. I kept telling him there's no way I'm piercing her. He steps up to me and gets in my face. That's when I smelled the booze on his breath and told him he needed to leave. He starts yelling and says he's not leaving, and asks why I won't pierce her... So I told him he's being an unreasonable asshole and has obviously been drinking. He finally left yelling the whole way out how he's writing a letter to the editor and shutting us down. And then he drove away drunk.



I had one guy that came in smoking and when informed he couldn't smoke in the shop, he butted his cigarette on the display case. I told him that that was a rude thing to do and he tried to take a swing at me. I asked him to leave and nothing ever came of it. I think he was drunk...



Back in 1998 in Wisconsin I had a client's husband come in and throw a bottle of water at me and then came running at me yelling that I was a asshole because I told his wife that she was not able to get a navel piercing and that it would not heal very well. He ended up falling on the floor... He was drunk, and by the time he was starting to stand up, he was back on the ground with his face smashed in the carpet with my knee on top of it.



My shop got picketed outside by a bunch of nutty Christians, claiming that we sold "sin" — after having been pierced the week before!



I had a client pass out during a nostril piercing, and when she woke up she accused me of “touching her” while she was unconscious for a whole three seconds. Her boyfriend was in the lobby waiting because her friend wanted to go in with her and I had limited room at that studio — he was totally opposed to the piercing anyway. So she gets up screaming and throwing punches, and her boyfriend comes in and tries to hit me... luckily one of the tattoo artists came into the room to see what the commotion was about and he has training in several forms of martial arts. The whole ordeal ended up with police being called, the boyfriend going to jail for disorderly conduct, and the girl went to jail as well for possession — she had a gram of cocaine in her purse that fell out when she went to show the officers her drivers license — and assault. I drove her friend home because the boyfriend’s truck keys went with him to jail, and she was left at the shop with no one to get her. She is still to this day a good friend of mine, and I dropped the charges to keep the shop’s “so far, so good” reputation, and there are no hard feelings.



I saw a “rival” tattoo artist come in the shop, go back to the owner’s station where he was tattooing, and proceed to beat the fuck out of my boss with the machine still in the client! He did deserve it though.



We had a guy started clearing off the shelves when we told him we don’t pierce or tattoo anyone under the influence of any drugs. He then pulled a knife on our apprentice tattooist, and then someone else took him down.



While working in Providence, we had a drunk homeless man come in begging for change. When my counterperson refused and asked him to leave, he leaned over the counter and punched him in the face! The guy ended up leaving with a stun-gun to the neck.



We had a guy come in to fight a tattooist for working on his girlfriend. He was arrested and came back two more times to fight the artist before he dumped his woman and then came in for a tattoo for himself.



I had a woman get mad and threaten me because I wouldn’t pierce her thirteen year old daughter’s hood... sad...



We use give our scared female clients teddy bears to cuddle while we were piercing them, until we had a lady rip one arm and the head off one of our teddies!



It was closing time at work when a guy came in and said “I know you guys are closed but I want you to pierce my dick.” I told him that I wouldn’t have near enough time in three minutes to ‘clave my tools and get my procedures room set up again for just one piercing.

“WHAT THE FUCK DO YOU MEAN BY THAT!?”

“Well sir, it means exactly that, I’m not going to go back and set up all my stuff again to do a single piercing when we are about to close.”

At that point it was overly apparent that he was not happy but I figured he would just stomp out of the shop yelling about never getting anything pierced here again like most of the underage kids did when I was working the lobby. Now I am not a small guy, nor am I what you might call a “wuss” — I can dish out punches like there’s no tomorrow, but this guy was pissed and caught me off guard, because when I turned around he said “HEY!” and I did exactly what I always tell myself not to do, I turned around. A good square punch to the face and I was floored for about two minutes as he ran out of the shop, knocking down two rotating display cases and the five foot standing case we had by the door. He was later prosecuted for assault and destruction of private property... I heard he moved away because he was afraid that I would “come after him with my needles”. Fucking drug heads.



I had a dad trying to force his fourteen year old son to get a tongue piercing because it is ‘cool’ while the son didn’t want one... and I mean forcing. We told him no, a piercing is a free choice, not a something you can force, and he wanted to beat us up. He was kind of trailer trash looking, with a big mouth, and he said to my boyfriend, ‘do you think you are a macho with your big ears?’ That comment made us laugh when we talked about it a few days later...



We had a mother making her daughter get her nostril done. The girl, who had just turned seventeen, didn’t want to get pierced, and after twenty or so minutes of refusing to do the piercing I was told by management to do the piercing. They wanted her mother out of the shop, because she was making such a fuss... It was either pierce her or have the drunk friend of the boss throw her out. I figured that I would take the safe “non-violent” route, seeing as the drunk wanted to take care of her in a horrible way. Guess who picked wrong. When I pierced her, the girl grabbed my ear lobe and pulled. Before she could rip my ear lobe off, I sank down on her arm, pinned it to the table and got away from her. Needless to say I never finished the piercing, but it was pretty awful, and of course there were phone calls the next day from the mother and the father wanting me fired for piercing the girl and not putting jewelry in after she grabbed my ear. Keep in mind that I was wearing 30mm flesh tunnels at the time. Such is the life of a piercer at a street shop in the “ghetto”, right?



I had a rather well built man come in for a nipple piercing and as usual he was trying to be the tough guy, and in typical fashion he was overcome by his adrenaline and passed out. When he came to, he was disoriented and nervous. I was leaning over him when he panicked and swung at me, knocking me to the ground. He figured out where he was and

soon apologized. I've also had a woman throw her purse at me for refusing to pierce her underage daughter. Then there was a guy who owned another local shop that came in and threatened me with a beating... I still don't know what that was all about. People are very strange.



I was throwing this guy out of a shop that I was working at. He was harassing other customers and being very disruptive. I'm pretty sure that he was intoxicated. When I came out from behind the counter, after the verbal altercation that he and I had, I started moving towards him. He pulled out a knife. I went back behind the counter and got the bat that we kept back there and he left.



I was reading a book on Buddhism while a client was waiting for another client who was being tattooed. The lady, after already being contrary to me about having piercings (keep in mind she was in a piercing and tattooing shop), looks at the book and says to me "be careful the things you put in there" — pointing to my head — "you you just might not get them out. You should be reading the Bible instead."



We had a person come in who had been asked to leave and never to return a year or so prior to this visit. He looked a little different, and upon handing his ID to our receptionist, Joe, he was recognized and reminded that he wasn't supposed to be there, and was asked to leave. Apparently he thought that Joe was joking, and laughed a bit. Joe told him that he wasn't joking and that he needed to go, and of course, he got all pissed off. He started yelling "Fuck you! Fuck your shop! Fuck all of you assholes!" Joe got pretty assertive with him, and pointed to the doors and sternly told him to get the fuck out, which he attempted to do. He ran to the doors still yelling "Fuck you guys, fuck this place, blah blah blah," but when he was trying to get out, he couldn't get the doors open. He pushed and pushed, putting his shoulder into it and leaning like he was trying to move a giant boulder or something. He kept yelling, "fuck you, blah blah!!!" and then "let me out of this fucking place!" Joe finally said "pull on it, ya jackass," since he couldn't figure it out for himself. We had a room full of clients, which you never want to have to witness something like that, but it didn't seem to bother them. Everyone thought it was so funny that he tried so hard to open the door the wrong way, that it just ended up being more entertaining than stressful.



A couple of hoochie women came in and asked if I got discriminated against going to nice restaurants. I said "no, I can eat anywhere I please!" And the two women said, "well, that's not fair to places trying to uphold a certain reputation."



We had a woman that would call us drunk late at night playing the harmonica and such. Eventually she attacked one of the artists and we had to get a peace bond.



We had a guy start picketing outside the studio, with his three year old daughter, holding a sign saying “Do Not Get Tattooed Here, They Will Never Finish It.” He was upset because one of the artists couldn’t work on his tattoo right away because he was booked for about two months out. This guy didn’t feel he should have to wait that long to get tattooed so he decided to picket. He then started trying to fight with a friend of mine who told him to leave. He said he was going to put his daughter in his car, then come back and kick my friends ass. He took his daughter to the car, and called the police instead. The police came and they were cops who get tattooed at the shop, so they weren’t too happy with the guy and made him leave and told him if he came back to the shop he would be arrested for trespassing. Needless to say he never got his tattoo finished.



About six months ago I learned that a regular customer of mine had been screwing my husband behind my back for over a year, but I assume that wasn’t because she was unhappy with my level of service as a piercer or anything. Needless to say, she’s not a regular customer of mine anymore.



A few years back, a drunk make came in for a PA. After he filled out the release with just one scribble (I wanted his name in case he caused trouble; I wasn’t going to pierce him), I asked him to leave because he was drunk. He resisted and threatened me. I called in my boss, and he had to force him out of the studio by shoving him... over and over...



I had a guy threaten to sue me because the tattoo artist that was working on his leg left, and he didn’t want to get it finished at the studio he was now working at. He called every day for three weeks harassing everyone that works here.



I had a father threaten to beat me up for piercing his underage daughter, even though she was never pierced at my studio. She told him my studio because she thought once he saw how clean my studio was he would relax. She actually got pierced at the studio around the corner and didn’t want to get them in trouble! I had another piercer threaten to break my hands for stealing his clients. He even had some seventeen year old girl steal my sidewalk sign to try and intimidate me.



I have a lot of bamboo around the studio. I was doing a piercing and heard some noise, so I went out in the waiting room to find two frat boys from Syracuse University sword fighting with bamboo sticks they took off the wall, and they were standing on my furniture. Apparently that’s how frat boys impress sorority girls.



I was working alone on a slow Sunday once and we were robbed at gunpoint. The weird thing was he only stole the jewelry in our display counter, and didn't ask for money or for us to even open the register. He just took lots of jewelry. He was never caught either.



I unlocked my studio doors one morning to find three candles burnt and left outside the doors, two on either side and one in the middle. I have no idea what that was about!

“The Customer is Always... Suicidal”

This section is horror stories about customers doing ill-advised care and procedures.

Once a girl from Edmonton came in to our shop who had drilled a 4 gauge deck screw through her labret from the inside out. She came in after a few hours and asked us if it looked okay and if we could put some proper jewelry in it. “You should probably go to the emergency room.” That was the last we ever saw of her.



I had a guy who used a sharpened tooth of a comb to pierce his tongue. It was only a little crooked...



I had a guy come back in three days after I had tattooed him, and he had this black greasy substance covering his freshly done tattoo.. He said his grandpa told him the best way to heal a tattoo was to keep it covered in motor oil... My jaw just dropped, but he wouldn't wash it off, and swore by his grandfathers advice... I could only wonder if there was a specific motorweight that should be used for best results.



I had a regular client that had been in jail for a week. She had held all 40+ piercings open with little bits of comb that she had inserted and burnt the ends with a lighter to melt them and keep them in. This includes genital piercings. I reinserted all of her jewelry for her, having to cut out the bits of plastic comb while she told me tales of sharing needles, gang rape, and other biohazardous activities. When I went home that night, I showered with Betadine from head to toe. Seriously.



Kilt pins!! I can't even count the number of pre teens to young adults that I have had to replace out kilt pins from all over their bodies. I just can not imagine the dedication and perseverance it must take to push a very dull kilt pin through a part of your body. You got to give it to them there.



I saw a seventeen year old boy who implanted a 2ga receiving tube into his inner forearm.

∞

I had a client come in with deep chest piercings that he had been putting some form of rubbery plastic line into that looked and felt a bit liked cooked spaghetti. He had gotten the piercings up to about a 00ga but the plastic was not bio-compatible. He had these giant deep infected holes with sticky white lines hanging out of it. It had taken him weeks to get all of that stuff in there but I told him that it was so infected that it just needed to be taken out.

∞

I had a client come in with PA problems. He said it was really irritated and that the after-care was extremely embarrassing. When asked what was he was doing, he told me he had other people urinating on his piercing. He had read that urine was sterile and flushed out the piercing... but he didn't realize that it's his own urine, not other people's.

∞

The worst thing I ever saw was self-done implants with sewing needles... oh wait... that was me and I was 14...

∞

I saw a kid that tried to stretch his own tongue with the latch from an outdoor gate (the hook in eye-bolt kind). He came in because once he got the hook through the hole he couldn't get it to move. So for a day he was walking around with a patio latch hanging out of his mouth. That procedure required cutting the material out of the tongue.

∞

I've seen nurses use products from the hospitals that just completely seem to eat through the skin. The migration of the jewelry is so quick it only takes a couple days as if their skin is completely withdrawing from everything that is foreign in the area. Crawling away.

∞

We saw a girl with a "home tattoo" that was done with metallic gel pen ink. She no longer has any color in the tattoo, but some really nice scarring and pretty dots all over from the metallic sparkles in the ink.

∞

A few years back, we had this kid come into our studio with a badly splitting lobe... It turns out he had cut the holes into his ears with a normal pair of household scissors.

∞

I had somebody came in with a nail through their tongue once, with a rubber band wrapped around each end to hold it in. Their tongue turned black around the "piercing" — I refused to say anything other than "please go to a hospital."



We had several kids come in after trying to “scalpel” their friend’s lobes themselves with a steak knife. They assumed we could stitch him up, and brought him in bleeding like mad. We told them to jet over to the ER, and they weren’t too happy with that.



A girl came in once after having her tongue pierced at a pager store and the tip of her tongue had started to necrotize. Apparently she was giving her boyfriend regular oral sex, even with her tongue the way it was... Her tongue was so swollen I couldn’t see one of the balls on her barbell. I hadn’t and still haven’t smelled anything so putrid in my life.



The worst aftercare I ever saw was cayenne pepper and urine. Turns out “her friend” told her that peeing in a cup, adding cayenne pepper and using it as a soak was the ultimate in healing regimes.



Some genius got scratched by his cat. The cat’s claw hooked into his earlobe and went halfway through. He pulled the cat’s claw out, thought to himself, “wow, I want an ear piercing right now,” and pushed an old earring stud the rest of the way through the open wound. That’s right, he let his cat pierce him. How tragically hip.



A sixteen year old male was escorted into my business by his mother. She had him by his arm in a forceful way and said in a firm tone “Tell him what you did to yourself!” So he pulled his pants down, right in the middle of my studio. He had driven a dirty nail through the shaft of his penis (was Jeff Foxworthy right about us here in Texas or what?). I am not a doctor ya know and I did not want the many liabilities.



I had a woman who was told by another local shop to use Listerine on her nipple piercings. She came to me with symptoms of mastitis a week after they were done. I sent her to a local urgent care clinic as she was feverish, and both breasts had what appeared to be large abscesses developing in them. I felt so bad for her.



This twenty-one year old guy was bragging to me about the branding he had done on his girlfriend. He made them sound amazing, so I asked him to bring her in sometime so I could see. He shows up a week later with a sixteen year old girl who has cigarette burns spiraling up her wrist. They looked horrible and you could tell the girl didn’t really like them. I was pissed.



I had a girl come in once that had taken a bicycle spoke and heated it red hot and shoved

it through her upper cartilage once on each ear. To make things worse for jewelry she used some thorns off a bush and left them for quite some time. By the time she came in complaining of the pain, her ears had gangrened around the thorns! I took them out and dermal punched around the tissue that was dead and put plugs in and told her to go to the doctor for antibiotics. She came back a week later and had not washed them once nor had she gone to get antibiotics. They were still infected and I told her to go to the doctor or emergency room for medicine or never come back. I never saw her again.

∞

I saw someone use lemon juice mixed with baking soda as aftercare.

∞

I had a female client that tried to pierce her nipples by burning a safety pin until it was red hot and push it through. It seared the flesh to the safety pin... all kinds of bad news.

∞

One of my clients made a thick paste of salt and water spread in a quarter inch layer on a navel piercing then bandaged in it place. This was repeated every day for many days until the pain was unbearable.

∞

A friend of mine that I was piercing hit himself in the head repeatedly to “get psyched up” for his septum. Gave himself two black eyes. Genius.

∞

A woman called in and said she had pierced herself with a sewing needle and asked if I sold jewelry to put in her navel. I said that I did and told her to come in. She arrived, looked at some barbells, and asked if I could put the jewelry in if she purchased it. I said “sure” and got her in the piercing room to find out that she had just pierced herself before she called the shop and made the trip with the sewing needle still in her navel!

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I saw an eyebrow piercing caked with Vaseline to “keep all the dirt out”. The customer was a lawn service guy.

“The Customer is Always... Perverted”

There's a thin line between being a sex worker and a body piercer... or at least that's how some customers treat you!

I was about to pierce a guy's navel. I asked him to roll his shirt up so it would stay up on its own. I turned around to start taking all my supplies out of the sterile packs, and when I turned back around he had his pants undone with his penis hanging out. I was stunned.

I then told him he doesn't need his penis out and that he could do up his pants. He then asked me if I was sure. I told him that I was very sure since I wasn't piercing his genitals. He put his penis back in his pants and left his pants undone. I then told him he could do his pants back up. He did so I went on with the piercing trying to push what had just happened out of my head.



I was piercing a PA on an unusually quiet man and was ready to clean his skin with Technicare. I did so in my normal fashion and he got an erection, but that can be fairly common, and I turned around to my stand to open the sterile packages and get ready to mark and do the piercing when I heard an "UUGGHHHH..." I turned around to see that he had jerked himself off onto my piercing room floor... in, like, five seconds... I was just starting out in my piercing career, so I think all I could say was, "um, you're going to have to come back another day and get pierced by (male piercer)."



I had a guy in his seventies wank himself as soon as I finished putting in a PA. It only took him about five seconds to reach the short strokes, but fortunately I had taped a rubber glove over his dick so I did not have to clean up after him!



In our shop, we've had a man cum in one of our female piercers hand as she was disinfecting and marking the area to do a Prince Albert.



I was tattooing a woman's inner thigh one day, and she started to moan, but not moans of pain... small stifled moans of pleasure. I asked her if everything was alright, and she said that she thought she was going to get off and climax due to the sensation in that area. By the time I was almost done with the tattoo she was actually playing with herself right in front of me and came to a full orgasm in the shop with customers in the waiting area. She even felt it was necessary to yell out my name when she came... the best part was that she had her back to the rest of the customers, so when she yelled out it kinda startled me and I ended up peeking out over her thigh and seeing everyone else in the shop looking at me as if I had been going down on her...



I was doing a standard nipple piercing on a big, sweaty, lecherous man. I can picture his gaping pores and the spittle on his lips. I wasn't watching him as I was piercing him, just his nipple. I noticed he was squirming a bit, which is regular, but once I followed the CBR though it was apparent to me that he had just ejaculated in his overly tight sweatpants. Fucking disgusting. At the time I was working for a shitty street shop and only getting paid \$10 per piercing. I was furious that he not only had cum about two inches away from me, but that I would only receive \$10 as compensation for the traumatic experience. I was put off sex for a week.



I had to pierce a girl's nipples, and her girlfriend came with her for support. When my customers undress, I always turn my back and pretend I'm doing my setup until they're ready, but this time, when I turned around, the girlfriend was sucking and massaging my customer's nipples, and even after disinfecting the skin for the second time, she wouldn't stop. I had to ask her to leave the room.



There was one woman who was maybe in her late thirties who apparently had a thing for much younger men who would come in once a week to have her jewelry changed for a VCH, the entire time making very inappropriate comments. It all came to an end the day she put her hand on the back of my head while I was changing her ring. Another time a pretty frequent client of the shop had just purchased nipple shields that she was so proud of that after I put them on for her she had to walk around the shop showing everyone shaking her tits in their face. This would have been simply just a strange moment had her son, also a frequent client, not been sitting in the waiting room at the time.



I had a woman come in to have her long tongue bar changed down to a shorter one. She wandered in wearing an exceptionally short skirt, sat on my bench, we swapped the bar, and she left, same as normal. However, when I was about to give the bench a wipe down I noticed a nice long trail of glistening wet, which just so happened to be around the area she was sitting.



So this chick comes in for a hood piercing in my first year as a piercer. She'd heard that you can't have sex for six weeks after you get your hood pierced. She decided that if that was the case, she was gonna get some before. She came in, spread to get her hood pierced, and nothing but ooze. She had just fucked her boyfriend in the parking lot before hand and was still "messy". I sent her home to shower and said I would do it at a later date.



I used to have a priest (although I'm not sure if he really was) come in once a year for a piercing for every sin he had committed. Scary.



I had a chick in the middle of her tongue piercing grab my boobie. She was just kind of freaked out. I told her, "I can't work like this, remove your hand, I'm not that kind of girl"... It ended okay and we are still friends.



I had two gay men that decided to lift the skirt of their female friend and start going down on her while I pierced her nipples. I had another client that wanted to describe his most intense fisting experience while I was piercing his guiche.



One time a girl started fingering herself while I was piercing her tongue... I didn't even notice it at first, but then as I was tightening the bead I saw and she was like, "oh... sorry... I didn't realize I was doing it..."



I had a regular client started to make out with her girlfriend in my room while my head was turned, stopped, and then later on in the piercing procedure tried to start up with me!



I had a Mom who was going to get her nipple pierced and let her teenage son come watch, while her teenage daughter was in the waiting room bouncing on Daddy's knee as he braided her hair. Maybe there's nothing wrong with that, but it sure creeped me out. Just something about the whole vibe of that family seemed a little off kilter.



We had a lady come in to get her navel pierced. She started talking about her sex life, to calm herself down, she said. She let me know that she wanted to speak with one of the tattooists about a tattoo she needed finished on her lower back, so when we were finished, I led her out to speak with one of the boys. One was working on a client, and the other was not... I figured this was pretty much self-explanatory, but instead of speaking to the free tattooist, she yanked down her pants (to below her rear end, sans-panties) and asked what the then-working tattooist could do with it. Needless to say, he was a bit surprised, and a little disturbed about her not-so-clean derrière, and before he could even think about what to say, he blurted out "That's waaaay more of your ass than I'd ever want to see!" — This same woman then came back a week later (to the day) and wanted a tattoo done right now, but on the front side of her panty line this time around... She ended up telling our eighteen year old apprentice that she "was gonna show her pubes to him", but then recanted and let him know "I'm only kidding, I just shaved a little while ago... I hope it doesn't smell funny!"



During a male nipple piercing the guy grabbed a hold of my arms very tightly and painfully, I might add. For the second nipple, I politely asked him to place his hands under his rear end, which he did. The second the needle touched him, and it seemed like forever for both of us apparently, and he grabbed me again, only harder. I had big black bruises (you could see each finger clearly) on the backs of my arms for nearly a month. I would have told him never to come back, but he was a fairly regular customer and never did anything of the sort. I didn't see him in the shop for nearly two months after. I later found out that the reason he grabbed was not necessarily the pain, but he was really getting off on the feeling of the piercing.



I had a customer start trying to give me a hand job during a piercing. She reached out and

grabbed my cock through my pants and started attempting to stroke. I told her to stop right away and she did and only smiled and blushed. She said she couldn't resist and she does come back every once in awhile to get work done still. I always joke about it with her when she comes in but she doesn't try anything like that anymore.



This Asian electronics guy comes in every once in a while to troubleshoot his most recent attempt at whatever he's trying for. He came in about a year ago with about fifteen silver finger rings around his wang. He said he had soldered hooks onto the inside of the rings so they couldn't come off. He also had a solid piece hammered into place on his sac. The sac shield did look kinda cool but I couldn't imagine him heating it and hammering it on! It looked like he had dripped his sac into liquid metal and let it set cool.



I had a lady that I did a hood piercing on, and when I was getting ready to grab the ball to put it on the jewelry she started to squirt on me! She had a very steady stream of cum coming out of her. I would of been a lot more pissed off but she was a friend of mine and I just told her that it was okay and thanks...



When I was working in California I saw a man bring in a cup of his own cum and throw it at the tattoo artist that was tattooing. He yelled, "if you like my wife that much here is your sloppy seconds," and walked out to his truck...



I was doing nipple piercings on a woman in her mid twenties. First nipple, her back arches, and she lets out this moan and lets me know that she had become excited. As we're about to do the second one she says that she needs something to hold onto. Next thing I know, my junk is in her hand and she starts to fondle me. I quickly jump away and give her a few minutes to calm down. We do the second piercing and her back arches again and the moan is even louder than the first. She starts shaking a bit and then informs me that she just had an orgasm. She was either legitimately out of control, or she was a really good faker. Her body motions and the inflections in her voice definitely seemed to be those of an erogenous experience. Post-piercing she had to lay there for a few minutes to gather herself and I remember a slight pant in her breathing. I remember the whole thing clearly and vividly because it was the only time anything like that has ever happened to me in my piercing room.



I was going to do a PA, and I left the room for a minute and when I came back the guy was stroking his penis. His girlfriend was in the room as well sucking his cock — I was tripping out for a minute, then asked what the hell was going on... then they asked me if I would have a threesome with them, and the girl was trying to kiss me and the guy was trying to touch me.. it was whacked... They kept coming back, and the last time they came they asked me to go have drinks with them. I just happened to stop by the shop on my day

off and the owner was like, go have a drink with them, so I went. I got a buzz the guy was looking at me like he was going to eat me. We walked back to the shop because his girl was gonna get a tattoo — she wasn't drinking — I said thanks for the drinks, and started to leave, and the guy followed me outside and tried to kiss and grope me. All of a sudden I see this hand come and slap the shit out of this guy! I left quick!



I had a guy who attempted to make out with and play with his girlfriends breasts whilst I was trying to pierce her hood.



I had another older Russian client come in wanting a 8ga ring above his pubic bone. I tried to explain that it wasn't going to stay and recommend we use a surface bar, but he wouldn't hear of it. I finally gave in and told him I'd pierce it with the ring for him, but to expect to have it reject. I didn't notice this at first but every time I went to turn around to grab something from my setup he would reach into his pants and play with himself. I caught it the third time and was a little freaked out since this guy was a really built guy and I'm not a big guy at all. I just ignored it and went on with the piercing. Then after the piercing he started talking to me about genital piercings. He wasn't sure which one he wanted so I showed him some pictures. Then as I was showing him the pictures he reached into his pants and pulled his penis out. He was very subtle with playing with himself with one hand as he was pointing to other areas on his genital with the other asking about placement. Once again, I was stunned, and then asked him to put his penis away. He did as I asked. Then just as he was about to leave he reached out and put his hand on my shoulder and started telling me how I'm a "good boy". Needless to say I was really freaked at this moment and quickly had him on his way. I ran to the back of the shop and sprayed and soaked my shirt down with cleaner .



A couple came in for the wife to get a navel piercing, and the husband asked if he could take pictures. Well, the wife had a little sundress on so I let her know that if we were going to do this she would either have to change into something more appropriate or pull the dress up if she was comfortable with that. She did me one better, she took it off. With no underwear on no less. Not a problem, I can deal with that. So I get her marked and get her up on the table to pierce her, and as I turn back from my setup tray I see her making porn poses on the table with the husband clicking away with the camera. OK, whatever you're into, not a big deal. I let them finish up and proceeded with the piercing. With that done, she gets up, checks it out in the mirror, and asks me to stand by her for a final picture. Once again, not a big deal, I've had this asked before. So I stand there and try to look as professional as possible with a naked customer next to me and realize she's starting to do porn poses again. I just stand there and endure... The husband then says "you can touch her if you want to" — well, that was the end for me. I kindly declined and went over aftercare info and scooted them out the door.



I had a man corner me in my piercing room and touch my face and tell me I had beautiful eyes. It was sketchy.

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An elderly gentleman came in for nipple piercings, and upon inspecting the outcome, he asked himself, "I wonder if my granddaughter will like them?" I was thoroughly grossed out, and have paid close attention to the local newspaper for reports of child abuse ever since, just in case he shows up.

∞

An older client called my old shop asking about genital piercings. I talked him through the various ones that I could properly preform, and even referred him to another piercer in the area for a couple that I couldn't. He decided to come in for a consultation of sorts. Upon entering the shop and seeing the other piercer — a female in her early twenties — he suddenly decides that I am not competent to preform any, and started to insist that she must be the one to do it. He asks a very strange array of questions, and making some very odd requests, like "can you not wear gloves? I, uh, have a rubber allergy." She explains that the gloves we use are a synthetic hypoallergenic latex, and he asked if she could not use gloves if he paid her more! After she calmly explained that she was not willing to do what he had requested, he stormed out of the shop, but returned the next day to get a tattoo, with the same type of gloves.

∞

We had a guy come with his dominatrix. I fitted him with a custom made chastity cage attached to his PA, and then our tattooist tattooed a slave's mark on his buttock. Well, the man said nothing when he was being tattooed, laying on his tummy on our massage table, but it seemed he liked the idea so much that he came all over the table. He didn't make any sound, just got up after the tattooing and we saw what he had done.

∞

A guy came in for a PA once and when he pulled down his pants he had a partial chub-on and there was cum all dribbling out of his dickhole...

∞

I had a woman who tried to undo my pants to give me head after piercing her hood... We also had a regular who would come in to have penile piercings for fun and would orgasm during the procedure.

∞

A middle-aged man came in for a consultation to get pierced one day. He wouldn't tell anybody what exactly he wanted, so I brought him into my piercing room to get him to talk. It turns out he wanted three anal piercings. I wish I'd taken photos, as I'll never have the opportunity to do something exactly like that again. Anyway, when it came time for me to examine the area, he had to take his overalls off. This man was a construction worker in full work attire, so I didn't expect to see a matching pink bra and panties. Now, this did

throw me for a loop, but that's not what bothered me. He started going on about his transvestism and how he was "fucked up" and led a really messed up life. In fact, he'd had a tattoo done of a pin-up girl with a penis. Unfortunately I didn't get to see it, but it was done at my shop so I got the full description from my coworkers. He was very respectful towards me and everybody in the shop, but he really creeped me out. I felt like he was crying out for attention, but there was nothing I could really do to help him. Unfortunately, I think he had some pretty deep-rooted mental health issues.



I had a woman ask me if she could rub her nipples before her piercing (vertical nipples) so she could fully remember the experience. Of course I said I didn't mind, expecting a pinch or a rub, but she proceeded to rub herself for about fifteen minutes, all the while moaning... loudly. I mean, two stations over people thought I was banging the poor girl. She was one of the best clients I ever had.



It was a slow day at work, with just a few minor piercings here and there and I was getting bored, when a young fit girl came in and asked our price for genital piercings. She was very attractive to say in the least but I was dating someone so I kind of let that slide out of my mind. I quoted her prices with jewelry and she told me she wanted a VCH, I said okay and told her to wait in the lobby while I ran my tools through the autoclave real quickly. When we got to the back I told her I need to check her to make sure she was built for it, which she had no objections to, the whole time telling me how her boyfriend was ignoring her and didn't know how to treat or please a lady (most times I'm very sympathetic but usually not so much at work, I could really care less about her problems at home)... The SpeedClave went off and we were ready. I told her to relax and lay back in the seat, clamped her, and told her to breathe in and that I would pierce on the exhale. It took me probably five seconds longer than it normally would because she moaned like she was gonna blow... I hurried myself up a bit, put the jewelry through and was done. When I was about to turn around to get the aftercare sheet she grabbed my arm and thrust it down at her crotch, once she got me close she tried to rotate my hand to rub her!



One time this stripper came by the studio and she wanted to have her nipple jewelry changed. She just took her shirt off in the waiting room so that we could see her nipple piercings. It was funny, but she ended up marrying the tattoo artist at this particular shop that I was working at the time.



I had a guy who ejaculated all over my glove when I was doing his scrotum piercings.



I was about to do a guiche piercing, and when I turned around I realized that my client was masturbating... He said that the studio he was at before didn't mind.



We had a couple of strippers come in one day. One wanted a fourchette piercing, though she didn't know what it was called, and the other was brought along to show me what the piercing was. The one that already had the fourchette dropped trou right in our fucking waiting area. Thankfully no one was in the shop at this time, but I'm sure the snooty wine bar across the street had some rather surprised drinkers.



I was about to pierce a woman's nipples when she casually reached out between my legs and grabbed my dick in my pants. "I need something to hold on to" she said with a wink. I moved her hand to the armrest of the chair and told her she could hang on to it after the piercing if she still wanted.



I asked a man I'd just done a PA on if he could return in a week or two so I could take a photo for my portfolio, as I didn't have my camera that day. Return he did, so I had him come into the piercing room for the photo. As I was getting my camera and getting the settings right, he was asking if he should be 'hard' for the picture. I told him no, that natural would be just fine. By the time I turned back around to him, he was absolutely nude (not just pants off, but everything), hard dick in hand and jerking off. I basically just chit-chatted until he lost his erection, took the picture and sent him on his way... Without my phone number!



A customer came in and had me look to see if her nipple piercing was migrating. In examining her piercing I touched it and she told me that I could touch it more and lick it if I wanted to... gross.



A man came in wanting his nipples pierced. He was a mid-fifties, suit and tie type. He asked me if he could beat off while I pierced him... even offered me extra money. I didn't go for it, and I had the guy I work with pierce his nipples instead.



I had a girl tell me she'd show me her breasts if I'd give her friend a deal. I told her they weren't anything special as I see them everyday. She left irate. I guess hers were God's gift to man or something.



I had a young lady try to fellate me once while in the process of setting up the tray to pierce her nipples.



As I was scrubbing up for a procedure a client removed her clothing, and when I turned

toward her she was on her hands and knees on my table, telling me to do stuff to her. Yawn...



A young, fairly good-looking guy comes to get his PA pierced. He sprung a boner — no worries, it's happened before. I say, "that is not appropriate for this situation and your loins will have to be flaccid for me to continue!" Just a big smile... I continue, assuming when I bring the needle closer it would subside, but alas no, although for a short second as I do the piercing it loses its stiffness a bit! After I wrapped him up he stood in front of the mirror shaking his erect condom bandaged cock!



I was doing a navel piercing on this girl, and as soon as I put the needle through her navel she grabbed me and tried to hold me against her and started with some sexual references... Then there were the two dancers that came in for hood piercings. The first girl was straight-forward, but when the second dropped her pants the first commented on how big her inner labia were and that somehow lead them to talking about showering with some girl who loved big labia and would caress it just right and I am just sitting trying to mark this piercing and finding it fairly difficult to concentrate.



A female client came in to get a belly button piercing. After cleaning and marking the piercing I had her lay on the table for the actual procedure and she decided that it would be fun for her and her two friends there if she would casually reach out and try to rub my genital area. I can't blame her because some of the piercers in my area like to use the profession to get women (and men) but I'm happily engaged and not really down with breaking my own personal client-piercer boundaries. Needless to say she didn't get a navel piercing — or a full refund for that matter — and she's lucky she didn't get any charges filed on her.



I picked up an SMS message stalker! He kept messaging me about how he loved imagining my all these things he'd do to my "tattooed tits". I just ignored them and it eventually stopped... but it really was his fantasy cause mine are art free!



After performing a genital piercing, my usual M.O. is to clean up my tray turned somewhat away from the client while they're getting dressed, to give them some privacy. Once I turned back towards my male client to find him furiously jacking off. When I exclaimed that he couldn't do that here, he remarked calmly that he just wanted to "make sure it still worked!"



After performing a pair of nipple piercings on a lady, she grabbed my arm and pulled me to her and initiated a kiss. This was in my first year, and was really shocking for me... To

this day I haven't wiped it from my mind. I think it was instinct for her, she seemed like an especially "frisky" type... I really don't think she thought too much about it either way. I think she may of thought I was hitting on her because I get pretty talkative to try to calm the person being pierced. I sorta jerked back and tried to casually say "no, no, no... not here..." I really don't like being touched by strangers, so I may of seemed a bit rude.



I had an older man pop a boner on me while I was marking his navel. He decided it was more comfortable with his pants undone, and there it was trying to poke me in the eye. I had another guy try jerking off after I pierced his Prince Albert. He said he thought the piercing would look better for a picture if he was hard. I had another older man ejaculate while doing a Prince Albert — and he didn't even tip me!



A guy came from two hours away for me to do my first ampallang.. I'd met him before and done a few piercings for him, and for some reason he gave me the creeps from the get go. Anyway, I agreed to do the piercing because I needed the experience. First of all threw his poop-stained undies down right in front of me, and then had a full on woody while I was trying to clean the area. He asked if he could take pictures while the procedure was being done. I agreed because I wanted a copy as well, but he started snapping pictures while he had wood and pre-cum! I was knelt down cleaning his rod, my face in the picture... UGHGHGHG! Sorry, but yuck....



I had a guy once while getting his frenum pierced start sticking his finger in his own anus and sort of masturbating it, just moving it in and out of his anus. I asked "Um... what are you doing?" And he replied, as if nothing was wrong, "oh when I feel pain this makes it better." I told him he couldn't do that in here and he agreed but continued to do it. I just very quickly finished with the piercing and told him not to touch anything on his way out.



I had a girl come in to ask about a hood piercing. Her boyfriend was a little creepy and started asking "how long before we can..." I told them approximately two weeks to a month, depending on how quickly her body heals, so they started talking about it and left. Not fifteen minutes later they came back, and did the paperwork and paid. I set up for her hood piercing, figuring they had to go to the ATM to get money... To make a very long story short, they forgot, or totally didn't care about cleaning up because she was a mess.



A couple came in and the woman wanted her hood done. Forgetting the fact that she walked from my booth to the bathroom in nothing but her underwear and a shirt (in a packed shop no less), she hopped into the seat and we get started the procedure her and her boyfriend, between the "girl-on-girl" comments, touching her, and their constant kissing touchy-feely nonsense while I'm trying to do the piercing. At one point I just stopped

piercing because I felt it was beyond inappropriate... unfortunately the piercing was finished — we were doing jewelry, so I couldn't very well leave a corked needle in the woman, bad manners aside.



I got offered a blowjob once before a tongue piercing (I refused). It's pretty common to get provocative sexual offers in Italy after navel piercings for some reason.



I had a guy strip completely naked while I left the procedure room for about ten seconds in preparation for a navel piercing. Upon finding him this way, I suggested that about three inches of exposed skin below the navel would have been entirely adequate.



A very straight university student type asked me if she could masturbate (with her hand shoved down her pants) while having her navel pierced. I said yes, if she washed her hands afterwards.



There was a man just last summer that sat in the lobby rubbing himself looking at the teenage girls waiting to get pierced. That didn't last long...

“The Customer is Always... Stinky”

The worst of this series, this underscores the disgusting hell piercers often find themselves in.

Two girls come in from one of the islands off the coast of Vancouver to get their hoods pierced. They were really into the ‘hippie groove’ — they lived in a bus and only ate organic food. We get into the piercing room and the first girl goes, no problem, she's trimmed and super clean, but then the next girl goes, not trimmed at all (which is not a problem but it can mask unhygienic conditions) and just stinks like she hasn't showered in weeks (which I'm sure was the case)... I continue my job and I get most of the hair out of the way with my hand and then I see a vagina just caked in ‘cottage cheese’... it took me twenty minutes to clean her with Technicare and paper towels — cotton swabs couldn't do the job — just to be able to pierce her... oh well... they both left really happy which is the most important thing to me...



Between the normal “oh I have to clean my ears before I get them pierced?” stories, I remember very well a client coming in for getting an ampallang. After having told him everything about the procedure, cleaning, aftercare and so on, we went to the piercing room. As he dropped his pants on the bench I stopped breathing... I'd never seen or smelled somebody like this before or after. You ever heard people joking about a “cheesy” foreskin?

This man smelled like a closed fish shop and his penis looked like he dropped it in cottage cheese. I told him (friendly) that he could go home get a good shower and then come back. He never came back.



One of our customers, an Irish Catholic priest, who had not washed his genitals in probably living memory, came in for a hafada. It took almost three days to get rid of the rank smell from the treatment room. I had cleaned him using Phoraid iodine based cleaner which was a very gentle but effective antiseptic. He came back again a year later, and that time I used Jeys (carbolic acid) cleaner. There was never another visit after that.



I once had a client who I'm pretty sure had several untreated STDs. I was doing a Prince Albert jewelry change and was turned around to open my packages and heard him get up. I heard a bunch of shuffling and from the corner of my eye I could see him trying to quickly peel all of the dead flaky skin off of his penis. I told him that I had to get something from the hall and quickly left the room. In the hall I put on a medical mask and came back into the room again after washing my hands. All I can remember is this disgusting penis covered in open sores and flaky dead skin and trying my damndest not to throw up. I quickly changed the jewelry for him and let him leave. I spent the next thirty minutes disinfecting the bed over and over.



I went to do a hood piercing on this slightly overweight woman, and we got everything all set up and got her in the chair. She had her pants around her knees and I had to explain to her that she was going to have to drop them to her ankles and slide at least one leg out of the jeans. After a moment of thought she proceeded to do so. When she spread her legs I got a blast of the worst smell in history — the only way I could describe it is to compare it to the old “Ren and Stimpy” cartoons, where when something smelled so bad you would hear the sound of a tugboat horn blasting in the background... BaaaOOOO! I went over the procedures one more time, held my breath, and went in and did the piercing. When it was all over with the woman went to bend over and put her pants back on. She grabs one pant leg and goes to slide in her foot and exclaims. “Oh my Gawd! I am so sorry, I had no idea my feet smelled so bad. I’ve been walking around all day!” I just looked at her and smiled and said that I hadn’t even noticed...



One woman, in for a standard hood piercing, had such an advanced yeast infection that it was literally dripping out of her. The smell was nauseating, even with a mask on. I told her to come back after she had gotten it cleared up, as she was in no position to heal anything. Didn’t she know her pussy was sick? Why show that off? Another fella, in for paired dy-does had such bad genital warts that I couldn’t even find a place to pierce that didn’t have a wart on it. His penis looked like cauliflower. How can you possibly think your penis is okay when it looks like cauliflower? He also clearly hadn’t showered for days, so between the rotting crotch smell and the overwhelming visuals, I couldn’t fuck my boyfriend for a

couple of days.



I had a guy who came in for genital work and he was uncut. I was getting everything ready and prepping him, and when I started cleaning the area I could notice a bit of a smell. No biggy... But then when I pulled his foreskin back I almost threw up. The smell was not human. It was like he had been fermenting cheese in there, and to top it all off there was dirt and shit all over the place. Needless to say he didn't get any work done by me that day.



When I was apprenticing, one woman actually queefed on my bosses face. I kid you not — he was down there, and I swear I saw his hair blow back. After she left he spent a good hour gagging and coughing like he had a hair ball. He just couldn't get the smell out of his sinuses and hair — he could taste it. It was so bad he had to go home and shower.



I had a rather overweight client come in for an ampallang. When he dropped his pants and hopped up on the table, I realized that that I had to reach into a urine soaked hole to grab the head and yank his penis... that just barely came out of the hole.



Probably the most disgusting repeated hygiene offense would be the lack of attention spent to the navel when bathing is concerned. Some of the smells that I have experienced coming from there have brought me to tears. It's amazing how some people just don't realize their navel needs the soapy love too. I chalk this lack of tummy respect to a mental deficiency that is closely related to the "hair person". You know, the person throughout school or such that would do their hair sans the back. Their hair looks great but they never, ever recognize that they have a back to their head. Out of sight out of mind syndrome if you will. And you would think that these incidents would be with unkempt people in general but that's not true. A majority of these navels come from women who you could tell dedicate a good portion of their day and life to keeping themselves looking good. It just boggles my mind. But you learn to deal with it and when this type of client comes in and you get a whiff of the funk, excuse yourself for a second, head into the back room, swipe some speed stick across your top lip and sniff that sucker till the deed is done.



The absolute worst hygiene problem I can remember was when one of the homeless guys passing through our town came in to get his Prince Albert jewelry changed. It literally makes me nauseous to think about it even though it was a year ago. The smell was atrocious, similar to that of the sweat and urine smell you find around dumpsters. I have bad sinuses and I wear face masks, and my eyes were still tearing up. That was probably the fastest jewelry change I've ever done. It's really a shame because the guy was totally cool and probably had amazing stories to tell, I just couldn't hold my food down while he was there though.



I once had a client that looked very clean, and even smelled nice, and had fresh breath — all that kinda stuff — come in for a navel piercing. She was a big girl and I thought, okay, I have to see if I can safely do this navel before we go anywhere so I brought the woman into my room. When we were back there she lifted her shirt and I gloved up and tried to inspect the area. As soon as I moved her skin I got a waft of a wet dog kinda smell. The smell got worse and worse. I had decided I wouldn't be piercing this woman, but I had to know where that smell was coming from... I spent an extra couple seconds looking at her stomach. I moved a roll up a bit and found a pile of white goo. It looked like cottage cheese. It was one of the most disgusting things I have ever seen. I almost vomited. I told her that her navel couldn't normally support a piercing (which was true) and I told her that if she found someone that was willing to do her navel she should be very careful. She left and her smell stayed. I tried spraying everything down, but nothing would work at all — even straight bleach! I felt sick from that smell for the rest of the work day and I couldn't work out of my normal room because of the smell. I still get little twangs in my stomach thinking about it today.



I had this lady that came in that was very pretty — she comes in all the time to have me do ear piercings on her. One day she came in and wanted to have her hood done (I do a lot of them and she knew it). Have you ever seen pudding that sat out in the air for a while and it gets that yellow tint? She looked like that and chunks of I'm not sure what fell on the floor.



I had a woman in her mid thirties comes for a genital piercing. I got everything set up and ready to go. I ask her to remove her underpants, jump on the table, and put her legs up in the stirrups. As soon as she does this, a stench permeated the room. I reached over and discreetly put on my face mask, which I start gagging behind. As I reach in to start prepping, something white flicks off the area and at that moment I realized that she had a yeast infection. Nastiness!



I had to change jewelry in this girls hood. She was very cute on the outside, but when I went to change the jewelry it looked like someone had spread cream of wheat all over her genitals... gross...



I pierced double monroes on a client with all of three and a half teeth once. The best — and ironic — part was that he requested two inch long curved gold talons to give the impression of fangs!



One of my returning clients decided to get her hood pierced, but she didn't choose the best

time. She came into my shop to get it and tells me, “I just got back from a 36 hour car ride from Chicago, I feel like I need to wipe myself off.” She did need to! I had to hold my breath when I got within a foot and a half from the area.



While I think most piercers have ran across the occasional hedge that needs to be trimmed, or butt-crack that needs a good washing, the worst hygiene problem I’ve encountered was a session during a hood piercing. Once she was on the table and went to go spread her legs, I got a blast of a smell that nearly floored me, but the visual was the worst part. This stringy white and yellow shit was all over her cooter, and as she spread her legs, it stretched like a spider web. It was nasty. Stinky crotch goo.



A woman came in with who I think was her boyfriend to get her tongue pierced. She was super nervous the whole time, but it was nothing out of the ordinary. I’ve only had a handful of people get sick after a piercing, but I’ve never seen anything like this before. She walked out of the room, went into the waiting area, stood near the window, turned around to (what I hope was to) run to the bathroom, and lost it. Projectile vomiting. She ended up painting the wall a rainbow of colors only stomach bile can produce. She was pretty ashamed... Clean up wasn’t fun. With a spray like that, you literally have to wash down everything, not just the wall it (mostly) landed on.



I did a navel piercing on a girl who wasn’t very clean. She came back into the shop about two months later with the nastiest infected navel I have ever seen. She had obviously not washed it but maybe once a week since getting it pierced, and she had also gotten baking grease in it about a week earlier. You could smell the infection from about five feet away. The entire time she was there I was backing up and telling her to go see her doctor.



Unlike some piercers, I don’t care if I encounter a tampon string, as long the person cares enough to wash up a little before the piercing. What grosses me out most consistently is piercing the tongue of a heavy smoker. I can handle the bad breath, but seeing somebody with really bad teeth or a yellow tongue is disgusting. On an unrelated note, when some people get nervous they fart, and I can’t even count the number of otherwise pretty, skinny, young girls who cut a silent but deadly fart! It’s quite funny, if it wasn’t so gross. And there’s yet another reason I wear a mask for all piercings.



I had a guy come in for a PA that had gonorrhea, and didn’t tell me until he pulled it out to make sure he was “equipped” enough for it.



I had a female client that had come into studio to get her hood pierced. Our disclaimers ask if you are on your period. She definitely was on hers, with the added bonus of having

shit herself as well. She was quite sure that this was cleanest time for her to do it.



Living in a small, southern Vermont town, people seem to have extremely bad hygiene in general. We've had obese people that don't shower come in during the summer, which gets pretty rank. Doing tongue piercings in this locale is what made my boss stop piercing altogether; he couldn't deal with the filthy mouths these people had. It seems like every time someone comes in for a tongue piercing, their mouth looks like a cemetery: white stone, open space, white stone, open space... And people seem to think I have a fucking dream job.



We had a female piercer working once that had an opportunity to perform a hood piercing one day. The client was... how should I say... 'Of the earth'? The piercing was performed and aftercare was covered. The piercer grabbed her tray of supplies and brought everything into the clean room to set it aside. In the meantime, the client hopped up, threw on her clothes and left quickly and quietly. When the piercer returned to the piercing room, there was a nice shit-stain where the girl's ass had been!



I had multiple customers who where too filthy to pierce. I have worked in Amsterdam in the red light district, so junkies and alcoholics where a weekly task, but the most common hygiene problem was the inside of the navel — black crusts that people forget to clean or do not see.



A man came in to get his tongue pierced and even after rinsing his mouth with Listerine, cleaning his tongue with Technicare, and scrubbing his tongue with gauze, I still couldn't get the plaque, tar, and slime off his tongue.



A woman came into the studio asking about having her inner labia pierced. She asked if she had to take her pants and underwear off (really, I should have known right there) and when I informed her that she did, well, she was a bit hesitant. As she undressed, I started setting up. All of a sudden I could smell something foul... I mean like an old slaughterhouse, moldy gym socks kind of smell... she then informed me that she was on her period and hadn't been able to shower or change her pad in almost three days... I gave her money back and told her to go buy some pads and a shower somewhere. Just the thought of it still makes me gag!



I once had a girl that came into my store who wanted a horizontal as well as a vertical hood piercing. She was a very large girl, wearing very tight spandex pants in the middle of the summer. Since she was a regular client I figured she would have been wise enough to clean up before the piercings. WRONG! After she removed her pants, I had to leave the

room and get some fresh air. I did both of her piercings, probably only breathing a dozen or so times. I've never knew somebody could stink that bad. Not even Technicare spread inside of my mask could kill the smell.



There was a lady that came into the shop that I was working at one night that wanted to get her vertical hood pierced. When we went back into the room and were getting ready to do the piercing I noticed that she had probably the worst case of herpes that I have ever seen... not so much that she had herpes, but that she was so how do you say, not very well groomed at all. It looked like she had been wearing the same underwear for a month.



I've had a few clients who are just all-around dirty, some who've been so bad that I've turned them away because of it. What I think is the worst is when someone wants their navel pierced and has so much build-up inside of it that it seems like there are wood chips inside. The smell that goes along with that isn't pleasant.



One day I had to do a genital piercing on a female who was well over three hundred pounds. I refused to do the procedure because when I approached the area and began "prepping" it I was greeted by an odor that made me almost fall over sick, along with an incredibly curious discharge. It also appeared that the client was unable to properly "wipe". After confronting her and advising a check up she informed me that she had sex earlier that day...



I had this guy coming in for a PA... He was not circumcised, and the foreskin was tight. As I was pulling the foreskin up this smell coming out from under the skin was rancid — the whole head was covered in white smegma, and top of it he got an erection, and came all over his stomach... I'm just lucky I guess.



I had a woman come to get a hood piercing done at a studio I used to work at. We had a large piercing room, and I was at one end washing my hands when she took off her pants to sit on the OBGYN table at the other end of the room. The smell almost made me gag from across the room. I put on a mask and tried to hold my breath as much as I could to do the piercing. She didn't appear to be dirty or anything, she just had a horribly noxious stench. As I was doing the piercing, one of the tattooists was out in the hallway and started bitching at the counter girl asking if she used an old stinky mop to mop the floor or something because the whole place stunk! It was really hard not to laugh when I heard that since he had no idea what was really stinking up the place.



I once had a female client come in for a genital piercing, and when she took her knickers off and got up on the bench for me to clean and mark her up I literally couldn't get within

a few feet of her without gasping because she had such an eye-wateringly strong “low tide” odor. She had copious amounts of thick greenish discharge all over her vulva, and I of course told her there was no way it was advisable for her to get pierced until she had her infection treated and to go to the gynecologist — immediately! She honestly didn’t realize that any of that (the stink or the massive discharge) might indicate that she was in less than perfect gynecological health!



I had a woman come in for a horizontal hood piercing. As soon as she removed her pants (not her underwear) I became aware of a fairly foul odor. Once the underwear came off, my entire room smelled hideous. I ended up ducking into the room of the tattoo artist beside me to get some deodorant to put under my nostrils. I also borrowed his green soap. I sprayed her whole crotch down with the green soap solution and wiped clean. It took me two soap applications to get her to a point where I would work on her. I ended up giving her a very detailed and extensive lecture on aftercare and personal hygiene. She came in a few weeks later for a quick check on healing, and I was pleased to note her hygiene was much improved.



When about to do a tragus piercing once, I went to prep the area and there were about two years of wax inside the ear canal. I swear I could have spooned it out. It almost made me lose my lunch.



I had a woman come in and ask me to look at her navel. She said she had been pierced at another studio and was having some problems. I brought her to the piercing room, had her lie down on the table, and before she even lifted her shirt, I could smell it. She had let an infection get so bad that it looked as though the flesh was rotting away. The smell was atrocious.



Vagina cheese makes me gag every time, and of course half the time they don’t know what the different parts are called... I guess if they don’t know they have it, they wouldn’t know to clean it. Probably the worst though was this guy who came in for a guiche piercing after working outside in the sun all day. I actually turned him down, because the swamp ass was unbearable. I told him to come back on a day when he hadn’t been working all day or when he could take a shower first.



I found a tick on a client once when I was about to pierce their bridge. It was engorged with blood... It was gross.



I’ve had a couple of girls come in for genital piercings while on their periods and try to hide it by going to the bathroom getting rid of “the evidence” and end up bleeding all over my

table... Dental bib and drape sheet aside, a genital piercing is a pretty good ab work out — I guess they didn't account for that!



One client was so rank — you could smell his B.O. throughout the shop... I actually had to burn incense to relieve the stench. The same person shat himself during the piercing session... very, very foul...



This did not happen to me, but to another piercer at our studio. A forty-something, large, middle-aged woman came in to get her hood pierced. The piercer took her back, cleaned and marked her, and as he was about to pierce her, she blurts out “I gotta fart!” and proceeds to, while he's down there! He silently finished the piercing, called my name, and gave me “that look” from the room, so I went over her aftercare for him, and found out what just happened...



I once did a VCH on this woman whose ID said she was 5'2" and 150 pounds. She was really more like 250, and it seemed like she couldn't reach to wipe or wash. The smell was so overpowering, the piercing room reeked for three hours after she left, no matter what I tried to use to kill the smell. What's worse, between the sweat — SoCal in July — and other bodily fluids leaking, the stain never came off the table!



People ask me regularly the same question about female genital piercings. They say, “have you ever had a girl who smelled down there?” I tell them I have developed a secret art of breathing over my shoulder so I avoid it ever being an issue — I usually do it as I am reaching over my shoulder to the tray for tools, jewelry, or the needle. One time however I reached over my shoulder and took a breath to find something that smelled disgusting there, in a place I felt was safe — it was this girl's feet!



A guy in the shop was tattooing a heavier-set woman. She was laying on her side as he was tattooing her midsection. He asked her to twist and stretch her body upward a bit more to stretch the skin. As she stretched, a McDonalds Coke straw fell out of one of her side folds and onto the floor — she didn't even know it was there.

“Love At First Bite”

Done in 2005 when we were all living in Mexico, “Love at First Bite”, is my favorite of the April Fools articles. It was subtle, and melded in so much reality that it was widely received — BME employees Clive and Gillian really were in love, and are now married with their first child. As with the first joke article, media widely assumed this was true and the piece was a viral hit. It didn’t hurt that this was some of the best Photoshopping I’d done as well.

Before I begin, let me apologize for not having introduced BME’s new staff members more promptly. As you may know, at the end of 2004, I ran an “intern search”, looking for a writer to take over many of the duties here in BME/News which were lagging under my workload. The conclusion of the search was a tie, with both Jordan Ginsberg and Gillian Hyde joining the team, as well as Clive Mathias stepping in to handle BME’s new (actually, “reborn”) video division — you know him both as a long-time member of the suspension group iWasCured and part of the core team filming and producing Uvatiarru.



All of these three are currently telecommuting from BME’s “vacation offices” in Mexico where they met both me and each other for the first time. Part of working for BME means having access to highly sensitive information about things that people are doing behind closed doors, and thus signing a non-disclosure agreement was part of the hiring process. Jokingly I suggested that to really show they wanted the job, they’d have to lop off their little fingers as well. Obviously this didn’t happen, and I would never make such a requirement!

I think to everyone’s surprise — including theirs — a whirlwind romance quickly brewed between Gillian and Clive, as some of you may have noticed on their IAM pages (judging by the spike in hits on both their pages (typealice and rookie), I’d say more than a few people have been vicariously reading those journals). What happened next came as a surprise even to me. Looking rather sheepish, they came into my office, holding hands, and began, “remember that thing you said about cutting our fingers off...?”

They’d asked to keep their story private at first but have agreed to let me interview them here about what happened next and share a few of their photos publicly (the full video will go up on the new video site as soon as it’s launched, and a few more photos are scheduled for the next BME/extreme update as well).

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You know I was just joking about the finger chopping, right?

Gillian: Yeah, for sure; it doesn't have anything to do with you... I think that comment just planted the seed. At first, I thought it was a stupid idea, but the more I went over it in my head, the more I liked it.

What made you actually start thinking about the idea seriously?

I think we wanted to really just experience this important event in our lives fully, and as Clive is fairly knowledgeable about amputations, certainly more than I am, I trusted him. I think I knew the first day we spent together that we were meant for each other, as corny as it sounds. Dipping my feet in the Pacific for the first time with him was really, really special, and I think that's when it hit us: we were falling in love. We wanted to mark it with something really big.

Clive: If you love someone, you want to give something of yourself to them. I don't think people take that seriously enough, I mean, they say it, but it's just words... I wanted to show Gillian that I really meant it and it wasn't just something I'd read on a Hallmark card. Go big or go home you know?

Why not just give her a promise ring or something?

Gillian: I'm not dating a ring, and I don't want a ring. I'm dating flesh, and I want flesh to make a commitment to me. What good is a ring to me? It doesn't really mean anything. I've been engaged before — and look where that took me: Nowhere. I wanted this time to be different. Plus, he's been previously married, and I wanted to make sure that it wasn't a repeat of that relationship. I told him if he was serious about this, he had to prove it — and that I was willing to do the same.

That sounds like a threat?

Clive: It wasn't like that, we were just talking and it felt right.

How did you decide what exactly to cut off?

Gillian: That was obvious — it had to be our ring fingers. We were both just out of rough relationships, and wanted to both reclaim and be rid of those fingers... this has a permanence to it as well. You can take a ring off your ring finger, but you can never put your ring finger back on once you take it off. It's something that will last forever — it's a physical testament to how much I actually do love him.

Clive: And if we ever break up we'll just tell people it's a permanent shocker.

Think about it...

Gillian: Shut up.



Did either of you have an interest in amputation before this?

Gillian: No, and to be honest I never thought I would do one, but I think it's one of those things that's hard to understand until you feel it. It just sort of happened, and it feels right.

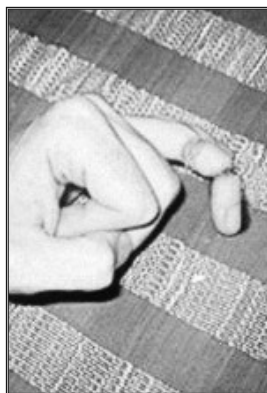
Clive: Like our love.

Gillian: Shut up.

I've got to say, the procedure you guys used is, well, pretty unusual. Do you mind walking me through it, start to finish?

Gillian: We started by putting elastic bands around the base of the fingers and wrapping them tight so there wouldn't be too much bleeding. Because we didn't have any anesthetics on hand — I'm definitely not into that much pain — we soaked our hands in ice water for about half an hour until they were totally numb. We poked them with a needle to make sure we couldn't feel anything.

I put my ring finger in Clive's mouth and he put his ring finger in my mouth with our teeth resting right on the last joint. We looked in each other's eyes, nodded, and bit down as hard as we could. It was a little disappointing because we couldn't actually get all the way through, but we did pop the joint open and tear it a little. We cut the rest, just some skin and the tendon, the normal way.



That sounds like a recipe for infection. Did you do anything to make it safer?

Well, of course we washed our hands first, and gargled with rum to disinfect our mouths as much as possible.

Clive: Gargled? I drank it.

Gillian: And that's why you bled a lot more, it serves you right.

Did you bleed a lot?

Clive: No, not much, the elastics stopped most of it and even after we took them off there wasn't a lot of blood.

And did it hurt?

It was more of a numb pain, like a really deep ache. To be honest, the ice water was the worst part.

Did you get out of it what you wanted?

Gillian: Yes, absolutely, it was intense, especially because we did it at the same time. I wasn't sure if it was going to work (because really, our front teeth aren't that sharp), or if the pain was going to make it just suck, but it was amazing. I've never felt so close to some-

one. Seeing someone when they're that vulnerable is like peering into their soul. We tried to keep eye contact the entire time, but Clive winced a lot.

What are you going to do with the finger joints? Are you guys going to eat each other's fingers or anything like that?

Clive: Right now they're soaking in Bacardi 151 just to preserve them, but when my hand is feeling a little better and I can work with it again I'm going to skin them and make a pair of amulets so we can each wear each other's ring finger bones as necklaces.



It's been about a week now. How is the healing going?

Gillian: I've had a little skin retraction so a bit more bone is exposed than seems right, but other than that it's doing okay. We didn't do much as far as aftercare comes... just packed them with [no-stick] gauze, left them alone, and kept them clean. We try to go swimming in the ocean every day — I think the salt water helps keep the wound flushed out.

Clive: Mine is doing fine but I have a Wolverine-like mutant healing factor. Yeah, I always heal well. Just look at my elbow, I took the stitches out while at work and it healed so well you can hardly see it anymore.

Would you recommend this to other couples?

Gillian: I don't know if I'd recommend it, but it was right for us and I don't regret it at all. I'd do it again.

Clive: On our ten year anniversary we're going to take off the next joint, and then the whole finger on our twentieth.

I apologize for asking this, but I have to... What if you break up?

Gillian: We can never break up, that's the wonderful thing about this.

Clive: I don't think that will happen anyway, especially with a kid on the way. If it's a boy we're calling him Bob, and if it's a girl we're calling her Chopper.

Gillian: Shut up.

Clive: But seriously, I have always wanted a child, and so has she.

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Finally, Jordan — I've got to ask, living with these guys, what do you think of all this?

Jordan: Before I came down to Mexico, I was under strict orders from my mother not to get romantically involved with anybody I would be living or working with down here, and I was generally in agreement with that. That said, I hadn't ruled out the occasional round

of drunken grab-ass, but it became quite clear within the first few days here that Clive and Gillian had a good thing going, and I saw no reason to disrupt that.

Once they started talking about this amputation business, I knew I had made the right decision... my decision being, of course, to not touch that shit with a ten-foot pole. Maybe I'm just cynical, but I haven't even had a relationship serious or long enough for a pregnancy scare, much less one where dedication-through-nullification was a facet of it. I mean, don't get me wrong, I generally support just about everything, but when Clive asked me to act as a witness to the "ceremony" — to legitimize it in the eyes of the Lord, perhaps? — I just did my best to claim conscientious objector status and keep my distance from the whole sordid affair.

Couldn't they have just gotten matching tattoos like other shortsighted couples or something? I honestly think it's just some nasty sex thing — like I really need something else to overhear and get the cold sweats from in the middle of the night.

Gillian: Shut up.

"When you make a sacrifice in marriage, you're sacrificing not to each other but to unity in a relationship."

- Joseph Campbell

Let me here wish them luck and longevity in their future together. You know what the strangest thing about all of this is? It doesn't even seem weird to me — it seems right. I don't know if that means I've been doing BME too long, or if it really means they made the right decision. I hope it's the latter.



Ben on Dermal Anchoring

At the time this article came out in 2005, dermal anchoring, which would later become better known as “microdermals”, were just a curiosity... They had been posited in a simpler form by Jon Cobb in 1998 as single point pocketing, but nothing had come of that, until Ben from House of Color started experimenting with his own variation (and of course they overlapped with transdermal implants). Not long after, the technology was refined, and microdermals took off and became the biggest thing to hit piercing in a decade.



It's not often these days that I get to document a new type of body modification procedure — most procedures are long since invented — so I was thrilled when Ben from House of Color in Colorado Springs sent me the following two photos titled, “eye boogie”.

The procedure, which he calls dermal anchoring, is something he came up with a few years ago and he feels he's perfected over the last year. It's starting to take

off in Colorado Springs — Ben says he can't make the custom jewelry fast enough to keep up with demand — and if it works as well as he says it does, perhaps that trend will spread even farther.

Among other things, you may remember Ben as the third person to hold the Guinness World Record for the most number of piercings on a single person in a single session (back in 2001 it was 227 piercings). Running from that notoriety he's settled down at House of Color (“the first shop I really call home”).

I assume you first considered the options of surface piercings and transdermal implants which cover similar territory?

Surface piercings and transdermal implants are very solid procedures — surface piercings are great, but if there's too much tension on the skin or if they're too heavy, they reject — you can counteract this by piercing deeper and through more tissue, but this means a longer healing time, increased infection risks, and a look that might not be right for the location. And transdermal implants need a lot of skill, and if done wrong can cause serious problems — just look at the words alone: the big one is “implant”. That means it's permanent, and to remove it is a lengthy and very painful process.

Dermal anchoring seems similar to single-point pocketing?

Yes, it is very close, although the dynamics and the design of the jewelry are what make it different. Really, I developed this procedure on a dare! My friend wanted the outside of her

eye done. I didn't want to risk the rejection from a surface piercing, and we only wanted one bead showing anyway. I offered her an implant, and she told me to fuck off, adding that I was smart enough to figure out another way — so I spent a few months hitting the books and making jewelry prototypes.

Cam was starting to become a pest about it, and eventually I was ready to try. The feeling of doing the procedure was overwhelming and made me sick to my stomach — I was so scared that if she moved, I'd hit her eye, and let's face it — insurance won't cover this.

Was the procedure successful?

Yes, but unfortunately even after all that, the jewelry fell out in her sleep two days later. The jewelry was the problem — it wasn't holding to the skin. I've been through six generations of jewelry design now — a few willing victims and a bit of trial and error development, and after the third or fourth time I started installing them in myself so no one else would get hurt — but I've finally got it right. I'm doing it in 18ga for anywhere around the eye, and 16ga to 12ga for other locations... I have five different kinds of jewelry in various designs up to high motion pieces that look like a scary fish hook... The geometry of the jewelry is the key to making it last.

How do you put the jewelry in? You said it's simpler than a transdermal...

All it takes is a normal needle, the jewelry, and a steady hand. First you read the skin grain and watch the way it moves and bends. Let's use the example of an outer eye — the grain is horizontal to the center of the eye. Lift the skin (eye closed) and insert the needle, without letting it come out the other side, going about a quarter of the way down on the needle stop. Then make a quick quarter turn and remove the needle, spinning it in reverse from your quarter turn. Next push the jewelry in place, and jiggle it lightly to move the flap into the crease in the jewelry. Finally, press down for about ten seconds.

That's really clever — how is the aftercare and healing?

Assuming the customer does what they're told, they do great. For the first week they need to press on it six or seven times a day and cover it with a bandage at night, just until the anchor grabs the tissue better... Healing is really beautiful — minimal to no bruising, no blood after the jewelry is in... They just need to keep it clean with soap and saline solution every three hours. In dry climates like we have here in Colorado I've found it doesn't dry out the tissues.



And the success rate?

After I got the jewelry right, of the twenty or so I've done, the people who've taken care of them have had complete success. Those that haven't taken care of it still tend to have the jewelry, but it shifts and moves out a little.

How do people react to dermal anchors when they see them?

“How is that in there?!” — they think it’s glued on... But most people really like them. A few piercers have tried to copy it but just managed to hurt and mess up their customers — of the shop whores in town got one done and then had to come to me two weeks later



to remove it... and then asked me to do it right. I said no, which is good because I later found out her plan was to take it to another piercer so he could copy the jewelry...

Co-workers have pushed me to release it to the world, but I’m taking things slow. It’s still really new and I don’t promote it too much. If people ask, I tell them about it — normally the pictures in my portfolio get the conversation started. My philosophy as a piercer is that if you’re doing this for the money, you’re going about it wrong. This is an art form, and that is how it must be treated. That’s when your best work will come out.



Have you observed any risks that are unique to this procedure?

Not really... without any upward pressure on the skin, normal rejection doesn’t even happen. I guess if you go to a mosh pit, yeah, but you could also have your teeth “reject” there too. It’s just really important

that people take care if it — you practically have to staple the aftercare instructions to their shirt for them to remember... But that’s all there is to it.

Any advice to piercers who’d like to try this?

Please call me. I’ll tell you whatever you need to know, or if you live in Colorado or are making a stop, come in and say what’s up... Don’t try and do these with just your skill under your belt unless you’re really good. I’ve seen what happens when some guy says “I can do that”, and it doesn’t look pretty.

Johnny Brought His [Tattoo] Gun

At the height of the Iraq War and the war in Afghanistan, I was writing extensively about the politics of it on my personal blog, so I was happy to meet an amateur soldier tattoo artist through BME, giving me the opportunity to write about it in a much bigger forum. This provides a much more positive version of mods in the military than Brent's horrific experience with tongue splitting.

I recently received some tattoo photos from a BME reader serving with the Oregon Army National Guard at Camp Phoenix in Kabul, Afghanistan. Johnny didn't just send in his own tattoos, but also the tattoos he's been doing on fellow soldiers also serving in Afghanistan, helping carry on the ancient tradition of military personnel coming back from tours with new tattoos. We had a chance to talk to him about the experiences.



What's your official job?

I'm working as a 45B — small arms repair. I am part of a program that fixes foreign weapons, mainly AK-47s for the Afghan National Army, along with Russian machine guns.

How did you first get interested in tattoos?

I got my first tattoo when I was fifteen, a home made stick-and-poke deal. I tattooed a Grateful Dead steal your face logo on my ankle — it ended up more like connect-the-dots than a tattoo. It wasn't until I joined the Army that I decided to get my next tattoo, a soldier's cross on my left leg [ed. note: this is the cover picture, tattooed by Steve Fuller at Phat Kat Tattoo in Medford, Oregon], which is a memorial to all the military personnel that died for our country. I also have shark gills on the sides of my chest, which are still a work in progress.

I guess I have always wanted tattoos, after seeing my stepdad and older guys having tats when I was a child. There were always great stories behind why people had them.

What sort of tattoos did they have?

Most of the tattoos were related to their military service. My step dad has a tat of a black rose with the word "death" above it. He got it shortly after two tours in Vietnam. Not all their tattoos were military related, but from what I remember, their first tattoos were received while they were serving in the military, and then other tats followed from there.

How did you start tattooing others?

I started tooling leather, making wallets and belts for friends. People wanted some of the designs I was tooling on leather as tats, so, after getting some ink on myself, my friends

pushed me to think about buying a tat gun and pushing some ink on them. I finally saved up enough money to buy a starter kit and rest is history. I have pushing ink for a little over a year now.

How long had you been tattooing before leaving for Afghanistan?

It was about six months of tattooing before leaving for training. I had done a good amount of tats before I came; but it's easier here I think, mainly because we all are in one place together and have the same job.

What made you decide to bring your tattoo equipment with you to Afghanistan?

Before we were leaving for Afghanistan, I heard about a soldier that was tattooing while stationed in Iraq. I figured I could bring my equipment, but I kept it under wraps that I was going to be pushing ink. I only told a couple people, but after I did my first tattoo, the word was out. After I finished that first tat, so many troops came asking if I did tattoos, you would think I was selling drugs!

How do others find out that you're tattooing and come to you?

Just by word of mouth — I haven't told anybody I do tats in months. I'm not really sure if I could get in trouble, but we're in a combat zone, and I could think of worse things to be doing. The Army has been more lenient on tattoos considering most teenagers have them before entering the service now.

Where do you work out of?

I work from the beehut (barracks made of cheap-ass plywood) that I live in, which is smaller than a jail cell.

Do you charge, or do you tattoo for free?

No, I definitely charge for ink, but not much though. Everybody here gets a military discount.

Are there any others there doing tattoos that you know of?

I'm the only one who does ink from what I hear.

How do you deal with sterility issues and so on?

I use disposable tubes and needles, and I can get the medics to sterilize my regular tubes in the autoclave if needed. I also use antibacterial spray and plastic wrap on my tabletop that I work off of, and of course rubber gloves.

How do you deal with restocking your supplies?

I brought a pretty good supply with me knowing that it might be hard for me to get supplies.

Do you mostly tattoo flash or custom tattoos?

I use mainly flash, or pictures that troops get on the Internet. I then just redraw it with carbon paper.

Are you tattooing exclusively Americans?

I have mainly tattooed just US troops, officers and enlisted.

So superior officers as well?

I have tattooed superiors — many higher ups have also wanted ink, but have not had a chance to get to them. But most of the tats have been on Sargents and below.

I would tat anybody that wanted ink. Some of the locals had wanted me to do some tat work on them, even though it's against the Muslim religion to desecrate the body... But unfortunately the local Afghans are not allowed in my area. The funny part is they tell me in secret, not wanting anybody else to know about their interests in getting ink!

What kind of tattoos are the locals interested in?

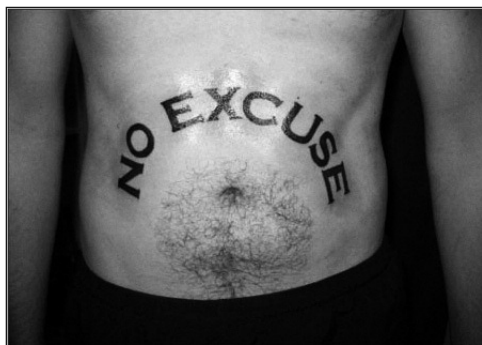
I really don't know the local Dari language, but I have seen a couple AK-47 tattoos on the locals. I don't really know what they like when it comes to tats. I know some [Afghan] soldiers that have letters tattooed on them in Arabic and in Dari.

What sort of work do people come to you for?

I think that most troops want patriotic tats. I did a tat on one soldier of a shamrock because he said he needed some luck after the suicide car bombings we have had on a regular basis. He is part of a recovery team that retrieves what's left over from the suicide bombers. I haven't done it yet, but everybody wants a tribal rising phoenix, which is our task force symbol, and the name of our base here in Kabul.

What's the story behind the "NO EXCUSE" stomach rocker tattoo?

I asked him the other day what that meant — you would think I would have asked him while tattooing it on him. He said when he was a private in the Army he had wrecked a Humvee in the woods. He had to explain to his command how this happened, so his Sargent had told him to say there is "No Excuse" as to why it happened, and to tell them the truth — don't lie. So since then he has always remembered this saying and has used it through his career. And now after tattooing it on his stomach he will never forget, I'm sure.



Are the tattoos important for camaraderie and morale?

I don't think it's that important for morale, but the fact that they received a tattoo while being in a combat zone seems to mean a lot to my brothers. I'm sure it will leave a lot of stories for the future.

Of course most of us will never forget the things we have done in the military — I think some of us also try to forget the bad times we have had overseas. A military tattoo also tells everybody that you have done what most are not willing to do, and that's something to be proud of.

What do you think of the military banning visible tattoos and so on?

Does a tattoo really matter when your brothers and sisters are getting killed? I don't think it should matter if we have tats on our faces as long as we make it home alive. Living to fight another day is the name of game. Not many people want to do our job.

I think the Army is doing their best to change with the times. They have changed the ruling on visible tattoos. You can have tattoos on your neck and hands, but they have to be from before you enlisted.

I don't know if you want to talk politics at all, but if you could make the decision again, would you still choose a military career?

Yes. I've done and seen more than most people will do in a lifetime.

What has the most memorable part been?

Probably travelling the country of Afghanistan, meeting the locals, and fixing the Aghan National Army's weapons at all the different FABS (forward operating bases), and just seeing the landscapes of buildings and how they live — they are about a couple years behind us.

Do you think when you come back you'll keep tattooing?

Sure, but I think it's more of a hobby than a full time job. I think I would need to find somebody that is willing to take me on as an apprentice to do this as a job. Until then I'm just happy making my brothers and sisters enjoy some ink while we kill time here in Afghanistan.

Michelle the Pass Around Girl

Michelle the “Pass Around Girl” created quite a furor due to her sexually explicit and arguably degrading tattoos. Even more furor was created as people started to dig into her story, and discovered that parts of it had been fabricated — that her fantasy life extended to the persona she presented in her interview.

After I posted photos of “Michelle, The Pass Around Girl” and her extremely direct and explicit tattoos on ModBlog, it generated a flurry of comments and debate about them. Were they part of a D/s relationship? Were they self-abuse or derogatory in some way? Michelle, an educated (she has a Masters Degree in English) and STD-free sex addict and cancer survivor, answered a few questions for us via email. You can also watch out for her in November when the interviews she did with Dr. Phil and Dr. Keith Ablow should air.

Tell me a little about yourself.

I am twenty-seven years old, five and a half feet tall and 135 pounds. I reside in Denver, Colorado. I am married to the adult actress, BisexualBritni and have been for almost eight years.

And tell me a little about your difficulties with sex addiction?

I have a huge problem with sex addiction and have been trying to shed light on the fact that women suffer from sex addiction as well as men. I have been fired from every job I have ever had for having sex on the job. I had affairs on my first husband to the point where he killed himself. I have had almost thirty affairs on Britni, and my marriage with her is in shambles.

I will betray anyone, at any time, to have sex with men or women. When I tried to fight my addiction and not have sex with people, I got myself jailed three times for domestic assaults on Britni. I have been confined to mental institutions twice for my outbursts that stem from not acting on my addiction. I have desperately tried to get help for my addiction, but all the hospitals who treat sexual addictions only cater to men and have no facilities for women. I currently attend Sex Addicts Anonymous (SAA) meetings and am doing the best I can with my addiction.

When did the tattooing process begin?

I started the tattoo process during the time I was initially trying not to act out on my addiction. Since I was trying hard not to actually have sex with everyone I spoke to during a day, my sexual addiction came out in other ways. My mind could not, would not, and could not stop focusing on sex 24/7 — I was wet and turned on all day, every day. My pussy ached so bad for attention that I could barely function.



I combated this, and in an attempt not to cheat on Britni again, I started tattooing what I was thinking on my body. The tattoo process — the pain — helped release the endorphins I live for, and when I looked in a mirror I could see what I was addicted to. Of course, being a sex addict, once I realized that the sexual tattoos made me feel better, I started doing a lot of them and I will be adding many more.

How did the tattoos progress?

I started with the “Cum Slut” tattoo and had no intentions of going further at that point. Then, while I was obsessing about sex, I would think of another tattoo and go have that done. Then, another and another. The words got more direct as the tattoos went on. By the time I was at “cum in me” and “fuck my whore ass”, I started to realize I was acting on my sexual addiction in a different way. I can barely go a day without having sex, and everything I do in my life is geared toward having sex. I can have four extramarital affairs a week and not break a sweat or feel any guilt — my body drives me toward sex to a degree most doctors have never heard of.

Do any of the tattoos show while you're out in public?

The two girls kissing on my chest shows up daily in most everything I wear, and since I often wear bare midriff shirts, the “cum slut” and “cum in me” tattoos show up rather often. Plus, I have the lesbian tattoo on my lower left ankle and script that says “girls will do girls” — plenty of people see them, and plenty are offended by them I am sure. Though my wife is the adult actress, and I have posed for very few adult-type photos, the In-

ternet's reaction to the tattoos has been overwhelming — I was sort of surprised actually. BME is the first to publish my photos on an actual website.

What would you say to feminists that say the tattoos are negative toward women?

Feminists bother me. They decide what is good and bad for women in the same way men do. I will do what I please, when I please, and that is feminism. I will or will not get whatever tattoo I like.

Who did the tattoos? Was it hard to convince them?

In LA, the ink was done by Nathan's Tattoo on Topanga Canyon Blvd, and in Denver, the work was done by Low Life Tattoo on Broadway. I have to stay with those shops as quite a few won't do this sort of work. I was told “no thanks” several times before I found artists open minded enough to do what I asked them for. Nathan's Tattoo in LA really enjoyed doing this sort of work. I think it was new and different to them, and a break from the same old stuff.



What do your partners think of the ink?

Men absolutely love the ink. They like to act out what my tattoos say — “fuck my whore pussy” and so on. Britni thinks they are hot, as do many other girls I have had sex with. People basically love the ink until I upset them, or say no to having sex with them — then they are easy targets for insults... “What kind of loser tattoos themselves with shit like that?” or “I bet your mom and dad are proud of you.”

Have doctors said anything about them?

A handful of doctors have seen them and said nothing. I can see it in their eyes when they read them, but to their credit, they say nothing. I did have one nurse in a mental hospital go down on me after asking a few questions about my tattoos. So the ink seems to have prompted at least one healthcare professional to act improperly. I was just surprised it was a woman that did it, and not a man.

Your ‘A’ is a Scarlet Letter reference I assume?

Yes, you’re right. It is a scarlet letter and brands me as the adulteress that I am. I don’t mean to have the affairs that I have, but I seem powerless to stop them. If someone pays attention to me, the only thing I can think about, until I have sex with them, is having sex with them.



When you call yourself “The Pass Around Girl”, is that literal, or is it a persona?

My last job was an \$80,000 a year position as a supervisor for RTD in Denver — I was fired for having sex with the people I supervised. I found out I was known as the “pass around girl” by the bus drivers. It was not a term of endearment, I assure you. The term just sort of stuck, and that is often how I am referred to, and I often refer to myself as such.

FK, The Indestructible Man

The story of “FK” came out at about the same time as the TV show “Heros” premiered, so the idea of indestructible people was in everyone’s mind. FK actually never penetrated the body cavity, so one could say that what he was doing was no more threatening than subdermal implant procedures — less even, because no foreign materials were left under the skin. Still, he healed quickly, and pushed this type of play farther than anyone else we’d seen, and his photos made quite the impact.



A few months ago I met “FK” in Germany. His personal play involves intense body insertions with dramatically large (and often unorthodox) objects, as well as other play and body modification activities. Due to an abnormally well developed immune system, he is able to push the limits of “if it feels good, do it” farther than most. The interview below is a translated version (the interview was done in German) of our conversation about his remarkable games.

How did this type of play begin?

At first I experimented with pins and so on. This was when I was about thirteen years old. I was very drawn to the feeling of putting something inside my body.

At first it was curiosity — how much could I take? Then I found that pain excited me sexually, and over time it became more and more extreme. The thought of putting things under my skin is very hot and exciting. After pins I moved on to skewers, and sometimes 10mm stainless steel rod and aquarium heating rods (not turned on).

To insert the larger rods, I use very sharp special scissors that are normally used for cutting fishing line to make the incision. I’m an avid angler, so I always have them around the house. I usually don’t leave the objects in for long, no more than a day. Last year I inserted a metal rod in myself and rode a 100km bicycle route, which was quite extreme! This was an experiment to see how much I could stand and for how long.

Healing from heavy play takes two to four weeks, and then everything is back to normal. I’ve stopped now because of the considerable scars that I have from the play.

What do you think about while you’re doing this play?

Obviously it hurts, but to tell the truth, this sort of pain excites me greatly. I don’t think about anything while I’m doing it, it’s just a turn on. It is a kind of “sex”, and is very exciting right up until the orgasm.

Do you think that you have strengthened your immune system with this sort of play?

My immune system is naturally extremely strong. I've never had an infection or other complication, in my entire life, which is already quite unusual. I can eat poisonous fruits and mushrooms without difficulty. Drugs and narcotics are almost completely ineffective on me — a few years ago I had surgery with general anesthesia and I required three times the normal dose!

It's as if you're a "superhero"...

It's a mystery to me as to why my immune system is so durable! As I said, I've never had any inflammation or infection my whole life. The only reason I stopped was because of the scars, but on the other hand, the scars are a sort of body decoration that I carry with pride. Perhaps I'll do it sometime again.

Have there been any complications from your play?

Other than some bleeding, I've never seen any danger in what I do, but I know my body very well. If I push a metal bar through my belly, I always remain in the fatty tissue, in order to not hurt anything vital. I do not sterilize the items but I clean them with soap and water — as I said, I am practically immune to germs. If I wasn't like that, I'd probably not be here right now!

...and how in the world did you find out that you could survive poisons???

That was coincidence — as a child I ate poisonous mushrooms and had no complaints! Then when I went to the dentist the anesthetic didn't work — getting a tooth pulled without it is not fun! Later, in the hospital, for a tooth operation they put me completely under, and afterwards the anesthesiologist told me the dose could have killed a cow... A while ago I smoked a joint with a friend. It was strong and my friend was totally stoned, but I couldn't feel it — I'd probably have to smoke a whole lawn to get stoned!

Do narcotics work at all for you?

Haha, yes, but I have to take a lot! Everything works, I just have to take a larger quantity than others.

What made you decide to document it with photos and videos?

I always photographed and videotaped it so I could watch it over and over and remember it, especially because I don't do this type of play any more. The last scene I did was the one you see in the "stomach torture" video on BMEvideo.



Do you do other play or body modification as well?

My other passion is extreme anal expansion. I insert bottles, fruit, and other things into my ass. In addition, I enjoy fisting myself and being fisted by others. I don't have any tattoos, but I have piercings in my cock, scrotum, and nipples.

How do you explain your scars to partners?



I tell them a story about how I went through a window. Many of my scars are actually from a car accident about twelve years ago — I was almost cut in half due to the car not having safety glass... My current partner is not bothered by the scars, but finds it all a bit mad. He mostly fists me, and says that he likes the scars a lot.

Did you heal well after your car accident as well (I assume that wasn't exciting sexually)?

Yes, amazingly fast. I had a broken nose, a dislocated shoulder, cracked ribs, and my belly was nearly completely slit open. It was definitely not sexually exciting, but after three weeks I was back at work farming fish.

I hope this isn't a silly question, but do you consider yourself a sort of "fakir" or is there any spiritual aspect to what you do?

It's not a silly question, but quite justified. However, there is no spiritual aspect and I am not a fakir. I much prefer sleeping on a comfortable mattress than a bed of nails!



Magnetic Vision

As “magnetic vision”, the implantation of small magnets to allow sensation of EM fields progressed as an art form, I continued to cover it and believe it was one of the most important forms of body modification — the only one that could be said to grant the bearer a new sense! This interview chatted with a number of people (myself included) that had long-term experience with the implants.

Magnetic implants are small, encased magnets designed to be implanted in nerve rich areas in order to give the patient heightened sensitivity to EM fields — that is, magnetic vision. Because the magnets vibrate very slightly, the wearer’s senses begin to extend, giving them an awareness of electromagnetic fields and radiation. Just like iron filings want to align themselves with a magnetic field,



magnetic implants also want to align themselves with magnetic fields. This motion can be felt on an intuitive level by the fine nerves in the fingers, tricking the body into feeling like it’s touching a physical object when it interacts with electromagnetic fields of all sorts.

In this interview I wanted to talk about the “day-to-day” aspect of having implanted magnets — “what’s it like?” Magnetic implants are still quite uncommon, with possibly less than a hundred people having them. We’ll talk to eleven here — in order of when the magnet was implanted, Todd Huffman had his done in January 2004, a stack of six magnets in a single case, implanted by Steve Haworth and made by Jesse Jarrell (Mr. Bones), who had a silicone case molded 1/16 length X 1/8 dia N45 NIB installed by Steve a few days later. Steve Truitt’s magnet was self implanted in mid-2005 (and removed about a year later), and my (Shannon’s) magnets were done at about the same time by Steve Haworth. Also by Steve, Quinn Norton’s magnet, since removed, was implanted in September of 2005. Jymmi’s magnet was done in September 2006, and Powder’s was done a month later, both by Steve Haworth. Fred has a 1/16”x1/16” neodymium magnet implant in a custom made titanium casing (all the others here are in silicone), implanted by Nickk Leading. Anton and Dean were both done in January of 2007, and KYO got his most recently, in April 2007.

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When did you become aware of being able to sense things with your magnetic implant?

Fred: For the first month I thought this was a failure; my main goal was to be able to sense things and I hadn’t sensed anything so far. I work for a company where we manufacture a number of electronic things, and one day my friend was testing a large 230volt power supply with a huge transformer in it so I walked up and waved my hand in front of it and got that cool vibrating sensation in my finger tip. Immediately after I just started putting my

finger up to several things I knew had transformers, clocks, cell phone chargers, and microwaves. So far my nebulizer, which I use for my asthma seems to have the strongest field.

Steve: It was probably two weeks into having it that I started sensing things. I could feel my microwave stronger than anything.

Jymmi: I could feel small things at about a week to two weeks, like an electric shaver and a one inch earth magnet. After about three or four months I also could feel the electric fields in my non-magnetic hand. It's not as strong as my magnetic hand — it's more of a general feeling. About a month ago I started feeling the vibrations in my feet.

Powder: A few days after I had the implant done I was standing in my father's garage near a large running engine. I felt what I thought was a light breeze on my hand but realized it was only in my implant finger. I started moving my hand closer and farther from the engine and felt slight differences in the sensation.

KYO: On the sixth day I picked up an electric sharpener and had a weird sensation — then I realized it was actually the magnetic implant reacting to the electro magnetic field from the engine.

Jesse: I tried static fields from large magnets fairly immediately after insertion, but the first really astounding sensation was provided by a power drill.

Todd: To quote from my blog, two days after getting the implant:

I experienced my first "in the wild" implant sensory experience. I was in the library checking my e mail, and as I walk out there is an anti theft gate thingy. When I stepped on the pad I felt my implant oscillate, and quite noticeably so. My initial reaction was surprise, since I wasn't consciously paying attention to the implant. After the initial adrenaline rush I walked back and forth through the sensor gate, and it is quite interesting. So far my interactions have been planned, i.e. putting magnets and metal near my implants to see what happened. Today's event was rather significant, it was not planned, nor was it foreseen.

Dean: The first thing I noticed was while drinking a can of Coke. The magnets themselves obviously weren't strong enough to pick the can up, but I could feel a slight sensation when holding the can itself. The best way to describe it is a tingling sensation. To date, I am the only person out of the three I know with the implants to get this with a can.

Quinn: Right after the implant, Steve passed a magnet close to my finger. I felt it move, and jumped. After that I wasn't sure which sensations were the healing process and which were the magnet, but as time went on, I was able to distinguish more.

Shannon: The first thing I noticed was the drives and fans in my computer. I think I remember a vague buzzing in my fingertips, wondering what it was, and then moving my hands around and realizing that I was sensing definite fields and from that point on it snowballed (although I think they may be becoming less sensitive over time — I don't know if this is due to scarring or demagnetization).

What range of sensation are your magnets capable of?

Anton: I can feel rather faint magnetic fields and also electric currents at times, depend-

ing on how strong they are.

Fred: I can't feel store security poles, but I have felt a metal detector as I walked through — surprisingly it didn't go off like I thought it would. I have to have my hand less than a foot away from whatever I'm attempting to feel.

Jymmi: I am more sensitive to electrical currents. Sometimes the implant will vibrate or twitch depending on what I walk by. We have these big space heaters at my work, about fifteen to twenty feet up in the air and my whole hand vibrates when those turn on. We also have electric forklifts, and when I get close to the battery chargers it feels like an electric current running up my arm.

Steve: I could sense some electrical currents on certain things, especially larger things like my stove or dryer. I could feel certain types of security sensors at some stores. I was never able to feel anything from my computer though.

Powder: I can feel different amperages in various cables. I can also tell when a metal is a ferrous or not. My favorites are the fields around microwaves (a couple of feet out), AC transformers (a few inches), and fans under the keyboards of laptops (about half an inch above and while typing).

KYO: Range is hard to define since I find new things on a daily basis. But I'm basically able to feel the magnetic field around magnets, my computer, some speakers, the oven, some fields around the electric wires (I can actually detect the flaws since the lower protection allows the field to get trough).

Jesse: On the lower end I can feel higher power draws through standard 120v insulated power cords (wall power), various functions inside computer equipment (from a distance), magnetism in the more magnetic alloys, on to stronger things like various components of high voltage equipment used in my machine shop, including insulated high voltage leads from a foot or more away, transformers, motors and magnetrons wherever they may exist, store security devices, the stove, and so on.

Todd: Static fields are pretty uninteresting, and need to be pretty large. Oscillating fields I can sense at much lower amplitudes, and are more interesting because they occur more frequently in the real world for things I find interesting. I've never quantified the exact range, but I can sense a current running through an insulated wire if there is enough of it. Whatever a power cable to a hair dryer pulls I can sense, and probably about three quarters of that current.

Dean: The magnets themselves aren't that strong, although I am able to pick up tiny pieces of metal and can also use them for various magic tricks in conjunction with my magnetic wedding band ring. The most sensation I get though is when walking through magnetic fields — those sensors they have by shop doors. Again it's like a tingle within my finger, almost like a sixth sense.

Quinn: I felt about three different sensations from my implant. I can't really describe them very well, but one of them I got consistently from my laptop, and another from electrical cords. The third I felt very rarely... And of course, a fourth: other magnets pulling on my finger. To this day one of the oddest things I have ever felt was the magnet spinning in my

finger in response to circling it with another magnet. I tried to practice with it everyday, bring it close to things I thought would be sensible and concentrate on the sensation. After a while it became a comforting and even enjoyable thing. I would pass the magnet over parts of my laptop, and feel them consistently. After a while it helped me feel kind of like all was well with the world. I enjoyed concentrating on the feeling more than I thought I would. I was pleasantly surprised when I would run into unexpected sensations.

Shannon: I can barely feel static magnetic fields unless the field is very powerful (such as a large magnet). Vibrating EM fields ranging from spinning magnets in engines (power tools, the fans and drives in a computer, and so on) to any A/C or otherwise fluctuating electrical fields are very easy to feel. Powerful fields like you find in some security systems (especially the type that need to deactivate tracking tags) can actually be quite painful, but essentially an EM fluctuation is just like a physical vibration. So for example, a power cord will have a “buzzing” halo around it that I can feel without touching the cable itself. The size and tone of this field make it fairly obvious what I’m touching.

What are some day to day ways you use your magnets?

Anton: I work in a hospital (in the ER) and I can tell if the MRI is in use about fifty feet away from the room. Needless to say, I can’t go in there when it’s on, or it will rip the magnets clean out of my finger — I guess that’s one way to remove them.

Fred: I actually use my magnet quite a lot, mostly just to see if stuff is turned on. I am able to locate transformers inside objects and thus detect if they are on. I work in production where I make tons of different electronic components. It’s fun because I’m around a lot of huge transformers so it’s interesting to see how strong each of them are. I found a magnet under my bed once by feel alone, even though I wasn’t even looking for that and couldn’t see it.

Jymmi: I like to walk around work or through a store or just from room to room in my house and find different places that give off electric fields — like air conditioners, tattoo machines, and refrigerators. I use my laptop everyday and there are still a lot of fields that I can’t figure out where they are coming from — the disc drive is kind of going bad and every time it spins trying to read discs it puts off a crazy field. There is a small field around the steering wheel on my car — I can’t figure out if it’s from the metal vibrating, or if there is a magnet somewhere in there. Some cars have it, some don’t.

Steve: I didn’t really have any day to day uses other than just being able to sense things. Now that it’s been out for over a year, I can still sense the same magnetic fields, just not as strongly.

Powder: I have used it to find hot cables in a bundle, and sometimes use it to test reed switches in some of the electronics I repair.

KYO: Working at McD, there are the fries that beep once the cooking is completed, and the magnet allow me to know about a second ahead that they will beep since there is a different field that appears to make the alarm go on. Also, my imitation iPod tends to turn off by itself or simply go on pause, and the magnet allows me to know if it’s on or not without taking it out of my pocket. My cell phone is on vibrate, and I’m never sure if it’s my cell or not, but by holding my finger about half an inch away, I can tell for sure if it’s

actually the cell that's ringing. Finally I had used my magnet to troubleshoot a laptop, being able to detect something strange under the keyboard, and the tech did change a card that was located exactly in the area I had spotted the irregularities.

Jesse: Immediate awareness of high voltage is very comforting in a lot of ways — there is a reasonable amount of it around me in the shop where I live. Determination of ferrous alloys is frequently handy without having to go look for a magnet. Circuit tracing inside various equipment is often aided by it. Common shop dialogue: unenhanced individual: “Hey, what the hell is thing I pulled off that old assembly line?” enhanced individual: “I don't know, but its got magnets inside the case here, here and here, I'm guessing the two along that guide rod are for positional sensing, and the one over here is probably a transformer.”

An interesting note is that I sometimes get “noise” from it — moving fields with no apparent source. Some of it may be the magnet just “righting” itself after being moved by a previous field or physical force and slowly settling back into a position that fits better with the tissues in my finger, but there have been a few occasions that were not so easily explained away, where I sensed apparent moving fields in open air with no visible source.

Todd: Occasionally I use it for diagnostics. For instance, in airports often the power plugs on the walls don't have power, and I can test them out by just plugging in my power adaptor and feeling for the field — I don't have to get my computer out. One time I was trouble shooting a water pump, and I could tell that the motor component was working just by feeling the fields, letting me know that the problem was with the pump-shoe thingy. I can also feel my laptop's hard drive stepper motors, and I like knowing when my computer is moving out of RAM and dropping down into the HD for info.

Dean: I usually get most of my day to day use out of the magnet when going in and out of stores. It also helps to tell when certain things are turned on if there no other signs to tell you so. Like my computer monitor... the standby light has broke, but I am able to tell if it's on standby or not by placing my hand on the screen. Then again though, it really is an old messed up screen. I really should replace it.

Quinn: A couple times, in determining if something was live or not. Once, I was able to work out that a demo wasn't realistic based on the sensation from a cord.

Shannon: I'm very aware of power, so for example it's easy to tell if something is plugged in because I can feel the power leaking out of the extension cord (and I can tell how much power is being drawn — and also tell the quality of the cable assuming there's a frame of reference). In day-to-day life, my electric stove has bad connections in some of the burners, so the amount of heat that a given dial-setting generates is different from day to day. Now, instead of using the dial, I just hold my hand an inch or two over the burner and “feel” for the right setting by sensing the amount of power that's leaking off the coil. It's actually quite fascinating how EM-saturated our environment is.

Does your magnet have functional (as in non-sensation) uses?

Fred: Sadly, I am only able to pick up other magnets and only small things like staples.

Anonymous: I've gotten laid a number of times directly attributable to the implant. Oc-

casionally a girl on the fringe of my social group will be all like “are you the guy who put a magnet in his finger?” (swoon).

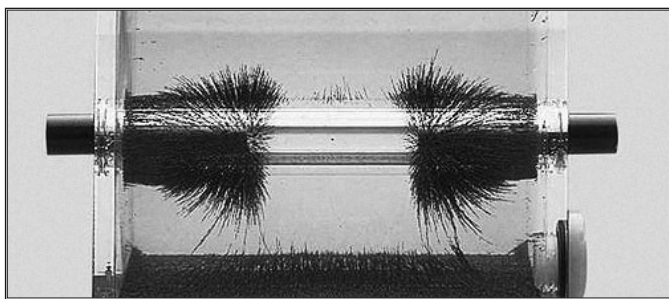
Anton: I can pick up very small, very light objects, and move the compass on my key-chain — it’s great for bar tricks.

Jymmi: The most I can do is pick up screws, paper clips, and bottle caps — or spinning lighters. It really freaks people out when they hold your finger and you move the implant around with another magnet they can feel it moving around under the skin.

Steve: It didn’t have any functional uses for me, other than some “party trick” type stuff like picking up paper clips or things like that.

Powder: I use my magnet to pick up small screws I might drop while working on various electronics. I have used it to single out a cable in a bundle of cables. I mostly use it to do small magic tricks like playing with my compass or rolling other magnets around without touching them. When I’m bored I’ll play by swinging a paperclip back and forth.

Todd: It has functional use in that it helps me reconceptualize the world around me, and every now and then I say something smart, and that is what people pay me to do. I got into my PhD program solely because of the implant. I was at a conference and some dude was all like, ‘there’s this dude who put a magnet in his finger’ and I was like ‘oh thats me’ and he was like ‘no, really’, and I was like ‘no really’. Then he made arrangements for me to get



into my PhD program. Which I promptly dropped out of for sociopolitical reasons but it was pretty cool at the time.

Dean: I suppose the most use I get out of the magnets again would be when

using with magic. Stopping a compass, or sometimes even a watch although that is a lot harder. After a while I was able to use it to “palm” certain objects although nothing bigger than a paperclip.

Why do you think some people report magnetic sensations without the magnet? (Both in new areas, and after removal)

Jymmi: I’ve been wondering if you need to have the implant to feel the electric field — if you can train your body to feel it without the implant. It would probably explain why I can feel it in both hands and feet, or maybe I’m just a freak. I think it is real. I’m not sure if it’s nerve density or something biological like high iron in the blood?

Todd: I sometimes perceive the magnetic sensation in two fingers, my left ring and pinkie fingers. However, I only have the implant in my left ring finger. I’ve thought about this phenomenon, and here is what I have believe is occurring. In the course of normal finger operation your pinkie and ring fingers often perceive things in parallel. For instance when you grab an ass or run your hands down a woman’s back those two fingers are feeling pretty

much the same thing. Your nervous system has limited resources for transmitting information, and uses clever tricks to up the amount of information processing per calorie. Since those two fingers often run in parallel, at some point for efficiency the nervous system constructed a compression algorithm. The dual finger perception with only one implant is an artifact of that compression. The phenomenon isn't 100% consistent, I'd estimate 10% of the sensations come up dual.

Shannon: I can't currently sense EM fields in any place other than the fingertip that contains the magnet stack (and the ones that have been removed don't appear to retain any sensation), and don't have any "crossover" between fingers.

Quinn: I suspect this is a matter of learning to concentrate. Before I went to Phoenix I designed a test just to make sure it was real, picking out a live wire from 4 choices. We did it double blind back in California with unmodified controls. People actually could pick out the live cord better than the stats would have had it. When I sat down to try it, I could pick out a live cord about 80% of the time, about twice the other controls. We were all surprised, but after talking to some people that worked with electronics, it turned out this was not at all unique. I think it's entirely reasonable to think that learning to concentrate on AC would let you do it with your skin even without a magnet; though not as reliably. We are, after all, conductive.

Alvar Saenz-Otero

One of the most accomplished individuals that I interviewed for BME was Alvar Saenz-Otero, a scientist doing work for NASA.



Earlier this year I was watching the Discovery Channel's "Daily Planet", a science news show, as I did some programming or BME work or whatever it was that my primary focus was supposed to be. The show caught my eye when I noticed they were interviewing someone with a fair chunk of facial piercings:

It turned out to be Alvar Saenz-Otero, a scientist leading a team developing a series of networked microsatellites at MIT that have been

undergoing testing in the International Space Station. The space program has certainly attracted its fair share of unique and expressive individuals, notably Erl Van Aken who is not only credited with inventing the bridge piercing, but also helping create the lunar rover. That said, because there continues to be a strong social stigma against the heavily (or visibly) modified individual, I'm always fascinated by people who are exceptional enough in what they do to be able to succeed in highly demanding fields while continuing to express themselves in the way that makes them happy or comfortable.

The easiest way to explain the SPHERES project is to say that they are reminiscent of the "battle training droids" that Luke Skywalker uses in Star Wars — these very small, relatively autonomous utility droids able to self-organize and navigate on their own, both independently and in formation (so multiple satellites could work together on a larger task). Here they are being tested both on the ISS and in a zero-gravity flight (sorry about the luddite screen caps — these are just photos of my television — there are much better pictures later in the interview!):

As you can imagine, I was absolutely thrilled when Alvar (or should I say "Dr. Saenz-Otero"?) agreed to do an interview! The interview is in two parts, beginning with a discussion of his modifications themselves, and then moving on to some information about the SPHERES project.

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What first drew you to body modification, and when did you first start getting piercings?

I would say that since sometime in elementary school (4th or 5th grade, I think) I thought it was very interesting for boys to get piercings... it was somewhat breaking the rules, al-

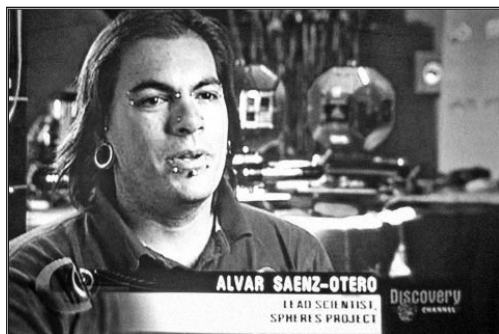
though at that point I never did it (after all, I do admit I was the “nerd” in the class). It also really was not “body modification” for real, but just the idea of an earring that was not supposed to be there by “standard” culture. I got my first piercing (earring) on 10th grade, and from there until sophomore year in college it was only earrings.

For some extremely unknown reason to me during sophomore year one day I just said, without knowing anything about body modifications in general, “there should be other places that can be pierced” (or, in my original translation from Spanish “where I can have earrings”). The nipple was an extremely obvious place, but at that point it was more like play-piercing, since I would never keep any of those piercings.

After that I spent a summer working in Atlanta, and during the 4th of July parade I saw a guy without a shirt with a nipple piercing (and a very impressive skull tattoo in the arm)... that told me “it really can be done”, and that’s when it all got really started. I got my first real body piercings a few days later (right nipple & tongue, which I noticed elsewhere). And a couple weeks later was the first time I saw BME (it was quite new at the time!)... this was all during 1996.

After 1996, when I discovered BME, I began to see other people with large-gauge rings (like 10ga or 8ga) both in real life and online, and that really caught my attention. In 97/98 I began some stretching and a couple other “beyond earring” piercings (septum — which I used a retainer for, and still do, it’s very “intrusive”, and tragus, which I retired for a while because of sports).

Originally I thought I’d never go beyond 10ga. Then around 00, after seeing lots of stretching on BME, I began real stretching, up to 1/2”. I also started with the facial piercings. I like symmetry, so while I began with only the right eyebrow, I ended up with both pierced. The bridge was fun: I had a trip to Europe (aerospace conference), and after that travelled around Europe a little bit... and decided I really wanted a new piercing, so I got the bridge in Frankfurt (it’s my only “metric” piercing... BTW, using Teflon bars for a bridge is incredibly amazing! It heals fantastic, and as the piercing healed (and the swelling reduced), I simply cut the Teflon to make the barbell fit). It all happened reasonably gradually, with about 1 new piercing every six months (the main thing is that I have not really retired many, or at least they come back).



How did your family and friends respond?

I really don’t remember how they reacted to the first earring. I’m quite sure my mom said something to my dad like “we’ve always told them to experiment things with their body if they want to”... and I’m sure my dad just groaned by did nothing major about it. Both were ultimately truly understanding, and it was very clear they cared a lot more about my values than my physical decisions. As long as I was a good student and good person, they never pushed me otherwise.

Still, the '96 summer I really never let them know. Somehow I actually kept both piercings hidden without them knowing. I'm not sure why I cared so much... except that even from then I began to have the attitude that they were my piercings, I did it because I wanted them for me and not anyone else... and that if they made a big fuss about it then it would become something not just for me, but about others too.

My mom never cared, she always laughed or simply did not care. My dad was a little harder... he actually very directly told me that he did not like some of them (like the earlets) but he liked others (the eyebrows) — and I guess others he did not care either way, like the industrials. So sometimes when I went home, to make him happy (but never because he forced me), I would take out some jewelry and keep other in (once when I lost an eyebrow barbell he actually asked me why I took that one out, he liked it!).

So, it was a two-tier thing: first, it all happened gradually over multiple years; and second, my parents were truly very understanding.

About friends — MIT is an amazing place that way, and because I always did tons of things to be around people because of academic or social reasons, while they sometimes reacted to the piercings with “wow” expressions (both good and bad), the fact that I did not let it bother me meant it did not bother them, and things went on. I never looked for anyone else to tell me what I should do or not, I did it on my own time when I wanted to.

I assume you had summer jobs and “normal” jobs before doing your current research — did your piercings affect that experience, and if so, how?

Unfortunately not having US Citizenship made having an engineering summer job basically impossible for me, so on this one the answer will not be extremely helpful.

My 1996 job was somewhat annoying, in that they did make me take the piercings out (which meant my first eyebrow piercing never had time to heal). But since the other “new” piercings were hide-able, they survived.

After that I always worked at MIT. While I did have some “customer jobs” (I managed a grill/restaurant a couple years), again, it was the fact that I really made them a non-issue and that people saw my character rather than the piercings, which made it never matter.

As you got more piercings, how did teachers and fellow pupils, especially as your education became more advanced, respond?

The more I got the less they responded. I think the most response always came from stretching the lobes, and always from fellow students (or administrators)... professors never told me anything about them in any serious way (one professor did point out when I had a clear-acrylic 1/2” plug: “be careful, that looks like a magnifying glass, don't burn yourself!”). I think that was the best part in that sense, professors (the people who I guess I truly ultimately looked up to) never told me anything about them. They saw my work, and that's what they cared about.

I have to admit that by staying in the same place it made it a lot easier, because I did make a reputation for myself. I did have to work with new people (like Deans) coming in, but the reputation did follow me a little bit, and I did personally feel very secure at that point. I am sure it would be different for someone who tries to go to a new place every few years,

and I don't have the experience to give any good feedback on that one.

Do you find your piercings are accepted more in Mexico or more in the United States?

I do think in a very objective way that the US (especially the coasts, like MIT/New England) is more progressive than Mexico, so there is some truth to being more accepted in the US than Mexico.

For a while (especially early on) I seriously felt as they were more accepted in the US. I felt like the piercings did not fit in Mexico, so I made myself feel like I should take them out while there... they were something I did in the US, so they should stay there? And looking back, I think it was more of a personal thing...

Today I'll go to schools/universities in Mexico and walk among both professors and students there, and while there may be a quick "shock", I quickly make them realize I stand by my MIT degrees and I mean business, and they realize that I don't have to be dressed "business casual" to mean it.

Because people face prejudice toward both race and chosen appearance (such as pierced people being banned from employment under dress code rules and so on), people sometimes compare or even put the two in the same class. As someone who has experienced both, do you feel that suggesting that pierced people receiving the same protections as other protected groups (ie. just like you can't fire someone because you find out they're a religion you don't like) is a valid or invalid statement? And how has being heavily pierced affected interviews and so on in the professional world?

This is a very tough question. Trying to be rational (that's why my life is about at MIT anyway):

- You are born with a race/color, you don't choose it.
- You do choose to be pierced/modified.

In that sense, no, the same protections are not the same... of course, then you go deeper and say "is being gay a choice or not?" In that case, whether a choice or not, I strongly believe people cannot be discriminated against for it. So, then, if you choose to be pierced, should people be allowed to discriminate?

In the ideal society, no. The truly intelligent society will exist when there is no discrimination based on any physical characteristic (choice or not) whatsoever, but only on the mental and moral values of people. A person in a suit who lies and steals is way worse than someone with dozens of piercings who makes an honest life piercing others. In blunt and condensed terms, in my opinion the piercer is a much better human being than the liar in a suit.

In the real society, I think it is a battle we need to fight, and one that basically comes from us showing the rest of the world that discriminating on looks is counter-productive to human kind.

My attitude is:

- I will show up to interviews, conferences, and meetings (e.g., including with Deans at MIT) with my piercings.

- If people decide based upon on them that they don't want to work with me, then in my opinion it's their loss.
- I come very prepared to every meeting — if the piercings shock them, I make sure that I shock them way way way more with my performance at the meeting.

Saying that “it's their loss” is arrogant, but I go beyond that by truly sticking with the third point: I impress them with what I do, not how I look (many times we end up laughing at the looks, but in a very friendly way once my real point has gone through).

Should someone have to work harder because they're pierced? No, not at all... you should simply always work hard. Being pierced/modified should neither give nor take any rights from you — you deserve the same treatment, and you are free to look different.

What advice would you have to people who want to choose to look different than the average person, but still want to have a successful life?

If you choose to look different, do it because you really want to do it, and do it for yourself. That's what I did. These are my piercings; they are not there for someone else to look, they are not there to attract attention of random onlookers (I'm sure almost everyone out there hates it as much as I do); they are there because I want them.

When you make them your own, then when you go meet others you act as yourself, and any smart person will be able to see who you are.

So, to that, I simply say: be a good person.



Don't get pierced and say that therefore you have to be X or Y; don't let your friends think you've changed because you are modified. That was really important, as I got more piercings, my friends began to see it as part of me, and not as something that was changing me!

You want to succeed and go to MIT? Be good at math, don't be a stereotype (MIT really does not like them!), take many AP classes, and show that you are well rounded

(sure, be on a band, why not!) When you apply to college nobody will look at your picture and decided from it if you are in or out, they'll look at your accomplishments. So, accomplish things.

I have mostly kept my “professional” and “modifications” lives completely separate. At work I really don't let them bug me, and when anyone tries to point them out, I very quickly make it clear that's not the point. Similarly, I really never talked about anything “work” related with any piercing/tattoo staff for a really long time.

I'm not saying this is good... it's not really bad either, although maybe a little bit. It does make you feel “lonely” when something that is clearly part of you is only part of you for

part of the day.

Around 2001 I began to be a “repeat offender” of Chameleon Tattoo & Body Piercing in Harvard Square (Cambridge MA, close to MIT). It really wasn’t until I met Owen there that I had shown anyone who I ever did any “mods” with anything about work. But finding Owen was good, because he kinda showed me that the “mod” circle can also be very open (I was always scared of saying I was from MIT and people either not believing or, more common, simply saying “oh” and not saying anything again!). I took me about a year of knowing Owen to take my laptop over to the shop and show him (and others there) videos of the SPHERES stuff (I do want a plug for Owen and company: for mods in the Boston/Cambridge area, definitely go to Chameleon!). This attitude really kept me from really joining any “mod” circles too, because I’ve been always somewhat scared that I’ll be the “nerd” again (HS was somewhat painful being the nerd)... and you wanting an interview I hope may be a turning point (just like you were shocked at getting a response from me, I was in shock to learn that you saw “Daily Planet”, paid enough attention to get my name, and then the time to find me and contact me!).

So, in this sense, I hope that me “opening up” with a BME interview allows others in very “professional” circles to also open up (without needing a BME interview for it), and at the same time to even further kill any myths that the mod-community is not open to “nerds” too!



I’d read that one of the design inspirations for the SPHERES project was the little floating droids in Star Wars — is that a fair way to introduce them to help people who haven’t seen anything on them conceptualize them?

I think you need a mixture of two things to conceptualize SPHERES: yes, the first is that each of our satellites is like that droid in Star Wars, it floats around inside the space stations and moves in all directions (although not that fast!).

The other thing is to think that there are many of them (in our case up to three), and that they work together. That is very important, we built them so that we can understand how many satellites can work together to replace one bigger one. One example relevant to today is the idea of going to Mars. We are going to need a very large spacecraft, larger than what we can put in space. That means we’re going to have to send many parts, and then put them together in space. We’ve done that: the ISS... but it’s very expensive! We need to get the parts to assemble themselves in a cheap way without all the expenses of the ISS.

One of the really hard thing for people to understand is: if the droid in Star Wars floated on its own already, what’s so big about this? SciFi inspires us, but it also makes the life of us scientists harder: it was humans who moved the droid in Star Wars, and which tell all those robots in movies exactly how to move... on SPHERES, the satellites are figuring out on their own both where they are and how to move!

What is your primary job in the SPHERES project?

I’m the “Lead Scientist”, in other words, the every-day manager of the project who makes sure (or tries :-)) that the science that needs to happen does. We have many contracts with

different government groups, with private industry, and with other universities. I need to make sure that the tests we run on the space station will meet the needs of the government and industry, while at the same time allow other universities (and our own “self motivated” research) to have some tests. To do this I manage a group of 6 to 8 graduate students (and 2 to 4 helper undergraduates) so that between all of us we program all the software and prepare for the tests. It also means interfacing with NASA to make sure they give us test time (and NASA is not easy!).

What do you see the main roles of satellites using the technology you’re developing being initially, and later as the technology matures?

The earliest roles will be, I believe, to “service” satellites — in other words, to be able to launch satellites that re-fuel or repair other satellites (e.g., the next generation of the Hubble will not need the shuttle to be repaired, we should be able to design it so that a “service” satellite does that).

In the long term it will help to find other planets. We are going to make huge telescopes by using small satellite in special “formations”, and we will be able to say : that planet really looks like the Earth!

What are the challenges in developing guidance systems on Earth (where I assume you can’t really test in three dimensions other than in a simulation) that are intended for use in a zero/microgravity environment? As you moved from simulation and lab testing, to parabolic flights, to the ISS, how much did your code and hardware have to change? Or is the design of the code such that when perfected it will operate fairly adaptively to whatever gravitational fields are affecting it?

You’re right, on Earth we can’t do everything in 3 dimensions (3D), we have to do everything in 2D.

We began the project fully aware of the need to operate in 3D, therefore everything we built was originally designed to work in 3D and then “downgraded” to work in 2D (although sometimes not enough — we actually ran into a problem that should only affect us in 3D in the 2D tests, and made things very hard!).

That said, your last point is the closest one to what we do: our goal is to show that the algorithms are very “robust” — that they will work even when we had lots of simulation/modeling errors. None of the real satellites that use the science we’re working on with SPHERES will look like SPHERES (they will be larger, different shape, have different components, etc); but if we show that the algorithms are very “robust to uncertainties” in SPHERES, then as long as we know the new real satellites “well enough”, the algorithms will work.

Do the SPHERES have Earth-based applications as well? (ie. autonomous micro-blimps for military and media use and so on, or even high powered ones — I’m asking this in part because of DARPA’s interest?)

DARPA’s interest in on the “servicing” missions, they actually have one going on in parallel with SPHERES.

That said, our algorithms will be able to help ground-based applications in the future too,

especially because they advance the science of controls, which is needed everywhere. I don't have a specific example right now, though.

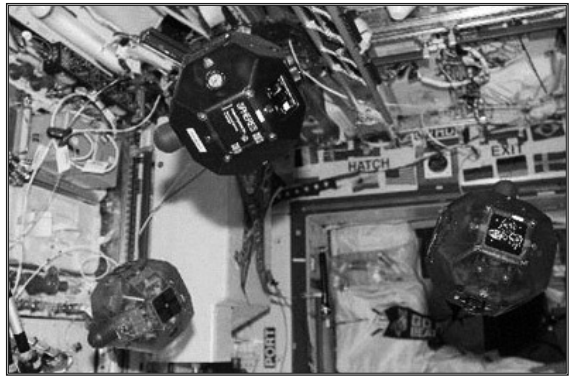
Can many current satellite roles be better performed by microsattellites or formations of microsattellites, or do SPHERES create an entirely new niche and set of possibilities?

Currently we're advancing both. Today microsattellites usually work on their own, so they can't yet fill the role of an existing large satellites — we and others are working separately on making microsattellites do everything they need to replace existing technologies.

But they also open new possibilities: for example, even with very advanced technology we'll never make a space telescope that is 1km in diameter (we can't build such a mirror, at least not for many decades). Formation flight will allow in less time, I believe, for us to simulate such a telescope in space and obtain the same results as a real one. Other interesting one is on space radar. All the movies that show us the military finding a card and then reading the license plate are using dramatic license to make it happen... it can't today. But by using many satellites to make a "synthetic" radar, we might be able to. The satellites can start aligned so that they cover a very large area, and once they find a "blurry" target, change their formation shape so that they can see the license plate.

From an engineering and programming point of view, was it more difficult designing the initial stability/motion code, or is formation flight the more difficult challenge?

In my opinion the hardest thing so far has for the satellites to figure out where they are. This is what we call "metrology" (the science of measurement). For an object like a satellite to know where it is, it's a very hard problem. Many people think "but GPS knows"... except that it does not work for two reasons on SPHERES: first, GPS is good for distances of about 1m, but since the satellites are only 0.22m, it's not good enough; second, GPS does not work inside the ISS.



Of course now that we're starting to do formation flight, we've had our share of challenges there too. Wireless communications between multiple satellites is actually a hard problem when you want them to be synchronized to milliseconds of each other! A human speaking on the telephone does not mind a short random delay... but the satellites do, so we have to research a lot of "coordination" between them.

Do you see a much wider range of applications for the underlying technologies (ie. automated docking of larger vehicles, etc.), or is this optimized for much smaller devices?

I think this goes with what I said above: SPHERES is to test the robustness of the algorithms, such that they work on larger "real" satellites.

Ashley Crawford

I first met piercer and sex worker Ash due to their submission of a cervical piercing, which was certainly high on the list of things I thought I'd never see. The lengthy conversation that followed was not just an enjoyable chat about a highly unusual body modification, but an eye-opening and provocative discussion of gender.



“Body modification is a personal choice. Primarily, my genitals are the site of erotic pleasure rather than a symbol of my identity or politics. My primary interest in changing my genitals is to enable me to do new and interesting sexual things.”

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Those of you who are regular ModBlog readers and BME members may remember that about a month ago I posted — I think for the first time — photos of a cervical piercing. I interviewed Ash Crawford, the piercer who'd done this DIY procedure on themselves, about the piercing, thinking that would be the focus of our conversation, but the interview soon moved into a fascinating conversation about post-gender existence.

A twenty-six year old body modification artist and sex worker that's spent most of their life in various parts of

England, Ash began as a tattoo artist six years ago, later moving into piercing and scarification, and has recently opened their first studio. As a tattoo artist Ash specializes in extensive cover-up work and enjoys combining large scale blackwork with scarification, as an alternative to white-over-black tattooing. A life long interest in body modification first expressed itself doing DIY genital piercings a young teen, and then visible piercings and tattoos after leaving school at age seventeen, aiming for full below-the-neck coverage.

As an adult, Ash became increasingly interested in body modification that blurs the line between male and female — for six years modifying secondary sexual characteristics through steroid use (testosterone) and more recently a bilateral mastectomy. Ash has been making her primary sexual characteristics increasingly ambiguous — not “more male”, but something that seeks a perfect balance between both, with each as prevalent as the other, in order to deny the limiting factors that come with traditional gender roles. As a post-gender human, Ash sees this transition as healthy and liberating, and believes that this view of gender will become increasingly common.

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Let's get right to it — how would you describe the cervical piercing procedure?

Difficult. It took a lot longer than most piercings. I was doing it all by touch. It took ten minutes or so just to dilate my cervix enough to get the clamp positioned correctly. I used

a cannula needle, which helped a lot because with these it is possible to shield the point of the needle with the cannula until it is positioned correctly and also to insert jewelry in the opposite direction to the way the needle went in. Originally I pierced with a straight barbell and one end sat inside the womb most of the time. I found that when I leaned forwards the ball would “pop” out of the womb, which was distracting and slightly uncomfortable, so I changed the jewelry to a curved barbell which enabled both balls to sit outside the womb at all times and this seemed to solve the problem.

After the procedure there was some cramping and light bleeding from the womb, similar to menstruation, for a couple of days. Due to steroid use it's been a long time since I menstruated, and I rather enjoyed the novelty of the experience!

While the clamp caused some discomfort and mild pain, the piercing itself was completely painless. I don't say this lightly. I don't have a high pain threshold at all. I struggle with the pain aspect of getting my body mods done, and I previously believed that all piercings hurt to some extent.

However, the sensation I felt during the needle insertion was like a deep pressure. It reminded me of getting fucked really hard with something big... Definitely pleasure rather than pain.

How has your cervical piercing healed?

It healed incredibly quickly, and with no action on my part other than abstaining from vaginal intercourse for a couple of weeks. The nice thing about internal piercings is that you just leave them alone and they heal themselves — you don't even have to worry about the cleanliness of anything that comes in contact with them because nothing will, provided you abstain from penetrative sex for a while.

Sadly I had to lose the piercing when I asked someone to change the jewelry over to a segment ring for me after approximately six weeks. Mainly I wanted someone to do a visual assessment and confirm that the size ring I'd chosen was correct because too large a ring would be holding the cervix open to an uncomfortable degree, and also, to be honest I've never put a segment in a segment ring “blind” and I wasn't confident that I could. This other piercer had trouble and ended up creating a new exit hole with the jewelry which was at approximately 90 degrees to the original. I ended up with a very shallow surface piercing (which I removed) and a lot of swelling which prohibited me fitting jewelry in the original hole.

I am definitely going to re-do this piercing. I was sad to see a couple of comments on Mod-Blog along the lines of “there is no reason for doing that except to show off”, because I can honestly say that it was one of the most enjoyable piercings I have ever had. I am not ashamed to admit that [im]proving my piercing skills was one of the benefits I gained from this procedure, but it was not the primary motivation. A few comments were also made speculating on any past or future pregnancies of mine. For the record, I have borne one child, who is now seven. I have no plans for more children in the foreseeable future, but if this changes I see no reason why retiring the piercing before attempting to get pregnant would not solve the obvious problems it presents in relation to pregnancy and birth.

What were the motivations behind the cervical piercing?

Having already gained a lot of pleasure from my g-spot piercings (the first of which I did for myself around six years ago) and been delighted with the fast healing involved, I decided a couple of years ago that I wanted to get my cervix done too. I had been intermittently asking around for a piercer who was experienced with this type of piercing, as originally I thought I would be unable to do it myself. A couple more years' piercing experience and no luck finding someone who had done the procedure before lead me to decide that I had as good a chance of getting it right as anyone.



I wanted to feel more connected with that part of my body and to be more aware of it during sex and orgasm, and the piercing fulfilled these goals totally. With the piercing in place, I became physically aware of the action of the cervix during orgasm, which I had only had a theoretical knowledge of previously. I did feel a slight

“pinching” type of discomfort during and immediately after orgasm, most noticeably in the first week, and to some extent for the entire duration of wearing the jewelry.

It was not severe enough to cause me any worry or distress, and would always pass completely a minute or so after orgasm.

Wow, you have a g-spot piercing as well?

I was probably being incorrect in calling it that. It's more over the g-spot than through it.

There seems to be more tissue on top of mine than most people's I have felt. Perhaps it would be more accurate to call it a hymen piercing, but the point of it is to facilitate fool-proof location of the g-spot. An average sized fingertip fits snugly between the two balls, and voilà, you've got the right place! I've had a few, one of which I stretched up to about 8mm until it split. The inside of the split feels fantastic!

I guess it's sort of like a subincision in that it's exposing more nerves to direct contact... I assume these atypical piercings have given you much broader insights into your own sexual identity both on a philosophical level and on a physical level?

I'm not so sure about that...

The fact that I thought about these piercings, that I thought they would feel good, and that they did feel good, would seem to reflect a higher level of body-awareness than I have had in the past. In turn, they have changed my body and given me new sensations to be aware of, so in that sense they have increased my awareness even further. They have been positive and perhaps improved my relationship with my body a little, but I wouldn't claim any deep insights as a result of them.

Your cervical and g-spot piercings were done DIY and by touch — is DIY an important part of the process, or is this something that you could offer others on a commercial level?

With certain clients I would consider doing internal piercings, but there are a number of issues.

The main thing to consider is the anatomy of the individual. My “g-spot” piercing works

because I have a larger than average bump there. On some people it would be physically impossible to do the same piercing because there is not real protrusion there to pierce. With a cervix piercing, a client would need to be able to achieve good dilation of both the vagina and cervix and also be able to use their pelvic floor muscles to push and hold the cervix lower down in order to make it more accessible. They would need to demonstrate an understanding of the potential dangers of trying to sustain a pregnancy with this jewelry in place and commit in writing to remove the jewelry before attempting a pregnancy or at the first sign of any unplanned pregnancy. They would also need to understand that placing oneself at risk of STIs with this in place would mean an increased risk of pelvic inflammatory disease, where an infection travels into the womb.

The second issue is my relative lack of experience with these particular piercings. You wouldn't consider someone to be fully trained and experienced in, say, navel piercing just because they did it on themselves one time! It's a tough one, because of course you always need to start somewhere. I feel fairly confident that I could get it right a second time, with the right client. Is there any room for being "fairly confident", as opposed to 100% confident, and still being ethically able to offer something like this to clients? I really don't know. I guess it would depend on the client and where they were coming from.

One further concern with the cervix piercing is the invasive nature of the procedure. Of course I am used to dealing with genitals as a piercer, but with no other piercing would it be necessary to put my hand inside a client's vagina. This piercing is a difficult one to do; it's not quick. When I was doing myself I was in there for maybe ten minutes. A person doesn't expect to go see a piercer and get digitally penetrated for ten minutes! I'm sure I could decrease the time taken significantly as I gained experience and refined my technique, but still... Of course, this level of contact would be appropriate since the procedure requires it, but I would still have some concerns about how it might make the client feel. It's important never to touch a client more than they feel comfortable with.

You've had more traditional genital piercings as well I assume? How would you compare them?

My first genital piercings were in the hood and labia, and these were for decorative purposes rather than enhancing pleasure, which was satisfying to me at the time. In the last few years I have had somewhat higher expectations of my piercings and have retired the ones that don't work for me in terms of sensation. I have recently retired my vertical glans piercing after almost two years because that one had always felt slightly uncomfortable, and I figured after all this time that was as good as it was going to heal. I had a horizontal glans piercing before, and that was just terrible — I only kept that a couple of months. I kind of knew that one wasn't going to work for me, but when I turned up for a vertical glans piercing the piercer was convinced that it would be better horizontal, so I went with that. I guess it works for some people, but for me it got in the way of how I like to be touched so I couldn't have an orgasm while it was in. I get some sexual pleasure from my fourchette piercing. Both the internal piercings have been less painful and faster healing than any of the others, as well as feeling good, so those are my favorites.

What are the considerations in piercing a testosterone enhanced clitoris? How does the anatomy change from a piercing point of view as it develops?

I'd consider a testosterone enhanced clitoris to be a small penis for the purposes of piercing. Piercing a clitoris is normally a very fiddly procedure, but after a few years on T it's wildly different. If you are talking about an otherwise unmodified organ then there are some differences that prevent a full range of male piercings being done, but you can still do a lot of them. After a metoidioplasty with urethral relocation the organ is generally indistinguishable from an average penis apart from its size. However, I would be hesitant to do any piercings to a surgically extended urethra, as these have a nasty habit of healing shut. I would be concerned that the healing stimulated by the piercing might encourage this to happen, although if the surgery had been performed many years ago I would be less worried than if it was newly healed. If a client came to me with that sort of anatomy I would advise them to seek advice from their surgeon. Piercings like the apadravya and am-pallang can be performed with less worry on a metoidioplasty like mine with no urethral relocation. Alternatively, a type of PA or a reverse PA could be done which might give the appearance of exiting at the urethra, especially if stretched, but would actually be exiting the glans from a normal piercing type hole. This could be useful if the client wanted their penis to pass for normal as much as possible in the context of sex or general nudity, but was not worried about using urinals.

Are there piercings and modifications that are uniquely suited to people who are living in a post-gender body?

People with a post-gender identity or outlook aren't necessarily perceived to be transgender and may not have any sort of transgender body mods. Even among transgender people there are such a range of bodies and minds, I don't think it would be possible to say X piercing will suit people with X identity. However, a couple of piercings come to mind as particularly suitable for FtM-spectrum people wanting to make the most of their testosterone-enhanced cock/clit: the triangle, one or more of which can act as the first step toward a metoidioplasty, and the glans piercing which is much more suited to a larger organ than an average sized clitoris. This piercing can provide additional stimulation to a partner during intercourse — very useful considering the size difference between this sort of organ and an average penis — and possibly to the wearer as well, although I wasn't so impressed with it myself in that respect.

Has the steroid use changed your perception and sensation sexually? That is, does your mind interpret female anatomy in a male way now? Or is that just a gendered misconception about sensation?

It has changed my anatomy, which has in turn changed my sex life. I am a lot more focused on my clitoris now that it is so much larger. It seems like my most important sexual organ now. Sex used to be mostly about penetration for me, but now being penetrated seems like an optional extra, even though I still love it. It's something I do less frequently, when I want to have a longer sex session and get turned on, but not necessarily come.

I had never had a proper orgasm before I used steroids, and then about a year after I started taking them I learned how to have one. This has had a really major impact on my quality of life in general, not just because I feel so much more relaxed and happy when I have regular orgasms but also because it quickly toned up my pelvic floor muscles and thereby cured the stress incontinence I'd suffered from since my child was born. I don't know that

I would never have learned to orgasm without taking steroids, but I definitely think the anatomy I have now is more easily satisfied than the one I had before. That benefit, which was unexpected, has actually been the greatest one of all.

You mentioned earlier that you self-pierced your genitals as a kid. I did the same, as did a lot of people who are now into body modification seriously as adults... Was it just sort of a gut instinct to do so, or was there a context for it?

I'd say it was an instinct. I don't remember knowing about anyone else having genital piercings so I can't explain where the idea came from.

Nobody knew, not until I was a bit older anyway. I don't know how I would have explained it if someone had found out. I suppose I'd have said it was decorative, because in my mind that's what piercings were always for, and I hadn't ever heard of another reason. I was mainly aware of ear piercings, which I had always resisted having. It was expected of me as a female to have a piercing in each lobe. One example of this is that on several occasions I received earrings for pierced ears as a birthday present. People just assumed I had it done. I resented what I saw as an attempt to make me modify my body to suit society rather than myself. So, a hood piercing was my very first body modification. It's hard to know why I chose that area specifically — I think it was just because nobody would see and I wanted it to be my secret for a while. I don't think it was anything to do with sex at that stage.

Do you think the motivator is more nature than nurture?

People are extremely varied in their motivations. I wouldn't attribute a reason to serious enthusiasts in general.

In this topic, as in general, I lean more towards nurture in nature/nurture debates. In my case there was no big, obvious thing that led to my love of body modification, but I am more inclined to think my life experience gave me a number of subtle pushes in that direction than to believe I was born with an inbuilt desire to modify myself. That said, body modification is something humans seem to be turned on to quite easily, in general. There are few, if any, cultures whose people never practice any form of body modification. So maybe the potential to be attracted to body modification is inbuilt in all of us to some extent.

How did you initially come to decide that you wanted to undertake an female-to-male gender transition?

The concept of "a" transition being "one" that I wanted to undertake doesn't seem very accurate to me. People talk about "a sex change" like it's one thing, but in fact the term usually describes a collection of different body modifications, and in my opinion each of them deserves to be considered individually.

Using steroids was the first thing I did that would clearly be classed as transgender body modification, although I had been collecting tattoos that some people interpreted as masculine for several years, so perhaps that counts too. There were two main reasons for wanting to take testosterone. I was getting into weight training at the time. I was impatient to feel stronger, and I knew that taking steroids would help me achieve that. That was the main reason. I had done my research and I knew that taking testosterone would make my

body a lot more masculine. I was ambivalent at the start — some of the androgenic effects took me a long time to feel at peace with. But at the same time there was an attraction to the idea of looking less feminine because I knew that having such feminine body often made people treat me in a way I didn't want to be treated. I think that many people have rather low expectations of what girls and women can achieve in certain areas of life, and that sort of attitude has always been very frustrating for me to confront.

In regards to the “masculine” tattoos, do you mean because of their design, or do you mean tattoos being interpreted as masculine in general?

I think it's just a prejudice that being heavily tattooed isn't feminine. It was reaching a certain level of coverage that seems to do it rather than the designs themselves. Particularly getting my hands done — so many people interpreted that as a very masculine thing, which seems really bizarre to me. I never thought of my sleeve and hand tattoos as being a transgender or masculine thing when I got them done. I only started to think about them that way later when I was being assessed as a transsexual so I could get a steroid prescription. My extensive tattoos were taken as a clear signal that I was already doing my best to live as a man, as was my short hair and the fact that I only had one lobe piercing at the time. This was an incredibly strange experience, because I'd had that stuff for years and never thought of it as being gendered. The whole thing was so easy for me because my body modifications happened to fit the psychiatrist's gender stereotype. It's pathetic really, cause I know a lot

of people way more transsexual than I am who are having the opposite problem. At some clinics, trans-women who wear trousers are being told they aren't committed enough. Most women wear trousers these days for goodness sake!

For a lot of people there is a strong sense that the most important thing a woman can do with her body is to present and modify it to be as attractive as possible to straight men. People don't frame it like that of course — they try to imply that these efforts simply amount to taking care of ourselves and making ourselves feel good, but a lot of what mainstream society expects women to want from their bodies is extremely narrow-minded and heterosexist, in my opinion. For example, I often hear people debating the acceptability of large tattoos

on women. Some people say it is “disgusting” and other people say “no way, women with big tattoos can look really beautiful and feminine...” This can of course be true, but what strikes me about this sort of conversation is that neither side have been able to step outside the paradigm where it is taken for granted that all women want to look feminine so that people who eroticize femininity will find them attractive. To some extent taking steroids was very reactionary. I was so sick of being told via advertising, popular entertainment, and the attitudes of people around me that one of my main concerns in life as a young woman should be to look as pretty and feminine as possible so that guys would fancy me. But then, of course, not to actually fuck all these guys that fancy me, and cer-



tainly not to take money for it, because nobody likes a slut or a whore. Riiight... so what is the point of all this looking pretty again? Looking deliberately masculine was very appealing in the sense of doing a big visual “Fuck You!” to a society which shames women who are not young, thin, large-breasted, free from body hair, and all that bullshit.

Before using steroids I’d get cruised almost exclusively by straight men, and that meant that my sexual relationships were always based on the heterosexual butch/femme dynamic. Even with guys that I liked and who seemed to basically respect me as a fellow human, I struggled to create egalitarian relationships under the burden of such a restrictive social script. Having a more masculine body was a way to opt out of that dynamic and to attract more sexual partners who would be open to other ways of relating.

To some extent, I had internalized a lot of the messages I’d been given about female masculinity being unacceptable. Even though I felt oppressed by those messages and was reacting against them by deliberately making myself masculine, there were often moments when I felt disgusted by the changes. I suppose what made me stick with it was that my androgenised body really worked for me in terms of changing the way people viewed and responded to me in social, romantic, sexual, and professional contexts — basically, in every area of life. While there were some changes that were negative, in general the changes were positive.

My main memory of being feminine was how patronizing people can be. For example, when I had not used testosterone for long and was still quite feminine, clients would often treat it as a joke or at least some sort of a big deal that there was a female tattoo artist in the studio. I remember one guy asking, “how did you learn to be a tattooist — did your boyfriend teach you?” I came back with “how did you learn to be so patronizing — did your boyfriend teach you?”... which I still look back on and feel happy about, because you know how often the witty responses don’t usually come to mind until its too late!

In a sexual context too, everything changed for the better. Suddenly I was getting cruised mainly by bisexuals, and they didn’t have this dumb way of approaching sex like too many heterosexual men I’d met. That idea that the woman may be reluctant and the guy’s job is to persuade her to fuck anyway by introducing the idea gradually or just by being persistent... How disrespectful! Of course I’m not saying that all straight people are like this or that all queer people are great at respecting each other’s boundaries, but in my own life I’ve noticed an obvious trend there. These days, I get cruised by bisexuals of all genders, dykes, and the occasional gay man, and it’s very rare for me to encounter someone who doesn’t accept that yes means yes, no means no, maybe means we should talk about what we both want and see if it matches up, and most importantly that having casual sex means we are both sluts and that being a slut is no bad thing anyway. These aren’t difficult concepts to grasp — why can’t more straight boys understand them?

I have now learned to accept, and even perhaps to love, all the changes to my body. To some extent it just took time to adjust, but it has also helped to have had so much love, lust, and general positive energy directed toward my body and mind by all my friends and allies over the last few years.

I was offered a bilateral mastectomy on the NHS [National Health Service] about a year after I started using testosterone, which I accepted. This is not a modification I would have

pursued for its own sake. The main motivating factor was the knowledge that if I went along with the standard transsexual script — that I wanted to look as male as possible — then I'd get my steroids free for the foreseeable future. The other thing is that there is a lot of breast cancer in my family, so I was always half expecting to lose my breasts eventually regardless of any transgender issue. It was more a case of “do I have this done now or in middle age?” than “do I have this done at all?” Basically I feel pretty neutral about this modification. I didn't hate my breasts but I don't miss them either.

I guess the interest in becoming more genitally intersex just stemmed from the amount of clitoral growth I got from using testosterone over the years. When you've grown something that gets almost big and hard enough to fuck with, then I think most people who were comfortable with that would become fascinated by the possibility of making a few changes so that they could choose to take the insertive role in sexual intercourse more easily.

“Post-gender” as a concept, versus a more delineated switch of gender role is very interesting to me... how common is that concept?

I've noticed that a major genderqueer/post-gender scene here in the UK seems to be very much based around the fringes of the sex-positive dyke and bisexual scenes and there seem to be a large number of people there on the FtM spectrum, probably because a lot of those people used to identify as butch dykes. However, there are some very vocal post-gender spokespersons on the MtF spectrum too. Kate Bornstein is a big name among those of us who like our gender theory good and radical. Also, genderqueer people on the MtF spectrum have been hanging around the gay male scene for years. Maybe those communities have developed a slightly different language and set of priorities around transgender issues, but interesting things are still going on there.

Post-gender is absolutely not a transitional point between genders. That phrase implies that there are two proper genders to travel between and post-gender is somewhere you stop off on the way. The gas station of genders, if you will. Not a proper sort of place in itself. I see post-gender as a useful viewpoint for looking at society in general rather than a sort of half-way place between genders at which individuals can choose to reside.

For me personally, the basis of a post-gender identity is being aware that nothing is essentially male or female other than the reproductive organs, and that even these can occasionally be other than male or female; for example, they can be intersex. Anything else that appears to be gendered just seems that way because of stereotype and social convention.

Most aspects of behavior and appearance can be a gender signal to some extent. For example, for an androgynous person, having long or short hair can make the difference between being read as male or female. Yet hair length is weakly gendered, and will only be noticed as a gender signal in the absence of stronger ones. If stronger signals are there, a man can have long hair or a woman short hair without being considered transgender. Long hair may be traditionally associated with women but it isn't an essential part of being a woman. It's optional.

OK, so let's take a more challenging example: Breasts. Most people think these are fundamentally female.. but are they really? If so, how did the concepts of “man boobs” and “bitch

tits” ever come to exist? Why does the body modification called “male chest reduction” exist? It’s not just FtMs having this done! Of course there is a major trend towards men having less fat on their chests than women, but what we have come to accept as normal and acceptable does not include all of the body types that exist naturally. This is why increasing numbers of women are having breast implants and increasing numbers of men are having liposuction on their chest.

I’ve actually had this procedure done because I was teased most of my life about it and wanted to move to a more stereotypically male body that I felt more comfortable in.

I’m not knocking these types of modification, I’m just pointing out that the physical characteristic of having a substantial amount of fat on the chest occurs naturally in some men and does not occur naturally in every single woman. So, having breasts or not is a gender stereotype rather than an essential part of gender. A man could have a quite lot of fat on his chest, or a woman very little, and neither would be considered transgender if this was the only way they deviated from their gender stereotype. They might be considered unattractive and made to feel bad about their chests, but there wouldn’t be a real sense that they were something other than male or female.

Post-gender is about realizing that gender performance is elaborate and complex, but when you strip it down to its component parts, there’s nothing really there. Almost nothing about a person is truly gendered, although most things can be, in context. Post-gender means choosing not to “do” gender. People will still see gender in you because we are all raised to see gender in everyone (and you can choose to play with those perceptions) but as a post-gender person you have that awareness that gender is not a real thing. A haircut is just a haircut and a chest is just a chest. You bring that awareness to the way you think of yourself and interact with others.

Do you think this awareness is possible for everyone? Or is it possible that having this awareness is a physical impossibility for a majority of people?

I don’t see why it would be a physical impossibility, but everyone has different views about the world and this is not currently a popular one. That’s OK. People are different and that’s what keeps life interesting. As long as people can refrain from being horrible to each other, it doesn’t matter if they have different opinions.

What insights does it give you about the world to be able to have experienced life from multiple hormonal foundations?

While a change in hormone levels had all sorts of temporary effects, I got used to my new base-line hormone levels and now I experience a full range of moods and have the same personality I’ve always had. Well, as much as anyone has the same personality after gaining several years’ life experience. I think when people say things like “men are more sexual and more aggressive than women, and this is because of their hormone levels” they are hugely overestimating the role of biology in the behavioral traits of men compared to women. I think these things have far more to do with socialization than biology.

I’m not saying that hormones have no effect on the mind-body. Clearly they have many effects. However, these are frequently blown out of proportion by people who want to justify their differing expectations of men and women in work, social, or sexual contexts. I

have always believed these sorts of arguments to be spurious and prejudiced. My experiences of steroid use have given greater foundation to this belief.

I've heard these arguments often most strongly from inside the transgender community as well — is there a philosophical rift between transgender and post-gender?

The transgender and transsexual communities are very diverse, and there is a lot of infighting over issues like this. I can understand why. There are a lot of transsexual people who only believe in two genders, and that they got the wrong sort of body to go with their inner gender. It's threatening to hear someone say that inner gender doesn't exist — it probably feels like I am undermining the importance of their transition. I'm not trying to do that. I respect their reality, even though it's not mine. Someone tells me they experience God, I say cool, I don't, but hey, maybe you're right. Someone tells me they experience gender identity, I say pretty much the same. I'm not arrogant enough to believe that my reality is the only one or even the most valid one out there, but it works for me. When someone's beliefs mean that they feel justified in doing something that harms me, then I guess that's the time to start arguing about the truth. Other people's transition or gender identity doesn't do that. It's only if they start telling me what to do with my gender and my body that it becomes an issue. Les Feinberg made a very wise statement on this subject: "My right to be me is tied with a thousand threads to your right to be you." The same society that gives transsexuals a hard time when they don't pass is responsible for giving me a hard time when I don't look unambiguously male or female, and for the same reasons.

An interesting thing to consider is that what seems like a massive difference in identity may be simply a matter of semantics. For example, a few months ago I was chatting to someone who wanted to start taking testosterone because they felt like they might be a man in a woman's body. I asked them to tell me more about that experience in detail. When we broke it down, we realized our motivations for wanting to take testosterone were virtually identical. The person experienced a huge dissatisfaction with the way they were treated because they had a female body and preferred the idea of being treated like men usually are. In addition, they wanted to have a stronger, stockier body because they thought it would feel more comfortable to be in. I can relate to all that; it was just the "man in a woman's body" label I don't understand and wouldn't want attached to me. It's helpful when people can put aside their differing labels for a while and concentrate on what they have in common.

With testosterone being the first major undertaking you took, to what extent did this shape the further ones? I remember being struck in the "You Don't Know Dick" documentary by people who'd started taking testosterone commenting on how much it affected their view of the world — do you think the testosterone changed your course (or accelerated it) in any way?

Definitely. It started with taking testosterone and this led to the other modifications.

I definitely wouldn't have agreed to have the bilateral mastectomy if I hadn't enjoyed taking testosterone so much. When I got diagnosed as transsexual and my name went down on the waiting list, I told myself I'd just take the steroids until I got a date for the operation and then say I'd changed my mind. I didn't want it done. However, I had such a positive experience with the testosterone that when the time came I decided it was worth

losing my breasts to keep getting the prescription. I didn't realize at the time how easy it was to just buy testosterone at gyms, on the gay scene, and even online. Perhaps I'd have made a different choice if I knew, but I am actually really happy with the way it worked out. After the operation my chest felt weird — I could feel bone where there was flesh before and I hated it. I'm not bony anywhere else! I compensated for the loss of soft tissue by doing loads of pec work in the gym. After a couple of years I had pretty much the same measurements as before, only it was muscle rather than fat. It's hard work to maintain (in fact I haven't maintained it of late and need to get my lats back in the gym!) but I love the muscle more than I'd loved the breasts. Having something you've worked hard for it always more satisfying, isn't it?

The testosterone lead to me becoming more intersex and I've started doing a metoidioplasty to enhance that effect. That's not something I could have done, or would even have thought of, without having the testosterone first. My clit is trying its best to become a dick under the influence of the testosterone. If your dick was attached to you all along its length you can probably imagine how frustrating that might be sexually. It seemed obvious that if I cut the tissue away I'd have better sexual function. Only after I had done it did I read that doctors offer a similar modification to FtM transsexuals. Surprisingly, though, it actually seems smaller most of the time now I've done that. Before, it was stretched out full length and held in place, but now it shrivels down to nothing when it's not erect.

Finally, and I worry that this question is almost offensive in nature, but since you say you never experienced an orgasm until you started taking male steroids, do you think your life and view of gender would be different if orgasm had come to you easily “as a woman”?

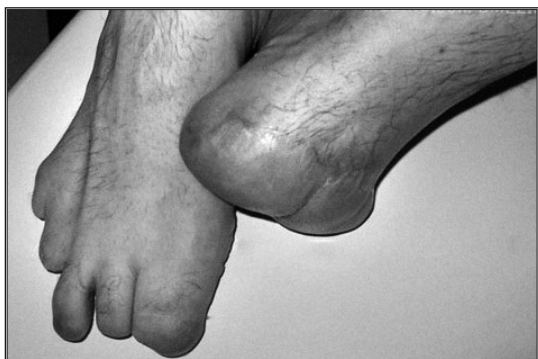
I think the biggest difference would probably be that I wouldn't appreciate it as much. How many able-bodied people in their late twenties think “wow, it's just so wonderful to be able to do this” when they jerk off? Not so many, I bet! In all aspects of life, it's easy to take the little pleasures for granted when they have always been there.

I don't see it as being a major issue in my life. I like sex about as much as I did before, and I still enjoy lots of sex that doesn't include orgasm. Orgasm is not the most interesting or rewarding thing about sex, in my opinion. I can't see how being orgasmic at an earlier age would have affected my non-sexual life or my view of gender very much, if at all. Who knows, though... Sometimes in life the little things affect the big things in ways you could never have predicted.

Thank you, Ash, for one of the most enlightening conversations I've had in a long time!

Leen's Half-Foot

I really enjoyed my interview with Leen, but it generated a mass of angry responses for a variety of reasons — some felt the entire concept was wrong, some felt it was wrong that he hadn't told his wife, and others were upset about the abuse of health insure.



I first met Leen about seven years ago in one of the Voluntary Amputee mailing lists where he was inquiring about bloodless ways to amputate his left leg, at the time considering dry ice. Not long afterwards he contributed photos of his recent toe amputations and other body modifications to BME, and a few months ago induced an infection in one of his toes (by, among other

things, standing in dirty fish ponds and soaking it in motor oil) which eventually led to half of his foot being amputated by his doctors.

Outwardly Leen is a “normal” guy — other than his limp, without seeing his feet you'd never know of his interests. He's a straight (and married) forty-two year old construction worker in Pretoria, South Africa, where his hobbies include motorsports, nature, working out, and reading — and still slowly working toward his dream of a LAK (“left above the knee”) amputation.

∞

When do you think your amputation interests first developed, and how?

As a child I was always fascinated by people that looked different. I loved to look at amputees just to see the stump dangling and not really doing anything... I just loved that. My mother always told me not to stare at people with disabilities, and that made me wonder even more what it would feel like to have just one leg.

Then at school we had a girl with one underdeveloped leg and one good leg because of polio. She had a prosthetic leg, but the best part was when the leg had to go for repair, as she use to come to school on crutches — those where good days at school. We also had a student teacher who had four fingers amputated on her one hand — she only had a thumb. It was always nice looking at her carrying her briefcase and writing on the blackboard.

When and how did you come to realize that you actually wanted to become an amputee?

I was about five years old when I first tried to cut my two little toes off with a pair of scissors. I was unsuccessful of course. Also, when we would play doctor, when I was the patient I always tied my one leg so that I would look like an amputee.

That seems early... And when did you actually do the first successful amputation?

I did my first amputations when I was thirty-five years old.

Did you ever see a therapist or wonder if you might be unstable?

No, I never saw a therapist. I always knew this was the right thing to do. There was no “internal struggle”... nothing like that.

While many people into voluntary amputation are only into amputation, you're into a broader range of body modification — I know you have a subincision, as well as having done a partial castration... Are they linked interests, or separate?

I just love to be different. Thanks to the internet I was able to see what other people do and try some of those things myself.

How did the partial castration happen?

I was just exposing my testicle, playing with it — I struggled to get it back into my sack, but couldn't so I just cut it off. There was a lot of bleeding, but I managed to stop it. Later I tried to do a partial penectomy, but ended up at the ER.

Why did you go to the ER that time?

I was losing a lot of blood. I knew I had to get to the ER — as soon as possible! I fainted twice on the way there because of blood loss!

I'm glad you're OK — I assume that the penectomy and similar play means there's a sexual aspect to your modifications in general?

Not all of them. I think to have a partial penectomy would be interesting — not to be able to have penetrative sex anymore, but still be able to cum by masturbating or from a blow job.

It's my feeling that as a generalization amputation and body modification is sexual behavior; almost like the extreme mating dances that animals do to attract each other... To me this also helps explain why these extremes are almost always male behavior rather than female... What are your thoughts on that subject?

I agree with that.

You're into CBT as well?

Yes, I am into CBT... Every now and then I love to torture my dick.

What's the motivation?

It just feels good.

∞

You mentioned in the past that you don't want to lose a lot of blood when you do procedures... Is that why you chose to induce an infection for the toe amputation rather than doing it by just cutting it off?

Yes. I think toes and fingers are easy, but anything more gets a bit tricky. I do it on my own at home, so if anything goes wrong I could bleed to death. Thus the infection route is better.

How did you do your previous toe amputations?

For most of my previous amputations I put my feet in a bucket of ice for twenty minutes, and then I use a cable tie. For the first ones I just used a chisel and hammer and chopped them off. On later amputations I used a scalpel to cut right up to the bone. Then I pull back the flesh, and use the chisel and hammer to chop off the toe. Finally, I stitch it up. I take the stitches out after ten days.

On one toe I was just “playing” with an old chisel I found... I put it on my toe and pushed too hard and it went right through the bone — I then just had to push harder until the toe was amputated. Of course, an infection set in because the chisel was dirty and I had to go to hospital where they did a ray amputation [note: a ray amputation is where the bone above the toe is removed as well — this is what caused the “hoof” type split in Leen’s foot].

Which method would you recommend to others — a chisel job, or cut and stitched?

It heals much faster if you stitch it up. After ten days the stitches can be taken out and it is basically healed. The other way takes about two months to heal completely.

Have you done any amputations (or other modifications) that are visible to the public, or are they all relatively hide-able?

None of them are visible — I just walk with a slight limp. Most people I meet ask me what’s wrong. I then just tell them I had a mid foot amputation.

With the most recent amputation, where the infection got very bad and necessitated further removal, how risky was that?

My life was never at risk. I still went to work the Friday and Saturday after they did the mid foot amputation.

What did you think of the “surprise” of getting a mid foot rather than a toe amputation?

I was in the hospital for two days and then flew into Africa for my Christmas holiday. I am happy with half a foot, but the first doctor wanted to do a below the knee amputation, which would have been first prize! Unfortunately he sent me to an orthopedic surgeon, and after more X-Rays and an MRI, they decided on a mid foot amputation.

I’d make the argument that it’s probably more dangerous to use the induced infection route due to risks of septicemia and so on, versus the blood loss and shock risks of a “chop it off” method...

I’ve done both methods. Blood loss in my toes is not that a big of a problem, but if you cut off more, or start on something like your penis, there are big blood vessels so the loss of blood becomes an issue. The last two toes I did I struggled to get the stitches in, so I thought that going the infection route might be better. Since I am a diabetic, I just go to the diabetic foot clinic and they prescribe antibiotics which help against septicemia — I just make sure that my toe doesn’t heal and eventually they will amputate.

What would you say to people who believe it’s an abuse of the system for people to “force” taxpayers to cover an amputation by “tricking” doctors into doing it?

I have private medical aid and the monthly contributions are quite high, so why not make them pay for the amputation? It is safer when a doctor does it, and it makes me happy. The doctors and nurses think it is fantastic that I don't get depressed after an amputation, so I don't waste tax payers' money [with rehab or counseling].

And how is the mid-foot amputation healing? Is it still maintaining that split “hoof” appearance?

It is completely healed now. The hoof split is because of the ray amputation I had a couple of years ago.

When the stumps heal, what does it feel like?

In the beginning they are a bit more sensitive [than normal body parts]. After I did my big toe, whenever I woke up in the morning and I looked at my foot, it was still there! I think it is just imprinted in your brain, but after a couple of weeks it disappears. I do get phantom pains in my mid foot amputation — some days I can still feel my toes hurt.

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Unlike other modifications, I think a lot of people have a guttural response to amputation and have difficulty convincing themselves it's not always negative — that it's universally “wrong” to induce a “handicap”...

Amputation is not like piercings and tattoos, which are more of an art form. Most people see amputation as a disability, and yes, you will struggle to do certain things, but to we who want amputations that is part of the fun! We know what to expect from life with one leg or arm — disability is all in the mind.

So your amputations have been a completely good thing?

I love my amputations; I talk about them and show interested people my stumps... I go to gym, shower, sauna, and to the beach, and I don't care if people look at my modifications.

Any negatives?

Not many negatives — just the bleeding risks during the procedures.

Are they your favorite body modification?

The amputations are my favorites. I get such a high amputating a body part! The feeling when the chisel cuts your toe off, and it just lies there, unattached to your body, and goes completely white... I just love that feeling!

Do you think you have a specific end goal, or will you continue to do procedures to keep getting the high?

There is an end goal. I want to be a left above the knee amputee. I won't amputate fingers.

How do you explain the amputations to people?

People at work think I am unlucky!

And the doctors?

The doctors believe what I tell them. For example, for my missing testicle — since I live

in South Africa where there is a lot of violence and crime, I just told them that I put up a fight when a couple of guys wanted to mug me, and one of them fell on top of me and stabbed me in my groin area. They believed it and asked me if I wanted to go to the police — I said no, it was dark and I didn't get a good look at their faces.

Has anyone gotten suspicious?

Nobody has gotten suspicious. They may think that I have been unlucky, but even when I went to the ER they believed all my explanations. It also helps that I have had diabetes for twenty years, so it is normal to get infections in your feet that don't heal which result in amputations. Nobody knows that I help the infections along and make sure they don't heal so I can have amputations done professionally by a doctor.

And what does your wife think?

She does not know.

Wow... so you're not "out" at all — how would you feel if people found out your amputations were voluntary?

I don't really care if people find out they were all voluntary. They will get over it — there are more important things to worry about.

Are you interested in meeting others with this interest? Assuming you weren't married, if you were looking for a partner, would you seek out someone with this interest?

It's easier if you have things in common — partners should have the same interests... and I would like to touch and play with women with amputations.

With the majority of amputee groups being very fantasy/fetish oriented, does it make it difficult to meet others with the same drives?

It is difficult to find somebody to talk, to but there are a few in those groups that will answer your questions and give advice. The most I have learned is by reading the articles on your website BME.

What advice would you give to people who feel like this is what they need to do?

If they believe that this is what they want, they must do it, no matter what society or their friends say or think about it. They must just be 100% sure that this is what they want, because if you amputate something it is gone forever!

What are your future body modification plans?

I am going to amputate one segment of my middle toe on my right foot, just to get the proportions right for now. I am still going to become a left above knee amputee — that is my long term plan, my dream... Also I'll do a glansctomy or partial penectomy.

Something that I've heard brought up repeatedly by others is that voluntary amputation is an insult to people who've had it forced on them by fate — do you think that statement has any validity, and what would you say to someone who feels that way?

It has no validity at all. Voluntary amputations are just away to get our bodies into the shape we want them to be.

Howie

Nomadic practitioner Howie ("LunaCobra") is the quintessential modern underground practitioner. Unlike the cutters of the past, he comes at this from a pure body modification interest, rather than sexual fetishism. His pushing of boundaries — including doing my own eye tattoos — has made him one of the most loved and most hated practitioners out there. Howie's interview helped re-launch the site when I got control back in 2008.

How did you first get interested in bod mod?

I always loved tattoos as a young child, but as far as non-tattoo mods, maybe it started when I went to an all boys boarding school in the snow belt of the USA. We had to wear a tie every day, our hair had to be cut in a certain way, and no ear rings or anything like that were allowed — that is when I started to put holes in my body and did a few cuttings. A lot of the other guys wanted cuttings so I began doing scars in the dorms on the down low... It was not easy as we were always under watch and could not have blades or anything, so I used to make my own cutting tools. It was so jail-style — I think I liked that about it back then — to make art and say a big fuck you to the oppressors.



What name do you like for what you do — “cutter”, “body modification artist”, “practitioner”, or something else?

How about “SUPERARTMAN”... yes, that would be best.

But seriously then — it's primarily about “art”?

Yes, sir, it is.

I think when I first met you (in 2000?) you were just getting started as an artist... How did you learn your skills, and how have you honed them?

I lived with a family member while he was finishing med school and became friends with a few of his classmates. Before I started to do heavy mods I used to show them photos of things and talk about it with them, and they started to teach me. We used to stitch meat in our kitchen all the time — during many of my first procedures one of them would be in the room with me helping. I would video tape lots of my work and go over it with them or even call them right in the middle of what I was doing to ask advice.

And let's be honest here — what we as body modification artists do is surgery.

Surgery in a way, yes... but at the same time the motivations and so on are quite different so I can see why people find the term difficult, especially since surgery comes with so many connotations and legal hang ups.

TRUE...

I'm still honing my skills all the time, and I have changed how I do some mods even in the past two years — take nipple removals for example. At first I would make normal sutures, but every guy has a different chest — some have tighter skin and some are overweight which can put a lot of pressure on the wound — so now I use a long lasting heavy internal suture for that procedure. I never stop trying to make my artwork better, and continue to review my work with surgeons and learn as much as I can.

For those that don't know what internal sutures are, do you mind describing them?

There are many different kinds of sutures and they are used in all kinds of ways for different parts of the body. Internal stitches provide a longer hold and are always done only on the inside of the body.

What have you found the general attitude of people in the medical profession is toward heavy mods, and to those who perform those modifications? Would they like to do those procedures, or are they happy to see this gray market that they exist in?

The fact that people not in the medical profession do this sort of work worries most doctors.

As far as if they would want to do these kinds of mods, they don't think much of it — most if not all would not do it because its not worth much money. Why would they set up a clean room for \$200 to \$800? It's just not worth it to them.

If that weren't an issue, would the world be a better place if the medical industry embraced the legality and legitimacy of atypical procedures?

Hell, I think it would be great if it any of that happened — amazing things could be done if they would — but I'm about 99.9% sure it will never happen.

With a family that includes doctors, do you think there's a similar internal drive in both you and them, just expressed in different ways, that took you to your respective careers?

Yes. Anyone that has seen me and them together knows we are almost the same people. We look a bit different but are very close and very alike.

What is the range of procedures you do?

I do all kinds of implants — even some that people have not seen yet *wink* — most anything cut-and-stitch, dermal punches, scalpel piercing, and tongue splits. I do a lot of reconstruction like ear lobes, and removals of things like transdermals and put the skin back to normal. I do a lot of cartilage removal, elf ears — pointing — and lots more!

How does extreme modification — moving into “the unhuman” — change a person, versus tattooing or piercing which tends to be make more of a “decorated human”?

I see heavy mods in a lot of cases as looking more like decoration. Sometimes it can be more, and I love it when it goes farther... It's like I'm living in a fantasy land.

Your tattoo style seems reminiscent of some of the modern tattoo styles I see coming out of France, but without being “French” if that makes sense... What are you trying to ex-

press?

I understand what your saying, but I don't think it's like the work out of France... as the work I see like mine from those guys is just so clean... It looks like it has laws. I see my work as letting go — freedom, heart, and mind, smashing together to make something more than art. Just PURE LOVE — that is why I put a heart in most every tattoo I do.

Which are your favorite kinds of body modifications to do?

I'm not sure. It's all rather the same to me, but my favorite is when I work on someone that is happy both before and after the work.

I do almost anything above the belt, but I only do a few things (like transscrotals) below the belt. The only thing that I can say I dislike about mods is that some people make a connection to sex — I never liked that and try to stay away from mods that could relate to that.

I find that a interesting comment, because I think I'm probably one of the people who sees it as being strongly linked to sex, both in obvious ways (genital mods), and in the larger sense that I believe that most modification is motivated by “mating dance” type behavior (like how male animals seeking out a mate will go out of their way to be very flamboyant or do outrageous dances and so on). I think that the shift from heavy mods out of the sexual arena is definitely something new though, and something that artists such as yourself have been very influential in causing.

I can see and agree with the “mating dance” idea — but any other link to sex is something I don't want to have anything to do with or even know about.

What do you think motivates people to get modifications?

I cant speak for others, so I will just answer for myself: ART and LOVE.

You are often seen as the “he'll do anything” guy in terms of pushing the limits of procedures... And I think when people say that, they don't mean it in an entirely flattering way. How would you respond to accusations that you are not “cautious” enough or don't have the right “limits”?

Honestly, unless they are a surgeon they don't know what they are talking about. Who are they to say what the limit is? They just like to talk on the Internet because they like to bitch and be part of gossip. Of course I have limits and there are lots of things I turn down.

Like what?

I get asked for some odd things — many are below the belt and I don't even want to mention them. I was asked to remove an eyeball, and I would never even think of doing something like that.

I've heard people say that artists should play it “safe” and not do procedures that are too “shocking” or high risk because it attracts undue attention from legislators — that is, your actions could cause laws to be put in place that restrict others. Do you think there's truth to that, or that it's dishonest and makes concessions that shouldn't be made?

I don't think anyone should tell a person what they can or can not do to themselves... that's

fucking crazy. Go hard if that is what you want to do. In relation to the law, every country is different but it's already illegal to do a lot of this in many parts of the USA... There's not much we can do about that. It's never going to be truly legal, so whatever.

I guess the official stance is that part of being a government and a doctor is “protecting people from themselves” which is, for example, why anti-drug laws exist, and why a cosmetic surgeon is often legally and ethically obliged to deny the person an atypical procedure.

Well hey, I'm not going to tell an adult what they can and can not do. If they ask me to do something and they understand what they are getting into, and I can see the ART of it, then I will work with them.

There are a number of firsts that I'd credit you with as a practitioner — the eyeball tattooing, the antitragus removal, and I'm sure others...

Oh, there have been more, *wink, wink*

How does the process of coming up with new procedures work and what does it feel like?

Sometimes I'll be talking with doctors in my family, or another surgeon about something they did or learned that was new, and it gives me an idea, or starts a spark that ends up as this new modification idea. I might look at a face, or be watching a movie, and see something and apply that visual in my work... but any time I do something new I talk to a surgeon about it.

When I'm doing something new I would not say it's fun, because I want to see it heal before I can jump for joy and be prideful about it. Then it's fun, but when I'm in doing something for the first time it's just scary.

For example, when I removed that big strip of transdermals from Jake's head that you posted photos of, after I made the peel and did some elevation, pulling it together and knowing I only had forty minutes until we had to drive him to the airport so he could fly home... With the time pressure and a much bigger wound than I have ever had to stitch shut and it was on his head — that was a lot of scary! When I got to see his head again in Las Vegas a few months ago, I was proud and excited to see how well it worked out. People went crazy on me for doing that but it worked very well — he now is even growing hair through most of his scar tissue!

As someone that's worked all over the world, what are some of your favorite places to work?

I have been to many places all over the world and lived in many of them as well, and from that I can tell you — IT IS ALL THE SAME! Sure, you may have some different food or weather, but all in all, people are people, and it's all planet Earth.

That being said, I love all islands, and for sure the Pacific islands.

Does traveling internationally complicate your work?

Yes, at first it was a big pain in the ass, but after a while I had tools in most areas of the world I was working or was able to make them in tool shops I knew of in the other areas.

It helps that I know a lot of people that have been very kind with me — I could not have done the travel and work I did without them. Sometimes I knew a bit of the country's language, but other times I needed someone who could translate and help with aftercare.

Is a lot of what you do through a strong word-of-mouth network? How do most people find out about you?

Yes, for sure. In the past few years it's all word-of-mouth — over 50% of the people I work on are not even on the web in any way, or have not been on any bodymod sites before.

Do you think the mainstreaming of heavy modification is a good thing or a bad thing?

I don't think about to be honest... it will be what it will be.

With anesthetics being sort of "gray area" in many regions both in terms of applying them and acquiring them, what is your attitude on anesthetic use?

Yes, that is a spicy tomato! Bottom line is that if you do this work and you don't use anesthetics, you're doing it half ass. Without something to slow the flow of blood, you can not see the tissue layers properly, so if you want to do it right you use it — I use it at all times.

Ideally, what laws and regulations — if any — would you like to see governing artists such as yourself, both for the protection of the clients and practitioner?

In my view Johnny Law has no place in my ART.

We should talk a little about complications — you've had a few procedures go wrong, most notably a pair of very pointy horn implants that rejected, and a set of nipple removals where the client was unhappy with the scarring.

The pointy implants were on Jim, a friend of mine. I wish I'd only done two — going for five was not a good idea... But I think you're asking why we did it at all, seeing as they were so pointy?

He had been wearing regular domes in his head for some time and didn't like how they looked and loved the idea of having horns that were pointy — and I agreed. I think it looks amazing to have something pointy in that area. I had the silicone pointy horns and we talked it over for a day or two when I traveled to see him. I think we both loved the idea of how the pointy horns would look so much that we got carried away with it all and went for putting five of them in. In hindsight, if I had only put in two it would have been a great story.

So... we went with five, and after a week or two it went very bad. Two of the five broke the skin — three worked, but since it would have been off-balance to have two on one side and one on the other, three were removed. We pushed the limits of what kind of shape can be done, and that I feel was a success as he still wears two of them. Putting in too many at once was a very bad idea that I wish I could take back. I also wish I could have stayed around longer to monitor it — it's very hard to travel and do this sort of work. Ideally I would have stayed for at least ten days, but I only stayed for around three days. This all went down a bit over two years ago I think, and I've kept in touch with him since. Jim still loves how the two worked out and doesn't want to take them out.

On the nipple removal, yes, I also blame myself for not taking into account that he had a

heavy chest — this puts a lot of pressure on it. Back then I didn't do internal stitches, but because of that I've switched to using both internal and two kinds of external stitches, even with skinny people.

I think maybe people have unrealistic expectations about what nipple removal will do — it's rare to be left without a scar or to completely eliminate nipple response since it's not a mastectomy.

Yes, one will always have a scar when this is done. I told this client it would scar, but I did not expect his to scar as badly as it did, and his scarred much more than the previous four pairs I'd done.

I think the main thing about nipple removal is the size of the person — if you carry a lot of weight and have a large chest, or your skin is tight, your scar will be much bigger than a skinny person. His chest was the largest I had worked on, and this was before I started to use internal stitches on them — I wish I would have used them on him. I know if I had we would both be more happy with his scar.

On another nipple removal I did where the person was unhappy with the scar, I later removed the scar in a second procedure and I used two kinds of external stitches and also internal stitches to repair it and they now have a much smaller mark.

I suppose we're both getting criticized for the eyeball tattooing — I believe a recent quote from a prominent member of this community was "idiotic and disturbing"...?

We all knew what we were getting into that day so they can't say shit — fuck em! Why do folks gotta be dicks and talk trash stuff they don't know anything about? I'm going to start a solid black eye tomorrow!

I do think that people do like to call you out for some reason, whereas it seems like there are other practitioners who can do no wrong...

YES!!! Because I've been traveling internationally for a many years, it's a numbers game — the more work you do, the more people you meet in other countries, the more people that might not like you... or even hate you. Not only that, but I'm loud, outspoken, and a shit-stirrer, so it all adds up the current mess... but at least it's only online and not in person.

Do you mind talking about what procedures tend to cost, like ear pointing and implants for example? How do you determine pricing?

The price does change — ear pointing can be anywhere from \$200 to \$700 US. It all depends on that person's body and what country I am in at the time, and how much it costs me to be there — and even how I think it will look on them. I often do work for little to no money if that person is short on funds and I think it will look nice on them.

If someone wants work from you, how do they do that, and how do you determine your touring schedule?

They can go to my website — www.lunacobra.net — and contact me through there. Often I just wait till I have a few people in a country till I come over. Now I'd like to have someone in each country that wants to learn to do what I do so I can make each trip about spreading knowledge — it almost seems like a waste to not do it that way at this point in the mod world.

Toph

People were deeply upset by the interview with Toph. While I saw Toph as a pioneer and admired his efforts to push the limits of personal aesthetics, many felt he was going too far and too fast, and even many long term BME members spoke out very negatively — negatively enough to actually chase him off the site. I feel this was reflective both in the changes that had happened to the site in my absence, as well as the changes — the mainstreaming — that was happening to the entire body modification industry, even in the borders that BME exists in. At this moment I realized that a subset of this community was being pushed back underground by the success we'd wished for so long.

When I was twenty in 1994, my 3/4" earlobe piercing was shocking enough to the public that I was stopped regularly so people could take photos. Today, with a societal foundation laid where the public is "used" to seeing body modification, I doubt anyone would even notice — it takes something far more radical to turn heads. My friend Toph certainly falls into that category — with roughly an inch plug in each nostril and a nearly two inch lip plate, as well as a myriad of other modifications, he's tormenting the programmers of facial recognition software by pushing the limits of a modern human face is.

I've split this interview with Toph into two sections, beginning with a discussion of his amazing modifications, and with the second section being about him and his life.



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How did you do your lip stretching?

I got my center lip piercing done at a 16ga — I didn't have a choice in the matter because the shop I went to only had that size, so when I went home I immediately put it to a 12ga. A few days later I put in an 8ga — my body stretches rather easily I think compared to most people. My steps were either every week or every other week until I got to 3/4", which was done all with a taper up until that point. Once it got to 3/4" it became loose every other day, and then I took my steps one millimeter at a time, every other day or so. By this time I was just "popping" them in without tapers or tape — I didn't use tape until about 28mm.

How long did the lip stretching take in all?

My lip took a total of six months to go from 16g to 40mm (1 9/16").

How do you usually wear your lip?

I wear it down 24/7, even when I eat, but drinking is always with a straw!

How about your tongue stretching?

My tongue was a different situation. I wanted to split my tongue, but I needed a good back brace, so at first I started my tongue off by scalpellling straight to 6mm, then stretching it up to 9mm the next day. I wore that for four days, and then scalpelled it to 16mm and stretched to 19mm the next day. By then I was ready for the split — I first cut it to 20mm, stretched it to 21mm, and used a scalpel and cut from the underneath up until the plug fell out and my tongue was split.

And your nostrils?

My nostrils were pierced when I was eighteen at a 10ga and immediately stretched to 8ga. I waited a good four months before going to 6ga, and then every month I went up to the next size until 16mm. Then about every week or so it was 1mm at a time until I took a long break at 22mm — about 5 months. I tapered them the whole way until 5/8", then slide the next millimeters in by hand. I just recently started stretching them again.

Finally, tell me about your ear stretching? What happened to your ears?

My ears have been a work in progress since I was sixteen, when they were done with a gun at the mall. I took it slow the most of the time, but I did stretch a few times faster than I should have. Unfortunately both my lobes were cut by a bad pair of eyelets at 19mm, and then thinned out pretty badly, so I had to take it really slow after that. Then last year I had plastic surgery on my left lobe due to a landscaping accident — I was weed whacking a lawn at work and a rock got kicked up and split the 1 1/2" lobe!

What are the differences in stretching the different types of piercing?

The differences I came across stretching the different types of piercing were that on the ears and lip weight worked really well, whereas the nostrils were all about time — if they didn't have enough time they just wouldn't stretch. My tongue was cut the whole time so it was a piece of cake, and I learned that if you really really want a 20mm tongue you can cut it there in a week without a hitch.

Did you have any problems in your stretching?

I did get some scar tissue on the front of my lip during my journey, which was cut off each time it happened and healed perfectly fine. I didn't come across any problems with my nostrils, mostly because I was really careful. The have minor scar tissue but it went away with the pressure of o-rings in under a week. With my tongue I didn't have one problem — besides blood and drool!

You managed to upsize all of them incredibly quickly — did you have a secret to doing this or does your body just tolerate stretching really well?

I think it's a mixture of the two — on one hand my body handles stretching really well because I keep it on a basic schedule, and I think my body adjusted to it and went with it for the most part. My goal sizes are 28mm nostrils and a 63mm lip plate. My ears are as is and if they go bigger then good, but if not I'm still satisfied.

Are all of your piercings publicly visible, or do you have private mods as well?

I have had a 00g PA, a 4ga scalped frenum, three ladders and two pubic surface piercings.

I do my own genital mods and plan on starting my full subincision soon — I've already done the meatotomy.

Do you have plans for further modifications?

My future modifications will include more facial ink, full sleeves, scarification, and large conches. It's a short list but over the years I've had a lot of different stuff done and I'm pretty satisfied with the way my image turned out.

And if you change your mind about all of it and want to go back, do you have a "Plan B"?

If it ever came to a reversal, I would downsize the same way I went up and hope for the best — but I've never once seriously thought about changing my image. I've been planning this out and making it a part of my life, and plan on keeping it for life.

How much do you think you've spent on jewelry so far — you must have gone through a lot?

Over the years I've spent about \$8000 on jewelry. That was another addiction — I collected jewelry, never thinking I would actually wear it all in multiple piercing over the years. I collected anything from normal stainless steel to one of a kind \$200 plugs. Once I met Karl (iam:MobyK), he offered to make me Delrin plugs if I ever needed them. At first I was like "no thanks", but the more I got into it... like you said, I went through a lot of jewelry.

Karl became a mentor to me and a godfather — we have been very close friends for about three years now, and have never once met. I met Pauly Unstoppable through Karl who showed me how big a nostril can go — he was my inspiration for that single piercing. Jesse (iam:pillpoppinfun, featured in BME's first article on lip plates) was my original influence for the labret. He wore pins and plugs and it interested me. Throughout the years I've had a lot of positive influence through the industry, not to mention the movie 'MODIFY' which gave me the idea to scalpel my own frenum.



How old are you, what do you do for a living, and what "life plans" do you have?

I am twenty years old, and currently unemployed. I worked restaurants for five years and landscaping for two before I moved to Oklahoma. Now I'm back at the challenge of finding a new occupation. My life plans are to find someone to apprentice me so I can take what I love and make it into a living. This is my life and it's what I think about day in and day out. I'm just hoping for the opportunity to get into the modification industry to fulfill my life goal.

Tell me a little about yourself in terms of interests?

I am a big fan of extreme sports — skateboarding, aggressive inline, four wheeling, motor cycles, and jet skis. I'm big into nature and photography and consider myself a decent artist.

What's your peer group like?

I don't have a big group friends outside the Internet and I like to keep my life limited to

family and close friends for the most part. When I go out in public I like to inform anyone who has questions about myself and what and why I do this, to my best ability, to try to help the public understand that we're not freaks or assholes. I do this mostly to help the next generation of modders so people don't get the wrong idea about us — this is very important to me.

How do people respond when they see you?

When I'm out in public people freak out... when they talk to me, it's very funny. Once they see I'm willing to talk to them they just let go and ask me a million questions. People jump up and down, spin and laugh, saying "oh my god, that shit is crazy!" I've found that I get more attention from middle aged and older African Americans than I do from white teens and young adults... I don't know why but I like it.

What got you interested in body modification originally?

I was around fifteen years old and I was a troubled kid, and I met a body piercer named Paul Kriner. He changed my life. I had already had a major interest in body modification, and so when I met him I tried to spend all my free time up at the shop that he worked at. He taught me a lot about the industry, proper aftercare and stretching, and became my mentor and someone I could look up to no matter what. I learned a lot from a young and very talented artist (he was only twenty at the time), and since the day I met him I knew what direction my life was going.

I know the why question is hard, but "why?", and can you think of earlier influences?

This is my passion. It makes me very happy doing this, and it satisfies an empty spot in my life. I believe in concentrating and self-inflicting pain — it's putting myself through more challenges in life... As if life wasn't hard enough! I don't think life should be easy, and if you're doing something you love and it makes your life harder, and you have the ability to work through it, it only makes you stronger. This is the love of my life — more than family and friends even. If I wasn't able to mod myself I'd feel as if I was walking around as a fake. I also find the way I look attractive — I'm absolutely amazed at what one can do to one's body to make it completely change form.

Really, why should everyone look the same?

Like I said, my piercer was a big influence on me in my teens, but as a kid my uncle was in a state prison and all I could see were endless tattoos. He was a great guy — he just screwed up. I had a very positive image of body modification at a young age, although it went against everything my parents ever told me. As a kid I pierced my ears with safety pins and my labret with a sewing needle, as well as numerous surface temporary piercings. The more my parents said no the more I got into it... Then I discovered BME — oh my god, BME — once I was shown that site it was over. It was a candy store for me. I started hanging out at tattoo shops all summer long and every day after school for around five years until I went off on my own.

All of this added to my obsession... The interest was already there, but when my eyes were opened to how far it can be taken I never looked back. I dedicated my life to it, and to this day still do and plan on doing it until I die. It's a part of my life that's too good to let go.

What made you decide to start to push your modifications in a direction that's far more extreme than most people can relate to?

My interest got so deep into it I didn't see a reason to stop at a certain size just because it was more accepted to stop there — being accepted by the community is something I can do myself no matter how I look. After seeing some of the famous modders like The Lizard-man, Pauly Unstoppable, and the movie 'MODIFY', I knew I could put up the fight, and so far have succeeded. I take this part of my life so seriously, and I believe you can change the way people think with the right attitude and perspective. It's all about being nice no matter what, and fully informing them no matter how unbelievable what they see is.

Given that you've made these changes in such a short time, I'm sure you've got some remarkable insight into how people who look different are treated?

My immediate family does not accept my body modifications at all, and still don't completely understand me. I've done my best but they don't want to believe this is who I am. My friends love it — they refer to me as a rock star when we go out in public because I have five to twenty confrontations each time I go to a store... nothing but tons of questions, excitement, and disgust. The public is very interested but not everyone can gather the courage to confront someone to ask questions and to fulfill their curiosity. You're always going to get bad attention, but there is a lot more good attention than most people would think.

What advice would you have for people who are considering doing something radical like this?

I would seriously encourage people to take a long hard thought before doing something like this. You receive so much criticism, and it's a lot to deal with on a daily basis. It is very difficult to handle and you have to be emotionally strong to get through it all. But if it is a decision the new generation is willing to take, it is only going to get easier as time goes on.



Since Valentine's Day is coming up, would you like to meet and date someone as radically modified as yourself?

I believe it would be so much easier to date someone that looked like Duff or Miss Kayteek Etemine because it would be easier to deal with the constant modifications and the public response as well because they would have already been use to it in their own lives, instead of having to adjust to an extreme amount of constant attention.

It can be a lot for someone to handle who has never experienced it before. I recently lost my marriage over my body modifications — she told me it was her or the modifications.... I couldn't believe my ears. I basically laughed, then cried, then said good bye. This path wasn't meant for everyone and it takes extreme dedication to do what I have accomplished.

Not to mention sacrificed...

One Hand Jason

*Probably the best amputee interview I ever did, this interview was far better received than most due to Jason's ability to coherently explain his interest without looking "crazy". Which was a huge relief after the sh*tstorm kicked up with Leen!*



If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not that thy whole body should be cast into hell.

Matthew 5:30

My friend "Jason" (not his real name) is one of thousands of amputees living with a huge secret. Years ago, after a lifetime of anguish due to having an extra hand — essentially a birth defect in his opinion — he took the radical step of amputating this hand just above

the wrist. He's never regretted his action, and feels that now his body is "right". Other than his former BIID ("Body Integrity Identity Disorder") affectation, he's completely normal, and now that he's surgically corrected himself his life has improved drastically. Jason was kind enough to speak with me candidly about his experiences.

Tell me a little about yourself and your life — how should I introduce you?

Let me be blunt — I staged an accident. Nobody's doubting it, and my friends and family, so many folks, came together for me back then, raised a lotta money, prayed, and said such sweet, loving things. There's no way I want enough details to get out there that they could connect up me with my 'accident', with the person you're interviewing, who's voluntary.

I understand completely — what was the "accident" you used to remove your hand?

I don't want to be hugely specific, but I used a very sharp power tool, after having tried out different methods of crushing and cutting. I know first aid so I was able to stop the bleeding with pressure, but I was worried that I could pass out and not call for help and lose too much blood. No worries, though, I guess I'm in good enough shape that I didn't even feel dizzy.

My goal was to get the job done with no hope of reconstruction or re-attachment, and I wanted some method that I could actually bring myself to do. I did experiments with animal legs I got from a butcher. It's lucky I thought of that, because some of my early attempts were total fuck ups and would have ended up with a damaged hand which might have had to undergo years of painful reconstruction, and worse yet, no amputation.

How was the aftercare and healing?

I had some shooting pains, almost like electric shocks in the end of my stump at first, as

the cut nerves tried to figure out what to report. That was gone in a couple months, though for some people it goes on for years. Aside from that, my stump was completely healed when they took the bandage off a couple weeks later, with just a faint red line across the scar that went away in a couple months. In some parts it was quite sensitive, with strange mis-interpretations of sensations — like when I touched something cold, it got back to my brain as the sensation of burning. One real weird sensation was to run my fingertip from the top to the bottom of my stump, across the scar. It felt like I was running my fingertip right through my arm! Now it mostly feels like it ends where it ends. I can feel things with it, but nowhere as precisely as with my fingertips. A huge surprise at first was how much lighter my forearm was. Maybe it was because of that, or maybe because my brain didn't ever completely accept that I had a right hand in the first place, but it didn't take long to accept that I couldn't reach out and grab stuff, and instead had to pinch things between my stump and my body, or a table or something.

Can you still sense the missing hand? On the whole, how do you like it?

I can sort of sense my fingers, and can imagine that they're moving, but I'm also really aware of the end of my stump — about 5" below my elbow — and what I can hold with it, and how far it will reach. I feel like my body is correct at last, and that's a way cool feeling. I've adapted to doing everything one-handed — not that I can do everything. For a while, my tennis game was off since I had to do everything left-handed, and my balance was a little screwy. Skateboarding took a bit of adapting. Running, swimming, no problem. I can't play that cool jazzy sax anymore... that hurt... but I'm getting into hand drumming. Strange, but it works! I guess there's a period of fighting it, but then your body just goes, "Hey, this is me now... what a groove".

Is there anything you'd do differently if you were to do it again?

No, it came off better than I ever imagined.

Hahaha, "came off" ok... Will you do any more amputations?

No, my body is just right now.

We've touched on it, but I guess now the big question — "why"?

I'm one of those body-integrity-disorder (BIID) dudes. As long as I can remember, having two hands was a defect in my body — something that was not meant to be. For me philosophically, it's totally different from body mods, which I also have. I don't think I had any choice. My right hand just didn't belong to my body. As a little kid, I soon learned that I was the odd one out, and that amputation was a bad thing. My parents reprimanded me for staring at amputations, but it was totally mesmerizing for me. Somehow I made it through high school, with hormones and peer pressure doing their best to mask my feelings. In college, I met a wonderful woman, and our love kept my thoughts of amputation at bay at first, but the need grew and grew. I don't know how I ever made it through to getting my Master's. My mind was more and more consumed, so that sometimes I would even blurt out an embarrassing word, like "stump" or "hook". I don't think she really grasped what was going down, but my lover couldn't take my distraction, and we parted company very sadly.

That totally shook me up. It was way clear that I had to get rid of my hand so that I could live. I began doing research and experiments right off. Maybe that's not exactly what the old college would think of as the best application for scientific method, but it paid off! Now that I'm free of my hand, I'm loving life, and have opened a cool little business with a partner who, it turns out, is none other than my lover from college. I still haven't told her the truth about my "accident", but she loves the change that's come over me, and best of all, she loves being my lover again.

Do you think you'll ever tell her, or is this a secret that you'll likely never tell anyone in your immediate life? It's certainly something huge to hide!

It's huge to hide, but for now, it's huger to tell! Also, the "accident" has passed, so now the focus has changed to how I live with it. People perceive, rightly, that I don't groove that much on talking about how it happened.

It's a very big secret to keep so deep "in the closet".

Yeah, it's a biggie. For sure it's not rational to want to cut off your arm or leg. There's no argument you can make that life will be easier, or that you'll be more capable doing anything. Even though a hook can do some things that a bare hand can't, a hand holding a tool can always do everything a hook can, and so much more. Even though you can run in prosthetic legs that give you a mechanical advantage, you can't compete with those.

So it's irrational, but is it insane? It's true that a major amp makes your body less functional, so how can it be sane to do it? For me, I think the answer is in what I was going through before my amp. I was so consumed by the drive to lose my hand that I could scarcely function.

Now I've totally lost the desire to amputate anything. I'm totally used to doing things with a hand and a stump. It's true I need to ask for help like once a day, that I'm a bit slower at dish washing, keyboarding, and stuff like that, but is that worse than being seriously overweight, or being short of breath from smoking, or even trying to walk in stiletto heels?

All that said, though, there's no way that society is ready to accept me amping my hand just to get piece of mind. Like I said, I picked up real early on the feelings about amps, and they were all negative. Even little kids can sense taboos and know when to shut them up inside. I know that for me, hiding that away caused me to hide other feelings and emotions too, as if letting myself go in other ways would let out my big secret. From all I've read and experienced, amputating the unwanted part usually solves the BIID sufferer's problem, and lets them get on with life. I'm certainly doing a lot better in living — taking care of relationships, doing well in my work, getting into my community — all stuff that totally got neglected before.

Do you think that the medical system should offer amputation as a service, perhaps with the same type of screening as a sex change? And do you feel any guilt about "taking advantage of" the medical system, or your family and friends, who you mentioned were very supportive? Finally, do you think your life would have continued to spiral out of control if you hadn't taken this drastic action?

I super feel like this "having a spare limb" is a definite body deformity, which needs to be

cured by surgery to allow the BIID person to lead a normal life. It's sort of like people who are born with a vestigial tail or a six-fingered hand. I totally understand that almost everyone would think that's totally backwards from reality, that they would see our un-amped bodies as being normal, not needing a "cure" by amputation. Given that viewpoint, of course, there's no justification for using public resources, but considering the mental health and, yes, increased capability of a healthy amputee over a tormented BIID sufferer, it's more justifiable. I didn't use any public funds, but a friend did, and I think that was justified.

That guilt is a whole 'nother thing. Yeah, there's a lot of places guilt can get into all this. Guilt about not being straight-up about having the feelings of needing the amp all through your life, about falsifying the details of the "accident", about acting believably upset about the amp, and then hiding the BIID and true history afterwards. Guilt about not coming out publicly to demand humane treatment for BIID. This can get real gut-wrenching real fast. Luckily there's other BIID people on the Internet who share my reality. Without them, this would all be a lot harder. Thanks, dudes.

If I hadn't gotten amped, I can't imagine any way my life would have not spiraled out of control without a drug-induced stupor...something else that woulda been a huge drain on society. Rather than that I'm a healthy, active dude, engaged in my community, who happens to be an amputee. Is that so bad?

Not at all... And I have to wonder how many amputees share your story. I've interviewed and met quite a lot of people who are living with the same secret.

For most of my life I thought I was the only one, but I've met quite a few since I made my amp happen. We're a lonely, isolated company, though.

I think something that comes across quite clearly is that even though this was and incredibly drastic action to take, that this is something you were sure about for a very, very long time. Did you go through periods of self doubt, or even seek counseling?

That's a really strange thing — thinking back, I don't ever remember any self-doubt. There were times of my rational self saying that I had to keep down those ideas cuz I couldn't function without that hand. So I always knew rationally that it didn't make sense, but I never remember feeling that it was right for me to have that hand either. I was too in the closet to ever admit that to a counselor. Other voluntary amps I've talked to are the same. We would do anything to avoid being "talked out of" or "cured" of our need to lose that part. Well, I guess it kinda crept up on me, cuz I was mentally ready to focus completely on doing it after my lover had enough of my distraction.

You mentioned you have "regular" body modification as well. How is getting those — which I see as "enhancing" the body — different for you from what you did — which I see as "normalizing" the body?

When I've gotten body mods, they're always to make my body more outstanding. I guess there's an element of "in your face-ness" in there. I was way into the punk scene for a while. Having gauged out facial stuff and some gothy tats in obvious places helps put that across. Usually, I want to keep that exposed, wearing shorts in cold weather, and so on. I think it gives out a statement about where I think society has sunken to, and that I'm not going to

let things just cruise in that rut.

My amp, though, is totally different. At first, I was way weirded out by people staring. I tried to hide it by tucking my sleeve in a pocket. I was totally scared about meeting up with someone I knew who hadn't found out yet. I actually ran and hid more than once. Even though it felt way cool to be in my right body, I'd hidden that drive for so long that the guilty feelings took a while to go away. Putting my stump right out there was huge for me. I actually met a voluntary amp dude on the Internet who totally worked through that with me, till I came to see how wonderful it is that I look the way I feel. I still get nervous about doing things with my stump in public, but that's improving. Even though having an amputation makes me feel normal, I need to accept that most people don't feel comfortable with it, feeling unsure about what to do, thinking it's ugly, worrying about how hard it is for me and such. Usually, I just try to overpower that with humor or showing my excitement for life, but sometimes I'm not up for that, and those feelings flow.

In terms of how it changes your life, what are some of the hardships that it's induced, that while they've been worth it for you, would likely not be to someone who's not in this for the same reasons? Why should someone NOT do this?

I guess the hugest thing is that it's not reversible. You can't decide you don't like it later and have it cured by laser surgery or something. While it is possible to transplant body parts, that's a huge thing, requiring lots of money and a lot of time to get a donor, drugs, and all that. I would never advise anyone to get a voluntary amputation. If I did, and they found out later that it wasn't as cool as they thought, how could they not blame me? Even if it seems like it would be super cool to have that sensation, that look, and that whole experience of adapting to the handicap, seeing people's reactions, and so on, the novelty of that wears off in like a year. After that, you've learned how to do all the stuff you need to for daily life, or ways to get others to help, or what to give up on; your friends are used to your way of doing things, so they hardly notice. Then you have the rest of your life to live as an amputee, with all the baggage that brings, and no more thrills.

For people with BIID, it's totally different. The things that are negative about having an amputated limb are the normal things that we should have been living with all along. We don't need to be advised about whether to get an amputation or not, whether it's cool or not, how it will feel, how people will react or anything else. I would never put anyone on the spot by asking them to counsel me about anything so life-changing.

I've so forgotten how I did things before my amputation, that it feels like I never hand that hand. In a weird way, that makes me a lot more capable... I don't spend time trying to figure out how I'll do a new thing one-handedly, I just start doing it, just like all you two-handed people would.

Any last things we should cover?

I'm very concerned that I've made amputation seem right for someone wanting an extreme body mod, cuz it is a major handicap, something that could totally fuck up a person's life, unless they have the right outlook. If someone does this without much consideration they will have a lotta regrets soon after.

Fabrizio Divari

Fabrizio Divari is one of the few — but growing number of — tattoo artists that come from a true fine arts background, rather than a traditional tattoo culture and pop art background. We chatted about his work in early 2008.

When I first saw Italy-born and now after various international locations Toronto-based — his Parkdale studio is actually just down the street from the BME offices — tattoo artist Fabrizio Divari's work (www.divari-art.com), I was struck that he appeared to be an artist in the traditional sense of the word first, and a tattoo practitioner second — it's been my experience that it tends to be the other way around with tattoo artists. We recently had a chance to talk about both art and tattoos.



Have you always been interested in art? How did you get into tattooing?

I've been wanting to be an artist since as early as I can recall. I was born in Rome and grew up between Bologna and Milan, where the artistic and cultural richness that surrounded me all the time was certainly overwhelming. Everywhere you glance, you see art and beauty: in the shape of architecture, visual art, even the natural landscape. This doesn't mean of course that everybody in Italy is an artist. I guess I was gifted — or condemned — since birth with a certain type of sensitivity and a very deep appeal for what we define as art. Since childhood I was especially mesmerized by paintings, and I started scribbling and sketching as a natural response to my environment.

My first contact with tattooing was totally accidental. While traveling through Spain one summer in the early nineties I bumped into this guy who was tattooing himself on a beach, sat with him, and immediately wanted to try it myself. We're talking about three sewing needles wrapped together with a string of cotton and some Pelican ink — every poke became one black dot. When I got back to my seven or eight friends at the campground where we were staying I pretty much tattooed all of them with very simple symbols taken from an old record by the "Cult". Every song was a different sign and they all got them — me too of course — with not a trace of meaning for any of us.

We were teenagers, all we cared for was to rebel in any possible way and this was just another sweet deal. However, once I was back in Milan, I actually started to get very interested in the process and tattoos as form of expression: I built my first machines using metal pens and a small tape recorder's engine. I remember I didn't even have a switch so to get the power — a really high power — on and off. I had to plug and unplug the cable to the wall!

At the time, Milan, and the south of Europe in general, was not really progressive in this

field. Tattooing was a shady, underground activity perpetuated by an ignorant elite whose only claim was that they traveled a bit here and there. Because of this, and despite the fact that none of them had any artistic skill, they were acting like Hollywood stars and were very careful to not let the secrets of the trade leak out.

It took quite a lot of investigating and asking to get the basic keys that I would practice on myself, and again on my friends once back home. This painful process went on for a few years before I finally saw the possibility of making a future living of it. Slowly but inevitably I saw the potential of translating what I was already painting on canvas onto a different medium, one that would be in constant evolution, given the nature of the skin, and at the same time quite eternal.

What did your family think of your decision to become a tattoo artist?

Ah! My family was quite horrified when they realized I was really undertaking this weird path — in conservative Italy it wasn't even worth the name of “career” at the time. I doubt



it is even today. Not to mention that my father used to be a high officer in the Navy — but not one prone at all to getting sailboats tattooed, as he was very disciplined. Sometimes I think I was adopted, for I can't even pronounce this last word without panicking, haha.

To their rescue though, I must admit that in the last few years they turned out to be incredibly supportive and very proud of me and the seriousness of my job.

How do people in general respond when they find out you're a tattoo artist? I guess these days, here in Toronto, it's certainly accepted.

I never brag about it, ever. I'm reluctant to say what I do for living (unless being asked of course) and don't really like to talk about tattooing outside my studio. And I hate when as soon as they

know you're an artist certain people suddenly go, “oh my god! I wanted to get a tattoo for so long.” Fuck it, why didn't you? I'm sorry, but I really don't care about those characters that need to be part of a conversation in any possible forced way... Not for me.

How do you grow as a tattoo artist, in terms of improving your craft?

When I started in Milan it was almost a joke — it was difficult to get any help at all, but I did meet a few decent souls who directed me the right way. Then in 1999, I took off and moved to Costa Rica where I worked at the same time in the capital, San Jose, with good guys, and at a little studio that I opened on my own on the Pacific Coast. After two and half years of tropics I moved to Miami and then New York City. Everywhere I went I had my machines and worked with many different artists, some mediocre and others very talented. This exchange and cooperation is at the base of any improvement.

What advice would you give young tattoo artists, or people who want to become tattoo artists?

Keep drawing day and night. This comes above of everything. You want to master completely the capacities of reproduction — and, therefore, creativity — of pretty much everything. Your specific direction, taste, and style will naturally occur with time, but before that stage, every artist should be above all a great illustrator, able to draw anything, and in any style. This sucks up a huge amount of time and energy but in my opinion it is the only way to go and become real.

Nowadays, tattooing has become such a trendy thing and so profitable that most of the newcomers skip this altogether and jump into the craft without the slightest clue or talent. We see the results of it every day — I know I do, and I don't particularly like doing cover ups.

I see that a lot of your tattoos are in the same style as your paintings?

My favorite pieces to ink are my own paintings. Nothing makes me happier, proud and rewarded as when a client commissions a piece of my own art. Right after that comes Japanese themes, although I try always to give a little twist as far as coloring and detailing go.

Who are your least favorite clients?

I don't like the confused ones — those who are constantly undecided of what, where, and sometimes why... I can't stand this. Thankfully, these types rarely contact me. Let's say you want to get a tribal for instance — if you navigate through my gallery you won't see a single one, so I'm not your man. On the other hand, you mostly see in it large pieces, fairly detailed, and rendered with rich, bright colors (either Japanese, or the cubist-like fashion I paint my canvases in), so if you're looking for something like that you reach for me.

Custom design is also a staple with me: when you walk into my studio you don't see any flash on the wall — just my art, both on skin and canvas. I draw every piece from scratch (unless it's a reproduction of a canvas by old Masters), starting from the client's ideas and insights, but applying my personal touch and creativity till completion.

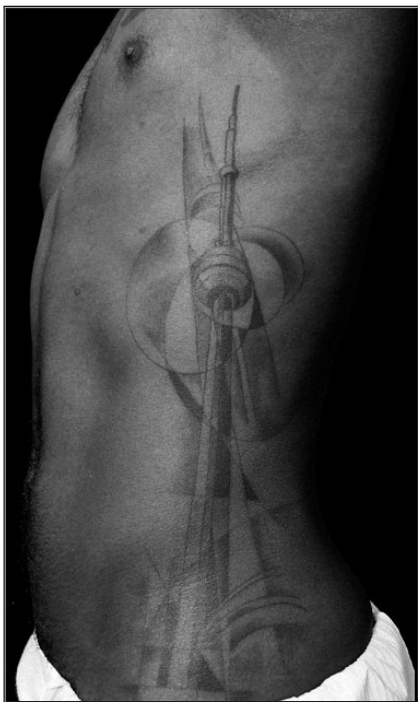
Do turn many people away?

I don't turn people away too often, although it happens of course. The only reason I do this is generally for artistic reasons. I guess I need to be captivated and challenged by the proposal in order to take you in — I have no fixed rules here. It can be anything really, although I do have preferences, but again seeing my gallery you know what I like to do and if you decide I'm your guy then generally you want something in these lines. Natural screening I suppose — can't complain.

I feel bad every time I say no though, for in a way I have the impression that I'm offending you or your ideas; that's why I always apologize when this happens and try explaining my point of view as an artist. I must admit that in most cases these people are very appreciative of my honesty and regard my opinion as valuable.

How do you feel about the massive popularity of tattooing these days, and shows like “Miami Ink” that popularize them even more?

I think shows like “Miami Ink” have definitely helped the “image” of tattoos overall. Getting tattooed is now much more publicly accepted and it’s not something taboo or mis-



judged. The majority of people who up until a while ago used to think about tattoos as necessarily linked with something shady or evil — jail, prostitution, drifters, drugs, and so on — accept it now, and at times get also excited about it. If you own a TV and had never been interested in tattoos, it’s now pretty much in your face and nobody can deny a deep sense of intrigue and mystery that this curious art inspires. People are now much less ignorant about tattooing and more cautious in searching and deciding if, what, and by whom, they will eventually get tattooed. In a way it’s sad that it took a massive corporate media to make tattoos be accepted and admired.

On the downside, I think that in these shows they talk way too much about crap that I don’t care of — the stories behind the images — and far too little, if at all, about the technical process of tattooing, its history, and geography. I was actually offered by a producer client of mine to create a show right here in Toronto but I couldn’t do it. I’m a rather reserved artist and am reluctant to transform such a delicate

art and relations I have with my clients into a circus for strangers. I like to think my integrity as an artist forbids me to sell what I reached in twelve years of experience to TV.

As a part of this mainstreaming I’m sure you’re happy though to see that tattoo artist is starting to be shown in galleries and treated as legitimate “art” though?

Yes, I believe it is a great sign when you start seeing tattoo-related art showcasing in galleries. It means that finally it’s been recognized as a form of fine art, and in my opinion tattooing has legitimately earned a place among painting, sculpture, architecture, and such.

What you see around now more and more often are tattoos that truly are pieces of art, and most significantly even is that often you can name the artist right away — this means that certain artists are in fact creating a “signature” style, something that is peculiar to their specific way of representing the art of tattooing. If you see a piece by Filip Leu, you don’t need to ask who’s the author of it, you just know it. And so Guy Aitchison, Shige, Bugs, Admiral, and many others including my friend Rob here in Toronto... and myself, hahaha.

DJ Minor

I interviewed talented tattoo artist DJ Minor in the spring of 2008.

After rejecting art school for a stint in the Navy, DJ Minor commiserated a few bad jobs at a tattoo shop near the base, and not long afterwards found himself tattooing tribal armbands on GIs... He just “kept waking up as a tattoo artist”, and the rest is history. You can find him at TastySquirrels.com and KantReed.com, and on Myspace as djminor.

How did you get into art and tattoos?

I wasn't drawing portraits of my friends at age three or anything, but I was steadily drawing from the third grade on. I got into photography and technical illustrations in high school due to a very persistent High School Art Teacher. She got me all revved up about a serious art career — as long as it wasn't photographing kids at SEARS she would be excited. Time goes on and I got a full scholarship for an art School in Savannah, GA, which I turned down for a trip to boot camp. This threw me into a different art reality of the tattoo parlors beside the base.



I would have been awesome at SEARS though.

Were you also exposed to tattoos as a kid, or were the base parlors the first time?

My uncle was in the Navy and was covered with little demons, and flowers from all over the world. It was really interesting since South Carolina, where I am from, didn't have legal tattooing, or many heavily tattooed people. When I got out of the Navy myself I was covered in the kind of tattoos that make laser treatment techs rich — but visibly covered none the less.

Living in the southern heartland didn't really take well to a twenty-something all sleeved out with naked ladies and skulls. After a few bad job decisions, I decided to take a few hours break at a local tattoo shop with an artist named Crenshaw. Knuckle head thought I was still enlisted, and was crackin' on me for my lovely collection of art. Next thing you know, I am rewiring broken power boxes and tattooing GIs from Fort Gordon with Crenshaw! I really don't know what happened after that — I just keep waking up as a tattoo

artist.

Tell me about your first customer?

So my first customer walks in, and throws down with some seriously sweet red tribal arm band action. Oh yeah! After probably two and a half hours longer then he was ready for, we wiped off my glorious red masterpiece. The client base at the time was a lot different from the tattoo show watching public of today, a little less informed about current trends in magazines and the art behind tattoos — they really liked tribal and Old English tattoos!

Obviously your uncle doesn't mind, but what about the rest of your family?

My grandfather was a Pentacostal preacher from the South, and my mom still thinks one day I'm gonna wake up and decide against them. Most of my family just doesn't care anymore and it's just who I am to them. The South isn't like the rest of the country as far as ink and body mods go — I've been on the road for many years traveling, and I'm really happy to be away from the negativity from all of that Bible Belt mentality.



Did you teach yourself to tattoo when you, I guess, just started doing it? How do you improve your work?

Tattooing was a sink or swim atmosphere and very intense. I quickly realized I needed more training, so I started traveling more and more until I just became a gypsy. I've been to every corner of this country I could, trying to learn more, and immersing myself into tattooing around as many talented artists and tattooers as possible. I owe any successes I have had over the years to my friends. Tattooing was a very private affair a few years back. The open ideas, and willingness to trade information of the last few years has really helped increase my tattooing technically. Lots of practice, and lots of technical critiques really have helped me push my tattooing to some very different places compared to when I first started. Fortunately the ability to tattoo more technically opened the arena to better

art, so I worked on drawing and painting. Both mediums helped push the other. It's kinda nice working with different mediums. You get stale and bored if you don't. Recently, my wife has been pushing to work with oils more and more, and I've been on an art vacation the last three months while my the shop is being refitted.

I really get super critical with my work. I learn from each piece — little things to make it

better, cleaner, and more crisp than the one before it, and improve on the next one even more. I try to outdo myself each time.

Critique from others is a large part of how I get better, so I don't much care for open forums. You get a lot of washed out opinions on the Internet from people trying to be nice. I keep mine for artists I respect and that influence me. No matter how good you are, or think you are, outside eyes often can pick up things you never see yourself — whether it's line weight, or contrast, you often just need a little extra outside opinion to help.

I also often try to incorporate as much non-tattoo art influence as possible too. There are so many possibilities with this medium that it just seems a waste not to.

You said you've traveled and worked with a lot of people — who are your influences as an artist?

Tattoo-wise, it's always been Joe Capobianco, Josh Ford, Josh Carlton, and Eric Merrill — guys like that have been on my radar since before I was a tattooer. Recently, people like Gonz, Jason Wheeler, and a lot more West Coast artists have been drawing my attention to more traditional themes and styles. I am looking forward to going back out to Reno and LA to work around them as much as I can. Currently, I am in Houston. Obviously Nate Beavers is a name heard a lot lately, and working down there with those guys was a pleasure. Rick Clark and CMFL are workaholics and make you feel guilty for not painting and working more. But, in this business, there are always amazing artists popping up out of the woodwork making your jaw pop. However, in saying that... I'm still gonna cut off Kyle Cotterman's hands — maybe just his fingers, haven't decided yet.

Who would you choose to tattoo you?

Josh Carlton, Joe Capo, and my wife Jen — but I could name lists of people if I had more skin and time. Joshua is a quiet tattooer with loud ideas, and just slick tattoos. His Alla Prima Ink just really looks cool healed. I'd gladly trade my black arm for a sleeve from Josh — might be time for some more laser removal? I still have a lot of open skin and I have barely been tattooed at all in the last few years... I would love to get some pin-up action from Mr. Capo. Finally, my wife is my new live-in tattoo artist. I love her work, and we are about to start my back project. I'm super-excited, but she is super-preggo, so I have to wait a little while longer. Once we move back to Reno, we will start on it.



What have your favorite places been to work in your travels?

Each area I travel to really helps me expand. Hawai'i was still the most awakening experience I have had artistically, but the majority of my education was in Atlanta. However, every pin-poke on my map has increased my artistic vocabulary. I really can't say enough about traveling — I made myself a promise, and this is my last year of being a gypsy full-time. I'm turning into a homebody as of late, so you'll see me on the West Coast as a fixture not just a glimpse.

What kind of machine do you use?

You can tattoo with a quill from a sea urchin with black soot from a fire, but I'm too lazy for all that. I still run electromagnetic tattoo machines. I haven't given into the air machines yet, but who knows. Most of my machines are just random one-offs from different machine builders like Dave Riegel, Josh Ford, BadBrass, and what-not. I wish had more, but my buddy Jay in Atlanta talks me out of most of my irons when I go home for a visit. I have a huge ink rack from several companies, but ink brands don't matter much. You just have to apply the ink to make a tattoo bright and solid. I got one of the fancy Eikon meter power boxes. I never really used the meter, but it glows all pretty in my booth.

What kind of tattoos are your favorite to do?

Tattoos without a huge back story.

I am sure that everyone could come up with the most meaningful tattoo ever to be on TV, but there is nothing as fun or rewarding as doing a tattoo just because. No reason or rhyme — just a tattoo because it looks cool. I got an elephant shitting out a Dorito on my neck. It doesn't mean anything but the fact that I have a nacho flavored chip on my shoulder. Most of my clients are pretty chill. I do a lot of odd zombie stuff lately. Not because I want to; people just like dead shit. Who can blame them?

What do you think of those TV shows? They certainly push the idea that everything needs a long story behind it. Would you appear on one?

Hell yeah I would be on a show! I'd be the jerk from any reality show. I love the interest that the shows have brought to tattooing. I am just not really happy about the side they show on TV — any business will have drama. You don't get a real sense about what is really going on tattoo-wise... "Come back in five minutes, I'll have that sleeve drawn up and stenciled for ya."

Um, yeah, sure. It may take a little longer in reality. Oh yeah... And you will not find a cat running around in my shop, or a tiger, or a bear, or even an alligator, oh my. I got a zoo at the house for that. The other shows like that Versus show were awesome, but didn't have the drama the seventeen year-old MTV crowd wants to see like on Big Brother or what-not. Tattoo shows need to show more art — more conventions and art shows. Follow an artist from two weeks out till the day after a convention. That would make for a better show.

Will you tattoo faces and other "public" skin?

An eighteen year old walks in and says, "Hey, tattoo this name on my neck..." Well, he probably won't be getting tattooed. But if you have a fair share of ink, and understand the

responsibility of a body mod, then it's your choice. Don't think there isn't a price to pay. Walk up into any store with huge piercings or tattoos and you will quickly learn. People are less shocked these days, but sometimes, you still got to warn or educate a client before they take on certain work.

Do you turn many people away?

Not too often... most of the clients I turn away are actually just referred to someone else who would be better suited for what they want. Most of my clients are here because they are open to my work already, so most often, people who come see me get me. If that Polynesian back piece is still on your mind, then I'll hand you Ronson's info and get you out to Oahu though.

What's the best way for someone to get into the industry these days? Any advice for wanna-be tattoo artists?

Be a well rounded artist way before you try to be in this industry. Make your own path, and don't look for a quick fix.

What do you think you'd be doing if it weren't for having fallen into tattooing?

I would have to marry a rich girl to afford my Xbox addiction! Maybe a porn star... who doesn't wanna watch a chubby guy wiggle on an ugly chick for fifteen seconds?



Think you've found your life-long calling then?

Tattooing for my whole life? If this old body will hold up, I will. My tattoo retirement plan is a little lax right now, but my wife is younger, so I'll just make her work when I get old.

Is your body starting to give you problems?

Yeah, I got some nifty glasses — I look like an old man creeping up with my newly founded gray sprouting hair. My back is ok as can be from sitting on painfully flat chairs for the last decade. I would really like to see some major advancements in tattoo chair technology.

Finally, what do you think about scratchers and their role in tattoo culture?

Trick question, right?

Haha, definitely not... thanks for talking to us!

Duff

Duff and I stumbled through this interview, having a major (Russian vs. English) language barrier... Because of Duff's young age, this interview caused quite a bit of debate.



In the time that I've known Duff (iam:Duff), she's gone from a very traditionally and "mainstream" pretty Russian girl, to an absolutely striking woman that's pushing the boundaries of aesthetics. Both her and her husband now wear lip discs — hers is at 32mm (approaching an inch and a half) — and, with the aid of translation software — my apologies for any errors that have crept in — we talked about her plate as she's one of the few women in the Western world currently wearing one.

How was your lip piercing made?

At the Moscow tattoo convention in August I decided to do this, and cut my lip up to 10mm and began stretching. I did the stretching gradually, in one or two millimeter increments, using tape to increase the size. Assisted by my husband (iam:pjevl), I stretched to 32mm over six months.

Was it easy to stretch?

It was only difficult in the beginning. Once I passed 16mm, it went very easily.

How far do you plan on stretching?

Oh, haha, I have already heard this question probably a million times! In all fairness, I don't know. For now, it's interesting and I like it and I don't have any plans to stop. I keep stretching my lip, but it hasn't torn yet!

Do you have future body modification plans?

Yes, certainly! I want to continue stretching my lip and my nostrils, and I'd like to re-stretch my earlobes. I took the tunnels out because Moscow is very cold — it's simply intolerable! Your ears freeze if you don't wear a scarf and a hat.

I'd like to get more microdermals as well — I already have three in my breasts, but want more. I have many plans — but many are secrets! Definitely I want more tattoos. Ever since I was a child I've dreamt about being a mermaid, and I've been haunted by this dream until now. When a master tattoo artist that I'm waiting for arrives in Moscow we will begin on this project. Other than that, I also want to get a series of implants in my hands.

What happens if you change your mind?

I am not going to change my outlook — never. I am very sure of it.

In Russia, a lot of people have pierced themselves, stretched very quickly, and are now taking those piercings out and sewing them up. For me it's not so simple — for me this is my

world, my culture, and my happiness. In the beginning, my family was against me doing this, but I've been modifying my body since I was very young. My parents never expected me to look like this — they thought up one life for me, but I ignored it and created my own life.

What do you do for a living?

You may be surprised to find out that I am only age sixteen! I study, but I don't enjoy it. People are wild, and this is not a natural environment. In the spring or summer my husband and I are looking forward to moving to his hometown, far away from the noisy capital, where we plan to save up money so we can travel, which is a dream for both of us. We'd very much like to meet people from all over the planet.

How did you become interested in body modification?

I have been interested in "updating myself" since early childhood. My parents lived in Africa for three years, and I, being a child, read all about this continent and learned everything I could. I saw many modified people, and it was so beautiful to me. My split tongue comes from my love of snakes — our neighbors had a pet snake, and I wanted to share something with it.

I remember when I was eleven years old I asked my mother whether I could pierce my eyebrow. After many arguments, I was allowed to go to a professional. I don't consider piercings to be a political act — it's simply pleasant to me, and I find it interesting that by piercing the body I can strongly change it and make it so much more beautiful.

What made you go so extreme?

I do not think that it is so extreme! In addition to the images I saw as a child, my husband had a 32mm lip — I looked at it, and it was so beautiful and unusual that I wanted to have it as well.

How do people in Russia respond to modifications like yours?

I think you'll be very surprised — even though I live in Moscow, the capital, it feels like I live in a small village where the people are primitive and have never seen anything before. When I walk on the street I have to cover up, or everyone stares with such amazement that it becomes unpleasant. Many people shout at me, ask to take pictures, and treat me as a circus amusement.

You're one of the only women I know with a lip plate. Do you think it's different for a woman to do this, more so a man?

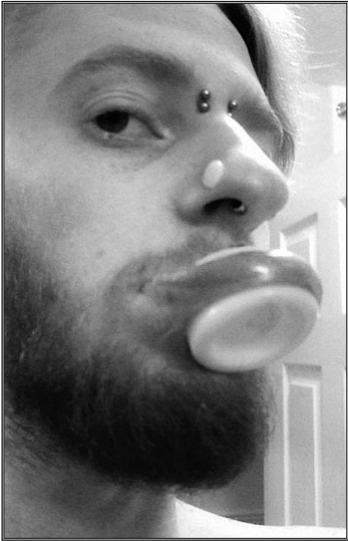
I don't believe there is a difference. We are all flesh and blood. The main thing that's important is that a person knows themselves, feels themselves on the inside, and understands whether these body modifications are right for them.

So you find this beautiful, both in yourself and others?

Yes, certainly it is beautiful and attractive. Updating my body also changes my soul, making it brighter and more beautiful, and with every body modification I become happier and happier. I would love to meet more people, and I hope that when we begin to travel we'll have the opportunity to meet others. I only wish I knew English better!

G.C.

After the mess of comments that came following the Toph interview, I thought I'd give it another shot with this interview with GC, a slightly older and more established individual with an equally larger lip stretching.



Like Toph who I also recently interviewed, G.C. is one of a growing handful of people choosing to stretch their lip piercings out to dramatic sizes, defining an entirely new aesthetic code, unique in Western history. As well as other stretched piercings, he currently wears a 41.5mm plate in his lip, and took some time out to talk to us about his successful life — which you may be surprised to hear is full of fishing trips and a cadre of unpierced friends.

How old are you and what do you do for a living?

I'm 23 and I work in a foundry. I mix the alloys, and transfer and pour the molten iron — it's not your everyday job but it more than pays the bills and allows me to live the life that I love. I just want to enjoy life to the fullest, with no regrets. My dad always told me to work to live, not to live to work — I think that's sound advice.

I love to fish, which is when I do my best soul searching — if I catch a fish it's a bonus. I just love being outside with nature, which leads me on to survival camping, playing Frisbee down the beach, and music is a big part of my life... I couldn't live without that. It could be said that I like to party a lot, although I'm down to one night a week now... That's a whole 'nother story. My friends and family are very important to me.

Did you have this job when you started stretching, or did you get it with the piercing in place?

When I started the job, if I remember right, my lip was at 15mm. I suppose I did most of the stretching while I've been working there. My employer obviously thinks I look weird and was a bit of a risk to employ but gave me a chance and has since said that I have proved him wrong. Thankfully now they judge me on my work and have said I have a job for life if I want it. I think if I did have to find new work it will hinder me somewhat, but I'd hope from the reference I would get from my current employer it shouldn't be too difficult to find more work. I have good experience in the industrial trade, plus multiple fork truck licenses.

What got you interested in body modification in the first place?

Probably like most people, the old National Geographic magazines. When I was a kid my dad had a subscription, and since then I've always been more interested in tribal culture than just seeing modified people around town.

What made you decide to start pushing your modifications past most people's borders?

When I was twenty I got offered a well paid job as an engineer for Honda, but I would have had to move and take out all of my piercings. I didn't want to, but it was such a good opportunity that I did it... I just felt like there was a part of me missing, like I was living a lie. I was incomplete. This might sound sad to some people, but although my mods don't define me, they are a big part of who I am. I made the decision to stay true to myself, and that has included "going extreme".

How do most people respond?

My family doesn't really like it, but they accept it, which is all I ask. Some of my friends think I've gone too far, but the outcome is the same — at the end of the day, when they look at me, all they see is Chris. You can tell this when they look you in the eye when they talking. I've gone out with mates from work, and someone will come up and ask a question, and afterwards my mate — who isn't into piercings or tattoos at all — will say, "I forgot that you've got all that in your face... I see you every day and you're just Chris to me." When someone spends the time to get to know you they realize you ain't weird at all — strangers can be abusive, but I take that in stride.

What did they think about you in Africa?

A pretty good one really. I was on the west coast in southern Gambia where they don't and never have, as far as I know, modified themselves, but most didn't even bat an eyelid. Just instant acceptance — it was really refreshing.

Does the radical stretching affect your dating life?

Not a lot. I still live in my hometown with a big alternative scene, but my last girlfriend didn't even have a single piercing or tattoo... I'd like to think being a fun person and not being above making a fool out of yourself helps.

How did you do your lip stretching?

It's been a long time, so hopefully I remember everything right... I got my lip pierced by Sarge at 1.6mm (14 gauge) about six years ago. It healed in a couple months and then I just started to play around with it — just pulling on the labret, really... After four months I went up to 2.4mm, and had loads of room to spare so I went straight up to 3.4mm, then 4mm the next week which finally filled the gap. I think I stayed at this size for about four months — this was also the last size at which I wore jewelry made specifically for a lip until I reached 24mm (1") some years later. I didn't get on the Internet at all until I reached 2ga, so I didn't even know that people made large gauge lip jewelry and just made do with what I could get.

I got a 5mm bullet retainer and just pushed it in — I didn't use any tapers. It bitched a bit, with a little swelling, but after a week it was fine. I won't lie though, it was an uncomfortable week. After another week it was looking good so I put in a 6mm tunnel that I blocked with wax and left it in for six months. Then I started stretching again, going up 1mm every two weeks until I was at 15mm. By this time I was using acrylic plugs and cutting a groove around one end for an o-ring to sit in so it didn't come off all the time. I must have stayed at this size for over a year while I got used to it and before I went past the "point of no re-

turn” where I couldn’t downsize any more.

I obviously decided this was for me, and bought a 16mm plug and upsized 1mm every two weeks until I reached 21mm where I stayed, again, for over a year. This was mostly because I couldn’t find suitable jewelry as my lip was getting fatter and the plugs I was using did not have enough wearing surface on them. Then I discovered BME through friends who were already here and I met Karl (iam:MobyK), told him about my plight, and he said he could help and sent me three plates — 22mm, 24mm, and 26mm. I went straight to 24mm, with Diddy’s help who scalped it for me. That took a month to heal and I put the 26mm in with ease, and within six months I was at 32mm and left it there while I went to Africa.

When I got back from Africa I put in the 34mm, and then Karl sent me a 36mm, 39mm, and 41.5mm. I put the 36mm in for a month, and then taped it up to 39mm over about

a week, which I kept for about eight months, and finally, taped up to the 41.5mm plate which I am wearing now!

How do you normally wear the piercing?

I wear the plate every day with the lip permanently down. It’s where it is most natural — if I lift my lip up, it hits my nose and I can’t close my mouth, ha-haha!

How did you stretch your other piercings?



My lobes I did over a period of about two years stretching 1mm at a time. I was very cautious as I snapped my left lobe previously by — to be honest — stretching too quickly. Diddy dermal punched my conches at 5mm where I’ve left them. He did the same with my flats at 8mm, but I’ve stretched the left to 13mm and the right to 17mm, I’ve since downsized to 16mm because I kept losing the plug. I did this stretch over two and a half years. My septum I stretched up 1mm every two to four weeks, up until about 5mm. I left it there for about a year, and then up to 6mm for six months, and then up to 7mm where it’s been for the last year and a half. My nostrils were punched at 8mm and then stretched to 9mm.

Are the different piercings different to stretch?

I would say just different types of pain really, but you come to know them all as old friends... I’ve tried to apply the same stretching ethics to them all — “if it ain’t ready, don’t put it in there, and if it is, woo hoo!”

I would also like to say that after about 20mm or maybe sooner the lip becomes extremely stretchy — far more so than any other piercing, and you can stretch it very quickly if you

want to.

Tell me about how your wrecked your lobe?

I've had big time trouble with my lobes. I had quite small lobes to start with — non-lobes, really — so it was hard work from the start. It took me a long time to admit it to myself, but I stretched my left lobe too quickly, going from 25mm to 30mm in about a month. Unfortunately I was not blessed with the most stretchy of lobes and this was too much for me. I had a bad blow-out, and instead of removing the tunnel to heal I left it in the lobe, started to lose circulation, and before I knew it, it was too late, and it split. A rookie mistake, from a rookie at the time, but I quite like what I have done to it now and it taught me a valuable lesson: to listen to what my body is telling me! I have had no such problems since, and now I downsize at the first sign of danger.

Any stretching issues with other piercings?

I only had minimal blowout with my lip — nothing more than a cat scratch with all the scarring on the inside of the hole. I had a bit of trouble with my septum. Stretching up to 7mm it kept tearing so I kept going back down to 6mm until it went in nice. It took about four goes but it's a nice clean hole.

How far will you continue the stretching?

I don't really have an end goal size — I've moved those goal posts so many times. I once said that I was only gonna stretch my lip to 5mm. I don't think I will know how far I'm gonna go until I get there. But saying that I have always said if one of my mods starts to become a hindrance then I would stop, but this has yet to happen — whether you believe it or not.

Do you have plans for other modifications as well?

I have plans for more scarification in the near future, and have considered subdermal implants down the line and apart from a full tattoo suit, nothing more as yet — but never say never! Evolution is a beautiful thing.



I hope you don't mind this questions, but some people have suggested that there's a line past which stretching is no longer visually appealing, and moves into freakish territory — what is your feeling on how aesthetics are interpreted at the borders of how humans express themselves?

I believe in the old saying, “beauty is in the eye of the beholder.”

What one person calls freakish is another person's normal. I think if you read into it more than that you're just pushing your beliefs onto someone else. People have to live their own

life to be truly happy.

What defines your own personal aesthetic? Is this something you find attractive in others?

I don't know if I could define my aesthetic. I think its just something that's evolved with me.

Of course I think women with lip plates of all sizes are very attractive, but it's not important to me. As I said, my last girlfriend had no piercings or tattoos, but I think that did put a strain on the relationship as she was not used to all the attention. Like Toph had said, it would be easier to date someone with mods because they would be more used to the reactions.

Do you have a reversal plan if you change your mind? I know Toph said he'd just let them close up if he wanted, but you've had yours a lot longer and I doubt they'd close.

I don't think my lip will ever stretch back enough to do a decent repair job on it, although maybe I could with some of the other piercings. However, I am 100% positive that would never happen. This is the path that I have chosen and am most happy with. I did not take



this decision lightly. I thought about it long and hard before going too far to turn back. Although my mods don't define me they are how I feel most comfortable in life and worth all the sacrifice.

Do you have to do things differently with the big lip plate?

When I kiss I take the plate out — I can leave it out for half of the day and have it go straight back in no problems. I drink

using my tongue as a bottom lip... and if I'm going down on a girl I turn my head sideways and stick the plate right up there (oh no he ditant!!!). I eat with a knife and fork just the same as everyone else... honestly, there really isn't a lot of stuff I can't do now that I could before and my speech is still perfect.

As it's getting more common, what advice would you have to people considering doing this?

I don't know how qualified I am at giving advice, but listen to your body and take things at your own pace. If people have questions they can write me.

Thanks for chatting about this!

Thank you for taking the time to read my ramblings!

Boff Konkerz

I'm always interested to meet people like Boff, because they live inside the tattoo scene, but at the same time seem like outsiders to it... It feels more like he's taking part in a folk art tradition than a part of a highly technically demanding industry.

For at least ten thousand years tattoos have been installed by hand, poked dot by dot using a variety of manual tools. While most modern artists now use high-speed powered devices, artists like 36-year old Boff Konkerz are keeping the traditional spirit alive as he visits clients' homes in England's East-Midlands region and abroad in his travels doing handwork tattoos. Boff has been tattooing for four years now, and recently talked to us about his art and experiences.



How did you get into this career?

I don't really think of this as a "career", but I got into it by accident, or it was fate depending on your view. I enjoyed art as a child, but didn't take it seriously until I started designing tattoos. I designed my first tattoo myself and later started drawing for friends.

As a teenager I was into punk rock and tattoos kinda just went along with that. When I first started I honestly had no intention of doing it for a living, it was a skill I just wanted to acquire due to a genuine interest in the art form. I did it in exchange for pizza and beer back then... I actually can't remember when I moved into tattooing for cash. Even now I'll tattoo friends for food and drink.

Besides pizza of course, what is the normal pricing for hand tattoos?

It really varies from job to job, but my basic quote is £30 (\$60) per hour, if it's big work I ask for a commitment of three hours a week until the piece is done, because of the slow nature of handwork I want to be sure they are committed to getting the piece finished. I am able to keep my prices low as I'm not paying rent on a studio. I also add any travel expenses onto the price per session.

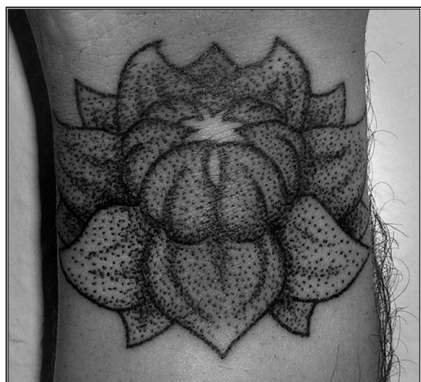
How did you actually learn?

I acquired my first piece of handwork from my good friend Xed Le Head and was interested in learning how to do it. I was already quite heavily tattooed by machine at this point, but had never had the desire to learn to tattoo by machine. When Xed did those first pieces of handwork the penny kind of dropped and I knew it was something I wanted to do. I was gonna ask Xed to give me some advice, but the night I was gonna ask him he wasn't around, so Lucky Diamond Rich showed me how to make a needle and I did my first tattoo on him and tattooed myself that same night. Shortly afterwards Xed shared some of his handworking techniques with me and after that it was a process of practice, trial and

error, and perseverance.

What would you say to someone who sees hand poked tattoos and says “I can do that”? How should someone learn?

Find a hand tattooist and get some handwork — just watch at first, and then try asking some questions. And yes, try tattooing yourself.



I'd like to say something in defense of “bedroom tattooists”. I read recently in a national newspaper here a criticism of bedroom tattooists by Louis Malloy [editor's note: you may know him from TV's “*London Ink*” or as “*Beckham's tattoo artist*”]. The truth is half of my work is fixing terrible tattoos executed by “artists” working from tattoo studios. Anyone with the money can open a tattoo studio, and getting tattooed in a studio is no more a guarantee of getting a good tattoo than getting tattooed in someone's home is a guarantee of getting bad work.

Life ain't that simple.

Although I'm proud to be part of a DIY tattoo tradition, I'm not opposed to working in a studio. Job offers can be sent to me via email!

Speaking of Louis, what do you think of shows like “London Ink”?

I think those shows are the fucking pits. I hate them, they are an abomination, and the worst thing to happen to tattooing in 10,000 years. Would I appear on one of these shows if asked? Of course!

It would definitely be an improvement if they added you to the cast!

You said you do a lot of repair work — how do you feel about scratchers and lower-end tattoo shops?

Tattoos teach us a lot of things, you often learn more from mistakes than from the things you get right. A shitty tattoo can be the right tattoo for someone at that stage in their development, if it teaches them to think things through. You either walk into a tattoo studio with your eyes open or your eyes closed — your choice. Responsibility for your tattoo ultimately lies with the customer.

I really like the idea of “healing” a machine inflicted tattoo using hand tools.

What's the actual tool you use for tattooing?

I use conventional tattoo needles lashed to half a chopstick.

How long do hand tattoos take to do in comparison to machine work?

It depends on the design, but I'd say three times longer.

What influences you as an artist?

I like to look at textile designs, porcelain, wallpaper... anything but tattoo flash. I love Pi-

casso, Miro, Goya and Frida Kahlo, but I don't think their influence can be seen in my tattoo work.

What are your favorite sorts of tattoos to do?

I love to tattoo hands, regardless of the design.

Why hands? Because of how they move or how they're always exposed to the public?

Yes, the way they move, and the way they are exposed to the public, but also something on a more subconscious level... I don't know what, but I'm happy to be involved with it. The leopard spotted hand for example, which took about twelve hours, is my personal favorite of all the tattoos I've done.

Also, I think handwork is better suited for tattooing the hands than a machine is. You often get blow-out on the fingers with a machine, but I never get blow-out.

I know you've done necks, but do you tattoo faces?

I won't tattoo faces until I have my own face tattooed.

Do people usually come to you with a design in mind?

Usually they say something like, "I want a rose on my hand," and I go home and draw something up, and nine times out of ten they like it and away we go. Even better is when they just say, "I want a sleeve." Then I can really go to town. A lot of my work is cover-up and repair work, so obviously then I have to work around what's already there, but I like the challenge of that too.

On a design level, and what works, what sort of tattoos work best for hand-poked tattoos?

I generally only use black ink and a lot of dot shading. I can do solid black but it takes a very long time — shading with dots I believe I can do as fast as a machine though. Other than that, anything goes. On a personal level I dislike portrait tattoos and won't do them — I think it's just weird having someone else's face on your body!

What does the future of tattooing look like to you?

It's only gonna get bigger, which will be both a blessing and a curse. As any industry grows it also diversifies. This will mean that the industry will be taken out of the hands of enthusiasts and uploaded into the mainstream dominant culture. Most tattooing will become formulaic and be tailored to the mass market. The plus side to all this is that the art will be big enough to support an underground scene. Think major record labels and indies in the music industry — this is already well on the way.



Have you experienced physical problems from tattooing?

Yes, I have problems with my right wrist, but this could be from masturbating.

Have you done any touring?

I took my tools with me when I went to India recently, and I thought I'd tattoo a few backpackers out there, but I only tattooed Indians, which was great. It's better to tattoo in my own area as I have a reputation there and so people trust me. People who've never encountered handwork are often wary of it, and they often think it'll hurt more — most of my clients say it hurts less — or that the work won't be to a high standard, which it is!

Is this your full time job, or do you do other work as well?

It's my only job. I earn a living, but it's not reliable. I try to limit myself to five jobs a week — Monday to Friday, with weekends off. Having said that I did seven tattoos last week,

and one this week. I like to do one tattoo per day because of the traveling involved, but if two of my customers know each other, I'll do both of them in the same day at the same house. This happens a lot, as all my advertising is by word of mouth, so many of my customers know each other. I tattoo a lot of people who are related to each other. I don't put out posters or fliers or promote myself in any way.

Finally, if you weren't a tattoo artist, what do you think you'd be?

A rentboy, which I was before tattooing.

On that note, thanks for talking to us!



Daniel DiMattia

Belgium's Dan DiMattia is a king both of back yard wrestling matches neo-Polynesian tattooing. I interviewed him primarily about the latter.

It's been my observation that not only do great tattoo artists exude raw artistic talent, but that they are also people of great humor, kindness, and wisdom. I believe that Daniel DiMattia, a master of neo-tribal tattoo art and a decade-and-a-half veteran in the field has all of these traits in abundance. His beautiful blackwork has long been some of my favorite ink posted to BME, and it was a pleasure to finally be able to interview him.

You can find Dan at Calypso Tattoo in Belgium. He travels regularly, so visit his website for more photos, contact details, and information on upcoming conventions he'll be at.

What got you drawing?

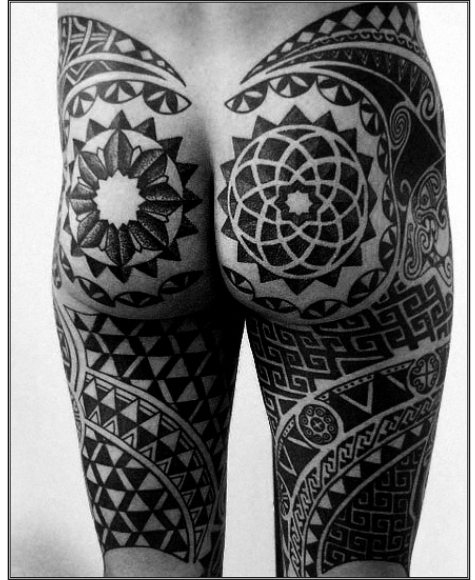
I've been drawing since I can remember — that doesn't mean I was good — but I was always drawing, like a compulsion. I attended art academy, but only lasted a year and half because I felt I didn't fit in. I came from the street, I was rough. I wasn't sensitive and feeling creative vibrations from everything around me like the others. It made me uncomfortable so I left. But I always kept drawing and tried to teach myself. Then I found tattoos and it felt more real, closer to people, still creative but grounded in reality.

What kind of exposure did you have to tattoos as you were growing up?

When I was young in Belgium, tattoos seemed limited to hand-done scratcher tattoos, usually on those who spent time in jail. So I was attracted to it because I wanted to be cool. At age 14, I took a metal compass and some ink and tattooed a cross on my arm — it was awful and my parents went insane. Fourteen years later while traveling around Europe, I met people with real beautiful tattoos, real works of art, and it inspired me. From then on, I decided I wanted to learn to create art on skin.

I was living in Sweden in the eighties and boxing in a club where there were a lot of skin-heads. Many of them had fine line, black and grey tattoos. Doc Forest, the Swedish godfather of fine art tattooing in Europe, was creating these illustrative, painterly tattoos. Amazing work. So naturally, I first went to him when I decided I wanted to learn to tattoo. He was nice but didn't need any help at the time, so I was out of luck.

Then I returned to Belgium and couldn't find any tattooists here to teach me either. But I did find books like Ed Hardy's Tattoo Time series and the first biker/tattoo magazines and



this helped because they also advertised tattoo equipment.

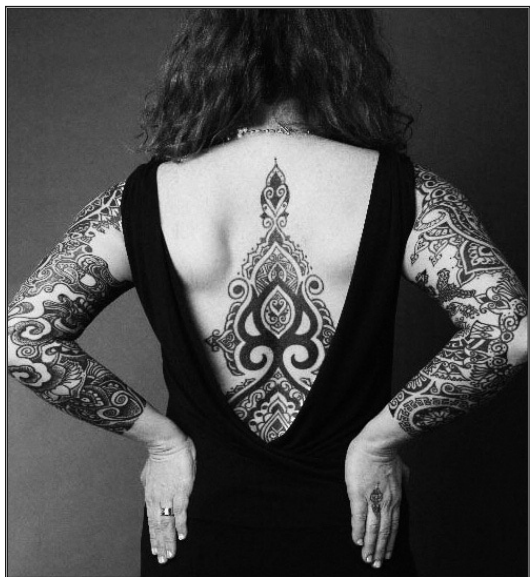
One advertisement offered machines, autoclaves, tubes, needles — the whole kit for beginner tattooists. The address was in New York and for me at the time, New York meant NYC, so I went to the States for the first time in my life. I ended up renting a room in Staten Island from another ad in the magazine. It was in a pretty dangerous place. A real experience for this guy from a small city in Belgium. I took the ferry to Manhattan and went around asking people — showing them the ad — where could I find the address? Turns out, it was in upstate NY. Three hours away! I called the place and they said I could have ordered the kit in Belgium with just a credit card. So, I went back, got a credit card

and ordered. But before I did that, I tried to find tattooists in NYC. Tattooing was still illegal at the time and everything was underground, so again, no luck! It was an adventure though.

As you can see from my story, it was really tough trying to be a tattooist at that time. No eBay for tattoo kits. No Internet for techniques and tips. You had to go out and search for everything yourself.

You're self-taught?

I started learning on myself. This is why my legs look so bad! I also started going to conventions like Amsterdam and Dunstable at the time and just watched the artists work. This helped a lot and



also increased my desire to do the type of work that I was seeing there.

Refining the craft is about practice, pushing yourself to do better but also experimenting — finding better equipment, and trying out new tools and techniques to see what works best.

Besides going crazy about the first tattoo you did on yourself, what do your parents think about your career choice now?

My parents are Italian immigrants in Belgium. My father worked the mines and my mother worked in a factory, so their lives weren't easy. Like many immigrants, they wanted security and tattoos didn't represent that. But once I showed them that tattooing is not only an art but a business they came around — but it took a while.

Tell me about how you actually started tattooing professionally.

I started tattooing professionally in 1992. The first one was a snake coming out of an apple — not a very exciting start for the design but for me, everything was exciting just to practice how to do a good line and get that color in. For four years I did all types of tattoos, but I began to specialize in blackwork after more and more people were coming to the

shop asking for tribal tattoos. I realized that there was more to blackwork than just traditional tribal patterns. There is more you can do with black ink. Because I am using only one color, I have unlimited uses of forms and design.

To experiment with blackwork on a large scale, in around 1996, I started tattooing local punks for free but they had to give me their backs and arms to do whatever I wanted. This is really how I started developing my own style. A lot of them came with me to conventions and showed the work I did on them, entered contests, and that's how my work began appearing in magazines. Conventions helped promote my style of work. Again, at the time, Internet access wasn't in every home here and there was no vast tattoo media as there is today, so people couldn't see your work unless you went out there and showed them.

What influences you as an artist?

I am influenced by any art that is well balanced, has an interesting shape and gives off a strong attitude, which includes many feminine shapes. I am influenced by gothic motifs, African patterns and masks, Asian art — all ornamental designs give me inspiration to create something different every time.



I'm also influenced by my clients — some of my favorite works are inspired from the wild imaginations of my clients.

How do you usually work with a client to come up with a piece in your style?

In general, I ask people who come to me what they are most attracted to out of my portfolio, whether it's abstract dotwork or more traditional Polynesian or a fusion of ethnic styles. I then create a work that is special to the client. Sometimes I ask questions about the person's life because I can incorporate design elements and symbols that tell the person's story.

Do you ever turn clients away?

I turn people away who are not certain of what they want. A person must be certain that they want to get tattooed. I never want anyone to walk out of my studio with regret. I love my job because it is the opposite — people walk away happy and that positive energy drives me.

Does working in black only limit you as an artist?

Working in black pushes me as an artist because I don't have a large palette of colors to work from so I have to keep researching and finding ways to stay fresh and create different works for different people. While I love old school and Japanese work — and have some on my own body — it would take a lifetime to learn how to do it really well, so I'll leave that to the others who specialize in it and admire their work.

I saw you're doing more and more dotwork tattoos. There's been some debate on how well these will age — do you feel they will do better or worse in the long run than “nor-

mal’ tattoos?

Dotwork ages very well. It’s less damaging to the skin, softer, and tends to heal better — all factors affecting longevity. But with any tattoo, it’s about how well you take care of it and your lifestyle. If you’re constantly in the sun, if you gain or lose weight in extremes, do drugs or any other activity that’s bad for the skin and your health in general, it will probably show in the tattoos. So if you lead a healthy lifestyle, you’ll protect your artwork investment.

As a “famous” tattoo artist, have you had any “famous” clients?

I had a famous footballer (soccer player) come into the studio once with his entourage thinking that I was going to stop everything to do a little tattoo for him — he didn’t even know what he wanted. These guys are treated like gods here but I could care less. I told him I was busy and to make an appointment — and leave a deposit so I know he’d come back. He couldn’t believe I would even ask such a thing and his crew was saying, “Do you know who this man is?” Kicking a ball around a field for a lot of money will not earn my respect. Leaving a deposit will. I never saw him again.

I’ve actually had a couple of ‘celebrities’ from the U.S. contact me, but I never worked on them because I could [would] not accommodate them the way they wanted. My favorite clients are the ‘average Joe’ as you say in English. Students, soccer moms, engineers, electricians, and a redheaded lawyer on occasion. People who come because they love tattoos.

Redheaded lawyers, eh?

Ahaha! I found my wife through tattooing! We met at the NYC tattoo convention in 2001 and a couple of months later she was living with me in Belgium. (We married in 2005). We share the same passions and philosophy, which is a foundation for any couple.

If you could choose any three tattoo artist to tattoo you, who would they be?

Wow. There are so many and so little space on my body! Xed from Into You in London — his compositions and dotwork are inspiring. I like the traditional Polynesian work of Manu and the hand Samoan work by Pili Mo’o, and I love the new color work from people like Nikko, Mike DeVries, and Tim Kern.

Quite a few of the tattoo artists I’ve talked to lately have mixed feelings about the massive mainstream popularity of tattoo reality shows like “Miami Ink” — how do you feel about them?

I think it’s good and bad. These shows inspire people to get custom work and not just flash off the walls. It shows the process of tattooing and educates the public, which helps remove the negative stereotype about tattoos. But it also creates new stereotypes like a person has to have some great story behind every tattoo, which I don’t believe.

Any interest in being on one of those shows?

I was offered an opportunity to appear as a guest artist but I never did because I didn’t want to play a part. I’m not an actor. I don’t think a TV appearance would make me a better tattooist. I don’t see how it would enrich my life.

What do you think the future of tattooing holds?

It's always the same, under the skin! Whether it stays fashionable as it is now or loses its popularity, it will always attract those who feel the compulsion to mark their bodies. I believe it is a genetic drive in some people to mark their skin. This does not follow fashion.

I agree completely. How do you feel about tattooing faces and other public skin?

I've done hands, faces, heads, necks — all public places. I take it very seriously. Decorating the face, to me, relates to the divine, the spirit of the person. It's more than just decoration, like the hands, which are related to creativity. So in doing the face, the person must have a certain ideology, a philosophy behind the desire.

What would you do if you weren't a tattoo artist?

A massage therapist. A QiGong teacher. Something that will make people feel good about their bodies and their spirit.

Speaking of massage, have you experienced any physical problems from a decade and a half of tattooing?

I did experience a great deal of back pain; that is, until I found T'ai Chi and QiGong. This unblocked my energy in my body and loosened me up so that I'm better able to absorb the tension from tattooing in difficult positions. I recommend it to everyone. It made such a difference in my life and I feel I can go on tattooing for many years to come because of it.

I saw a piece in your portfolio where you'd tattooed next to a large scarification piece — how do you feel about the rising popularity of other forms of body modification like this?

If a certain body modification speaks to someone like tattooing does for me, then who am I to judge?



What are some tips that you would offer to young tattoo artists seeking to better themselves?

Don't be afraid to freehand your drawing on the body. It's a great exercise in creating a flow and harmony with the body.

Also, go to conventions and watch how your favorite artists work. These days, people are more open, so you shouldn't feel shy to ask questions — but politely of course and at the right moment. I'm pretty free about giving advice to young artists at conventions, except those that scream in my client's ear about what kind of needles I'm using, or spilling beer on my booth.

Have you ever apprenticed anyone?

I did apprentice someone once, someone I treated like a son, and in return he showed me disrespect. It was a hurtful experience and I don't have the desire to apprentice anyone again. Well, maybe for a lot of money when I'm old and have arthritis!

Jae the Scratcher

It was a regular occurrence for scratchers to submit photos of their tattoo work to BME... What wasn't so normal was for them to be offered an interview (on BME or anywhere else), so I thought it might be interesting to hear about the industry from their point of view. People were extremely upset with me that I would allow this interview to be published, but I stand by the notion that it's worth hearing all voices, even those we disagree with... and perhaps those are the most important to understand.



“Scratchers,” both the outcasts and the heart of the tattoo sub-culture are our very own untouchables. They make up a large percentage of the tattoo world and all together do millions of tattoos, but they’re widely maligned and rarely spoken of by the so called “elite” — BME included — that publish magazines and websites. Of course this is the perfect formula for misunderstanding, and I

thought maybe we were missing out on some interesting stories.

My friend Jae, a home tattoo artist putting out work currently of dubious quality (sorry Jae!), was willing to put himself up on the block and candidly talk to us about his little piece of the tattoo world, and I thank him for that.

Please note: In no way am I trying to encourage home tattooing or tattooing before you're ready to do good work. I'm presenting Jae here not for his tattooing per se, because I like him, enjoyed hearing his story, and think many will relate to him as a person.



Were you an artist as a kid?

Well, I wouldn't exactly say I was an artist, but as a kid I always loved to draw. I used to watch my “father” draw and wished that I was able to draw as well as him. He was always in and out of prison so I got to sit there and mess with his art. Sometimes I would trace it and hang it on my wall, and after a couple of years I was able to look at something and draw it free hand, but when I tried to create my own art it looked as though I had no kind of talent at all. I guess it did come a little later because now I can create my own art and it actually looks alright...

That's actually a really nice story — so you learned to draw and became inspired about tattoos because they symbolized your father?

Yeah, my father has inspired me in a lot of ways, mostly by his art. He tattooed in prison

but that's all he ever told me. He didn't like talking about prison too much, except for the fights he'd get into and the dirty work he put in.

I guess you grew up around tattoos?

I've been around body art since I was a kid. I used to watch my father tattoo and pierce all of his friends and their girlfriends. I was always so captivated by tattooing and wanted to try it so bad that one day I tried to make a tattoo quill. I got some India ink and tried to tattoo Batman on my hand but that didn't work out so well. The first time I poked my skin the ink was so thick it wouldn't go in... It kinda just sat on my skin, and then my mom walked in my room and beat the hell out of me, hahaha... So about a year and a half ago I finally decided to buy a tattoo kit and I've been tattooing since.

Haha, yeah, my mom wasn't too happy either when she discovered that I was poking tattoos into myself in my bedroom as a kid. My father didn't mind though — how did yours react?

Well, my father was in prison when he found out about the whole tattoo thing, so he didn't really care too much about what I was doing — I think mainly because he couldn't do anything from behind bars so he didn't really say anything about it. That was pretty much the last time I saw him because when he got out of prison he disappeared.

What was the first tattoo you ever put on someone else?

My first tattoo was a heart that I put on my wife's wrist. Right now it's just a really thick outline — it's about the size of a dime. It took me like half an hour to lay the ink in because I didn't know what the hell I was doing! She whined the whole time, hahaha, and then she decided that I needed one too, so she tattooed me as well. It really isn't so much fun when the shoe is on the other foot! She likes to watch me squirm, but she's really good at what she does as long as she's not mad at me!

Yeah, I remember filling in my first tattoos and how long it took, not knowing how to do it. How many tattoos have you done in all now?

I'm not to sure how many tattoos I've done so far but I'm gonna guess anyway... probably about twenty-five.

What kind of tattoo equipment do you use and why? Where did you get it?

I use a Gold-Slinger for my line-work and a Wasp tattoo machine for shading, and the metered power supply that came in my kit, and a Tread-Lite foot switch and clip cord. I also have a machine that a friend traded me for ink work. I'm not to sure what kind of machine it is but it's pretty smooth running. I got most of my equipment from Superior Tattoo Equipment. It's a little tattoo supply shop down the street from my house.

How do you control sterility and cross contamination?

I usually cover my machines with baggies and wrap my surface with industrial saran wrap. I use disposable needle tubes and dispose of my needles in a sharps container, and I use medical wipes that kill everything from HIV to the common cold, and I use gloves. In some of the pictures I'm not doing all of these things because they were taken before I learned how to prevent bloodborne pathogens and cross contamination.

So in short, solving the problem by using disposable gear rather than an autoclave?

Yes, I figured it would be the easiest way to do it. I don't have to worry about not properly sterilizing something and making an enemy out of one of my friends!

What are your favorite sorts of tattoos to do?

Pretty much anything that's big — a tattoo that I can really get down with and throw my own little things into, to kinda make it my own... but little tattoos are fun too. I would really like to find someone that would let me go hog wild on their skin because I feel like I really learn more about myself when I'm tattooing a piece of art that I created myself... I pour a little piece of myself into it.

Do you like shows like “Miami Ink”?

Honestly, I've never seen “Miami Ink” — I'm not much of a TV person, but I hear good things about it.

I think that the popularity of tattoos is a good thing because people are opening up and accepting different ways of being. We live on a planet that is so diverse and beautiful — to shun someone else's beliefs and way of life or personal expressions is so sad and closed-minded. I feel that everyone should embrace life and not just live it.

Would you actually like to tattoo for a living?

Sometimes I think about it, and I'd love to find more clients, but then I remember that the clients that I do have have been with me since the beginning — mess-ups and all, and I can give them my all and not just another tattoo. I love to tattoo and I don't want it to turn into just another job — I want to do it because I love it, not because I have to pay bills. I've got a day job for that!

I definitely appreciate doing it just for the love of tattooing, and I like how it's a part of your friendships as well.

Yeah, in a big way it helps us bond and all of that good stuff, and it also makes us trust one another more — it brings us closer to each other. I guess it also gives us something productive to do with our time instead of running around all wild and getting into trouble. I've managed to stay out of “the county lock-up” since I've started tattooing!

I am trying to push myself to my limits by creating my own art and discovering exactly what I'm capable of doing with my creativity. I've been looking at a lot of other peoples styles and trying to use their art for inspiration.

Do you draw or paint as well, or do you prefer to work on skin?

I draw a lot, but I love to work on skin — it's so much more challenging when you can't mess up. You don't want someone walking around with a snake on their arm that looks like a penis or something!

Assuming you keep tattooing, how do you think you'll feel about these early tattoos you're doing now?

Well, I'm not too sure — that's a hard one! I think that they're okay for a beginner, and I know I need some improvement, but I also know that when I'm in my prime I'm gonna

look at them and ask myself, “did I really do that?” Hahaha...

Haha, no doubt. Free cover-ups in the future for all your current “victims”? Would you describe yourself as a “scratcher” right now?

A “scratcher”? Well, I’m not to sure what that is but I know I’m a “digger”.

Sorry, “scratcher” is a negative term for someone who’s doing tattoos that aren’t the greatest... I think that’s probably how most people who are used to high-end work will respond.

Oh. Well, in that case, I think I’m somewhat of a scratcher, but then again I’m still a beginner! I feel that no matter how good your work is there’s always room for improvement, and that’s something I strive for. I want to be the best that I can be — improvement is always a good thing, whether you were taught by the best of the best or if you’re self-taught like me.

I tattooed for a while and some of my pieces were pretty lacking technically, so I definitely don’t mean this in an insulting way — how do you feel you work compares to other work out there?

Oh, no, I understand... I feel that my work is okay, and I know that if I got a chance to pull out all of the stops — and cigarette breaks — I could really create a piece of art that would leave people in awe. For now though, I’m probably gonna have to beg a few people to let me fix up some of my previous artwork, or lack thereof...

If I had my wish, I would like to go to art school and learn as much as I can, and apply all that I’ve learned to tattooing, and maybe open up my own studio. I’d love to teach people who want to learn the art of tattooing to tattoo, because it kinda sucks to learn the hard way... but at the same time it’s an experience that I wouldn’t trade for anything in the world.

What do the people who’ve gotten work by you so far think of it?

Okay — I’m not gonna lie. I’ve done some really bad work... Some work that those poor unlucky bastards are gonna regret! I didn’t take their money because I figured they had already paid enough, hahaha... Okay, that’s not funny... But seriously, most of my clients love my work.

If you could ask a high-end artist for advice, what would you ask about?

Honestly, I’d love to know anything I need to do to improve my work — what should I do differently? What haven’t I been doing that I should? How do I shade from one color to another? How do I get more detail? What’s the best way to do a cover-up? How do I do realism and do portraits?

Sounds like there’s a long way to go — good luck, have fun, and thanks for agreeing to talk about this publicly!

Johnny Thief

One of the best tattoo artists featured in the BME interview section, I hugely enjoyed the answers I got from Johnny Thief.



Johnny “Thief” Di Donna is one of the most skilled and true artists inking people in America right now, and has achieved huge success in a broad range of very mainstream fields without compromising himself to that mainstream. Whether it’s designing artwork for Guitar Hero 3 or tattooing customers at his shop SEPPUKU TATTOO in Savannah, Georgia, fronted by Downing Greek Gallery, his raw talent shines through, and he recently sat down and talked to us at length about his experiences as a tattoo artist.

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How did you get into art? Were you an artist as a child, or did it come later?

I have a belief that all artists are born artists. Oh, I know people can be trained and educated and then work in the arts, but there is more to art than wiggling a mouse or working a Spiral-

graph™. That vision to see into other places, that insane burning desire to work through the night, that notion that if you don’t work, you could lose your sanity... these aren’t things that can be taught. They separate Artists with a capital “A” from the rich kids going to art school and thinking they’ll be gallery sensations by the age of twenty.

Art was always there, a God-given talent, and sometimes it’s strange talking about it in such analytical terms. It’s not unlike talking about, ‘How long have you been breathing, and who influenced you breathing from early on?’, y’know?

How did you first get introduced to tattoos, and how did you decide it was something you wanted to do for a living?

I worked for fifteen years in various fields of art before ever tattooing. I spent years designing sets, screen printing, designing, art directing, offset printing, prepressing, and building art departments for gigantic corporations. My client list had been huge, working on everything from the 1996 Olympics programs for Reebok to sets for Saturday Night Live and everything imaginable in between.

I always loved tattoos, but I had moved from New York to Florida in the late eighties just before the tattoo renaissance would really reshape the fabric of the scene. Florida tattoos were horrible and I was poor, so no tattoos for me anyway. I had many opportunities to

scratch, and I blew them off. People would stop me in the middle of the night, out in Ybor City in Tampa, wheat pasting flyers for concerts, and they would be like, “Man! You’re that guy! You do that fanzine! You’re the THIEF! Man, you need to do my tattoos!” And people would start taking off their clothes and explaining in detail what they wanted... which is alluring when it’s some killer babe. But, I’m checking out area shops, and this was back when Florida was in lock down, arresting 2 Live Crew for obscenity lyrics, arresting Michael Diana for drawing and things like that. I’m thinking, man, it must be really hard to own a tattoo shop, with all these religious freaks trying to close you down, and all the ostracization heaped on them, so without knowing how much that I was doing the right thing by them, I always turned down those kinds of offers.

Fast forward to 1999, when I’m putting my ex through school, and working fourteen hours a day to do it, while all my other friends are creating posters for bands and blowing up in the underground. Knowing that I was dying inside, my ex bought me a starter kit for my thirtieth birthday. One of my good friends was also an employee, Mike Martin, now of Engine House 13, a screen print shop in Columbus. Formerly a trained tattooist from Ohio, he was tattooing outlaw style in Myrtle Beach during the tattoo prohibition. He threw a party featuring nine bands, a custom hot rod show, and me tattooing illegally on anyone stupid enough to sacrifice some skin. (Incidentally, I still tattoo these people for free to this day as a thank you). We called it the Lo Down Ho Down, and there’s a poster we designed for the show published in the ‘Art of Modern Rock’ (by Paul Grushkin and Dennis King, Chronicle Books), my tattoo baptism enshrined for posterity.

After playing around with it enough to get the fever, under Mike’s watchful eyes, of course, I realized that tattooing is no hobby. It’s a 24/7 lifestyle commitment. I started doing crazy amounts of research, and testing the waters. Did I want, at age thirty and with fifteen years of experience, to leave a \$60K a year job with full bennies in NYC to go scrub someone’s toilets to maybe become a tattoo guy?

I interviewed Paul Booth, Shotsie Gorman, and Brian Everett for our online fanzine, the Black Market Manifesto. They’re great interviews, but I was really picking their brains about their career choices. I attended lectures at the Museum of Natural History on Body Arts through history, given by Hanky Panky, Don Ed Hardy, Chuck Eldrich, Lyle Tuttle, and a number of masters. I went to as many conventions as I could and started taking seminars. I collected more and more tattoos, and started trading work with some of the artists at their invite, one of which was IAM member Johann Florendo of Queens, which was really flattering.

I finally applied for a job with one of the top studios in the tri-state area and was hired. It was a devastating amount of work. But the cool part was, once I started getting my chops, the old corporate job was bought out and sold, and the new owners liquidated 90% of the spots. Tattooing provided me with job security, ha!

What did your family think of you becoming a tattoo artist?

My family has no idea I’m a tattoo artist, I have not spoken to them since 1992.

My formative years were terribly abusive, growing up in NYC in the 70’s at the height of its crime wave, to underage parents who had no concern for me at all. Art and NYC go

hand in hand; unlike other parts of the country, NYC loves an artist, the schools loved me because I wasn't some thug or gang kid, and the only ones around me who hated me being an artist was my family. As a teen, I'd be kicked out of the house for painting, and forget it, when I started painting sets at a theatre, everyone was sure I was some sort of mezzafanuch... in fact, there was a point I had to sneak in to the city, as my drug addict step father forbade me from going, based on his illiterate fear that I would catch AIDS just by walking around the city streets and then infect and kill the entire family.

My parents would beat me for wanting to be an artist. I had to fight tooth and nail for it. It's one of the reasons why I get so passionate about art and so nauseated at bad artists, or people who think being an artist is an easy ride for rock stars, doodling all day, banging painting models, and going to art parties all night long. Bullshit, my stint as an artist hasn't just been a few resumes worth of work, there's times it's been an out and out war. I've also tattooed in places where it was illegal, add that to the mix, fighting the government for your right to create art, and you get an idea of why I have no problem tearing someone up for sucking.

How did you learn and refine the craft of tattooing?

Oh, that is still actively going on, my friend. Tattooing is seriously difficult, more so than any other medium, it's a consistent challenge every day. Obviously, you're working on a living medium that differs from person to person. As an artist, sometimes you really need to turn off the creative and concentrate on the application. It's a ton of technique, some real hard and fast science. The art part of it is almost an afterthought.

I made sure that once I was committed to the tattoo lifestyle, that I served a complete apprenticeship under a reputable master, (Mario Barth, back when he had only one Starlight Tattoo, in my case). Practice of course helps. Getting tattooed by masters and sitting at their feet and learning from them, of course, one of the best ways to open your eyes and take things to the next level. I've been slack in that area: I was too busy making a lot of money for people who didn't care about art or me. But now I work for myself, and this year I'll be out of debt, and am starting to look to Europe and Japan to get work from my heroes.

Who are your influences as an artist and as a tattoo artist?

My influences, jeez, there's a book. I've had so many, it's rough to condense it all, I've got interests as diverse as classical renaissance art to graffiti, and everything in between. Although I love inkwork, so I'm a huge fanboy of the Romitas, Miller, the Hernandez Brothers, Shawn Kerri, Rick Griffin, and anyone who can work only in black, and create a universe out of it. I love comics (Marvel, DC, horror, Japanese manga, punk, underground, independents) movies (sci fi, horror, foreign, film noir, anime, kung fu, samurai, monster, and really weird cult shit) art (nuovo, impressionism, surrealism, cubism, chiascurro, abstract, dada, low brow, pinstriping) posters (Mucha, Griffin, Kelley, Mouse, Kozik, Coop, Kuhn, Pusha'd, Mad Marc Rude, and all my friends and peers) tattoos (Americana, Japanese, new school, grey, color bomb, whatever, it's all killer)... and the tons of subcultures I've been involved with, like motorcycles, punk, ska, hardcore, zine publishers, literature, writing, sex and erotica... it all contributes.

And damn, there are more and more talented bastards coming out of nowhere every day.

Who doesn't love Filip Leu? He's a genius and easily the best tattooist alive today. I love Jack Rudy's ethics. Same with Norman Keith Collins (Sailor Jerry) and Paul Rogers... ethics are constantly being eroded in this field and we could still use some of those old school values to preserve the craft for future generations. Bugs was a huge influence on me for a lot of reasons, I also feel he's really underappreciated in the scene. Mike Rubendall's commitment. Niko's realism. Grime's next level shit. Adrian Lee's vision. Chris O'Donnell's structures. It'd be easy to go on all night...

What are some tips that you would offer to new tattoo artists to become the best they can be?

For starters, never think this is going to be easy. No one ever became great because things were easy. You think Martin Luther King Jr. was a great man because it was easy? This is not a profession for the faint of heart, for slacker laziness, or for piss poor gimme gimme "I DESERVE IT" attitudes. My marriage ended and I will never work in any other field because of my decisions; I made sacrifices that this business demands. Turn off the My Chemical Romance and start acting like a fucking man. (Girls, you know what I mean!)

Second, forget about shortcuts. Scratching out of your house will teach you nothing. It will simply put money into the pockets of sleazy companies that will ship 'tattoo supplies' to your home. These companies are not run by tattoo artists, and their equipment is a joke; lousy ink, meat slicing machines, needles jigged by blind monkeys. The best companies will only ship to health department regulated legal places of business and will require you to prove it.

In NYC from 1961 to 1997, it was illegal in all five boroughs to tattoo. This was from one single trumped up case of hepatitis that came out of a prison. When you scratch, you are breaking zoning laws, health department laws, and biohazard waste disposal laws. In Chatham county, (Georgia) these fines can rack up to six digits and jail time. If you get caught scratching, you could reverse the laws and have an entire county or state go back to being outlawed. You could unemploy every tattoo artist in the state.

In the old days, which were not so long ago, apprenticeships were fucking hard. They were meant to be, they were supposed to weed out the fanboys and act like boot camp, college, and shock treatment all at once. In days not too long past, if you went to a shop asking to buy equipment, you'd leave with broken hands.

In Japan — (*cue the 'Kung Fu' TV show music*) — the old rules were as severe as everything else in their culture. You didn't get a bunch of small tattoos that had nothing to do with each other, you would have one single master design you an entire Horimono body suit. This suit may take years to complete, and the relationship and respect between artist and client was critical.

When seeking an apprenticeship, it was like that scene from 'Fight Club', which Chuck stole from the practices of Shaolin monks. A prospect would stand outside the temple, with no food, shelter from elements, or encouragement for days, being berated, screamed at, maybe attacked. If the prospect endured, he was allowed in to begin his training. Japanese apprentices shave their heads, like a monk... what they are doing is sacred to them. They move in and live with their sensei, their apprenticeship is 24/7. They will not tattoo

for two, maybe three years at all. They will do everything from cook, clean, to anything asked of them. If they screw up, they are beaten.

They study the history, culture, and sacrifices of all who came before them. They will draw until their hands fall off, become master calligraphers, and water color painters. They will study ukeio-e woodblock techniques, and understand the full range of mythology and religion descending from Shinto, Buddhism, and Bushido. When they tattoo, they will be using instruments made and handed down for generations. When they graduate, they lose their old name. They are adopted into the family, and given a two part name: Hori, which means literally to engrave, and also a new family name... like Horiyoshi 3... Now a family member, they will work with that master for at least five years, as a tribute back to his generosity. He may work with that master for the rest of his life, or he may find his own path.

The artist doing the apprenticing is a world class master with decades of experience, who commands the respect of both an international clientele as well as artists worldwide. He has contributed to the industry in many ways, elevating the art form, improving technique and materials, and upholding the ethics, self policing the industry. This level of respect allows him to easily tattoo everyone from working class laborers to the highest level of Yakuza officers. When a hitman bows to you in respect, you are doing something right.

An apprenticeship will teach you far more than how to tattoo. It will teach you VALUE for what you have, and have been given, value for your clients sacrifice of blood and skin, and value for how hard it was to get to this place in history and to not squander it lightly.

What are your favorite sorts of tattoos to do?

I just love to tattoo. I love the look on people's faces when they are just blown away. Challenging pieces, photorealistic pieces, things that are just a bit over my head are great, they teach me to stretch and grow. I love tattooing complex designs that my old boss would say were impossible, like wood cut effects, or a color portrait, mostly just to spite him. But sometimes, tattooing is as much about the ritual and bloodshed as it is about the subject matter. You know, like when people need a tattoo as opposed to just want a tattoo.

I still love the basics of tattooing... I haven't lost that first love of the gig. I get excited ordering supplies. I love unpacking a new machine or pouring out a bag of new ink caps. I love doing a first tattoo, a swallow, a sacred heart, a rose and a spider web... there's still a rush from meeting someone you may never have met anywhere else, and having the chance, with a small clean tattoo, of changing them forever.

I'll tell you something funny: I don't think I've tattooed any of my other art on people, like my posters. Yet, I see it tattooed by other tattoo artists all the time. Someone a state over did a beautiful rendition of the winged girl holding a baby skeleton from my Godsmack/Deftones poster... I was jealous!

What are your favorite sorts of clients to work on?

The kindred spirits, naturally... people who know who they are and why they are here. Strong individuals who come in, sit, get a fucking tattoo, a tattoo that is 100% who they are inside, now tattooed on the outside, and go out to kick ass. It makes you feel like an armorer, or an arms dealer.

Least favorite?

Ugh. It's getting worse. The dumbing down of America certainly has wrought some damage, huh? I hate tattoos of inclusion. When someone doesn't know who he is and is getting something to belong. Not belong to something he created or revolutionized. Belong to some vapid institution or brainwashing that the arts have railed against for centuries. Someone who doesn't know what it is he's getting or why. Like all these nautical stars on emo kids, never knowing why the word nautical is there, on a kid who's never even seen the ocean. A tattoo that brands you as a group and a follower, and not as the unique individual you are. I call them an anti-tattoo.

Or crosses. Ugh... I hate a cross tattoo. Nothing can be safer than a cross tattoo. Who's going to get pissed at that? Praying hands. Doves. That Ichthus fish. All Christian bumper stickers ripped off a pastor's bumper. Do not get me wrong, I am not anti-Christian, quite the opposite. Remember that Jesus was crucified with thieves, it was a thief on a cross who was first promised the kingdom of heaven. But, you get someone who has to have the praying hands with the rosary beads and a dangling cross, with another big cross behind it, and a dove, and a banner with the word "FAITH" in it, you know, just in case we didn't catch all that with the five other symbols in one tattoo... so, you're tattooing this Bible bookstore nightmare, and he's on his cell phone, talking to his wife. Then he hangs up and calls his girlfriend. WTF? Or brags about how he's dodging child support. Or calls his dealer for a bump after the tattoo. These are all fakers who have no idea what they're getting or why. But, they can go to Thanksgiving dinner, and instead of getting hell from grandma about their tattoo, she will most likely kiss it. I call bullshit.

The Bible is 3500 years old, 66 books long. It inspired people like Mozart and Michelangelo, inspiring some of the greatest works of art in mankind's history... In fact, there are portions of the Bible that indicate that the arts are gifts from God, supernaturally given to us by Him to glorify Him, like the artisans who constructed the temple of Solomon or the Ark of the Covenant, or King David who invented a number of musical instruments... the BEST you can come up with, endowed with all your faith and supreme being power, is bringing in your friend, rolling up his sleeve to show me his John 3:16 tattoo, and say, "I like this. Gimme one of these?" UGH! I've had guys ask for a cross tattoo, and when I ask where they'd like it, they roll up their sleeve and all they have is cross tattoos. They look like fucking Arlington National Cemetery!

An example, a kid came in, and he's asking me about a tattoo. He's like, "You know that verse, 'My Brother's Keeper'? That's what I want, My Brother's Keeper." I'm like, "Sure I know that verse. Who doesn't, it's in the first three chapters of the Bible. It has nothing to do with being your brother's keeper, in fact, it's the exact opposite. Cain said it to God after he killed his brother Abel, asking 'Am I my brother's keeper?'. Now, if you plan on killing your brother, then by all means..."

See what I mean? Here's a kid who not only missed the point utterly, he has the whole lesson completely ass backwards. A country that is SO obsessed with God this and God that, but has no fucking clue what their own book really says at all.

So, no. I didn't spend twenty-five years of my life creating art to help perpetrate ignorance. Sorry!

If you could choose any three tattoo artist to be tattooed by yourself, who would you choose and why?

Horiyoshi 3, Filip Leu, and Robert Hernandez. Because they are the best in the world, and I can only imagine the wealth of knowledge I'd gain just by sitting in supplication at their feet. Then Paul Booth, Grime, Marcus Pacheco. Tin Tin. Boris from Hungary. I'd always get more Bugs work. These are cats operating on planes that grunts like me can only aspire to.

What do you think about shows like "Miami Ink" and the mainstreaming and extreme popularity of tattoos? What's good about it and what's bad about it? If you were offered the opportunity, would you appear on such a show?

I hate these shows. I do not watch TV and I do not currently get any channels, but the premise of the shows is flawed at the base. It's corporate assholes who own and dictate the show, then package it and sell it like it was cologne or motor oil. They have no idea of the legacy of our history, or how hard it was to bring tattooing to where it is today, and certainly weren't there when we fought for legalization. When money is the focus, art dies. From what I hear about the shows, they are long on drama, short on education. And I can't stand the idea of tattoo faux pas being broadcast nationally; like when they're doing set ups without any gloves on, wiping fresh tattoos bare handed, or Kat Von D is brushing back her hair with bloody gloves and just keeps on tattooing.

And I know how cool it is to have Steve-O tattoo you, trust me, I've done stupider things with tattooing myself. We all have and still do. But why on earth present that to the public? That's a right that tattoo artists have earned, to do retarded things like go to a convention and then tattoo each other in a dark room under the influence of various substances. Instead, here you have an unlicensed, untrained person tattooing on national television, showing how the tattoo community likes to break health department laws for ratings. STELLAR.

Here's a killer idea on how to make tattoo TV work: Pick an artist every week, someone up and coming, but not like some megastar. Let's say like an Aaron Bell, a respected cat in the community who throws down like a motherfucker, but isn't the owner of several clothing lines or a chain of McTattooshops. Send this person somewhere they've never been to explore both the territory and then to seek out the indigenous tattooing. Like some tebori hand tattooing in Japan, get some work in Paris from Tin Tin, or on a beach in the Fiji islands. You would be exposed to a different culture every week, plus see tattooing permeating cultures globally, and have the benefit of a sharp tattooist to illustrate things to the layman. It's win-win-win, and would be really interesting TV, without all the fake drama or star fucking.

Tattooing is thousands of years older than TV, movies and marketing. Please, corporate whores, stop dragging it down to the lowest common denominator.

What direction do you think tattooing is going in and what does the future of tattooing look like to you?

Haha! I have an issue of ITA that is from 1998, with an interview of Aaron Cain by Dave Waugh, done while they're on a golf course. It's amazing. In the article, Dave asks Aaron

the same question, and it's comic how off he is on his answer. He had figured tattooing had hit it's saturation point, and couldn't possibly be more exposed. This was before any of the bike build off shows, tattoo TV, the glossy Madison Avenue magazines like *Inked*, or on-line banner ads for home mortgages being drawn by animated tattoo machines.

So you want me to go on record like poor Aaron? ;)

I say, I think it's a scary time: two illegal wars, prison camps, sanctioned torture, trillions in debt, fixed elections, suspension of Constitutional rights, illegal wiretapping, unemployment, falling markets, devalued dollars, the class gaps widening... this country is more apathetic than its been in ages. How many laws do these polesmokers have to break before they're dragged off to the Hague? Seriously, Dick Cheney could rape someone's mother on TV, and there will be some fascist pundit justifying it and saying what a whore the mother was and she was asking for it. I have no idea what is going to snap these spoiled, fattened, apathetic losers out of their funk, but I fear it. It's going to be a second great depression, war with China, or a nationwide Katrina. It's going to get really bad before it gets better. Tattooing will of course survive. It's watched things like the pyramids being built and fall into ruin, it will definitely have a shelf life rivaling radioactive waste. And tattoo artists will continue to thrive; during the last depression, the entertainment industries thrived, even with money so short. I just can't wait until the mall mentality shatters so we can get back to caring more about people than we do about stuff.

How do you feel about tattooing hands, faces, and other “public” skin? Do you do any screening of clients?

Sure. The first and only time I called the cops was on a nineteen year old who started trashing the shop when I refused to tattoo a skull and crossbones on his face. He was just out of prison on a drug charge, was a father already, was beating the mother, (also a client, who covered up his name on her neck after having it for all of two months) and had only one other tattoo. Instead of seeing where I was coming from, that it wasn't worth the \$50 I'd charge him for the tattoo to unemploy him from 98% of the jobs in this country... he felt I was 'disrespecting' his manhood and started throwing our portfolios around, screaming he'd burn the place to the ground, and that I didn't know "who I was messing with". I was pretty sure I was 'messing' with a 140 pound teenage ex-con, so I called the cops rather than snap his femur with my steel toes.

If the kid had some serious work gong on, some sleeves or a big back piece, and had a secure form of income, a trust fund, or a recording contract, then it may have been a different story. I take each client on an individual basis, regardless of the tattoo. I tattoo hands, fingers, feet, necks, and ears all the time. But the same ethics that makes us a quality shop doing clean work also makes us stop and exercise some small amount of social responsibility.

How often do you turn people away, and why?

More and more as time goes on. We get a lot of people in and out who treat our shop like the food court. They want it fast and cheap and they want it now. When informed that the wait might be as long as thirty whole minutes, they stomp their feet and ask where the next nearest shop is. So, after showing them an entire portfolio of before and after shots, I send

them on their way, and I don't feel bad about it at all. We also get a rash of people who come in with a grocery list of things they need in a tattoo, several different subjects, a cover up, must go from hip to hip... no problem, until they tell us that they're working with a \$40 budget for several hours of work. Haha! Right now it's just me and my amazing partner, Matt Lukesh, so walk-ins can only be done during the slow times. A LOT of people leave, thinking all tattoo shops are the same.

The only real subject matter I turn away are blatant racism or white power tattoos. I have zero tolerance for that shit. But luckily, our clients for the most part keep us interested. We get to do some tasty things and they're usually somewhat open to exploring outside their boundaries.

I'm also sort of against all white tattoos, because I know how our own melanin will obscure even my best efforts and do not think I can deliver a quality product. And not a fan of black light tattoos. I don't trust the company producing the 'FDA approved' inks, when you examine the release forms and find out the ink was developed for use on fish. Besides, how often are you in black light? Even the owner of a chain of strip clubs isn't in black light enough to go through the pain and expense... more often than not, it's a gimmick used by people who don't know how to put in regular tattoo ink.

Although, to my chagrin, I use three colors from the Skin Candy line of pigment that are also completely black light reactionary, as well as looking great under daylight, and not one single case of dermatitis or reactions. D'oh!

With galleries starting to exhibit tattoo and tattoo related art, do you think this is a good thing, and do you feel that tattoos are "fine art", or are they "folk art" or "craft" or something else? How do they fit into the larger art world, if at all?

This is funny, because our entire front lobby is the Drowning Creek Rock Art Gallery, with a full display of screen printed concert posters done by Jeff Wood and his impressive roster of artists, from Coop, Frank Kozik, Alan Forbes, Jermaine Rogers, Mark Arminski, Stainboy, Jeral Tidwell, Jason Goad, and myself. We've had a number of signings out of the shop, a few art shows, and display some of our original art as well.

As a professional artist, you realize that the gallery scene is kind of a bogus creation. Gallery owners are quite often viewed as scum: many sell art for a 50% commission. 50%! Who else gets 50%? Loan sharks in Brooklyn are jealous of 50%! A lot of what makes a successful artist in terms of pay scales and exposure is a lot of whoring, ass kissing, and nothing to do with Art, capital "A".

The lines are getting blurred in as much as you have so many more fine artists taking up the tattoo profession, but are not stopping their former careers either. So you have tattoo art that is without any debate fine art. And it's the kind of thing that will never provide a proper answer. Throughout the ages, the greatest artists in history were rarely the most lauded in their times. Some were shunned by critics but had commercial success, some so far ahead of their time that they failed to hit in any way at all until far after their prime.

Have you ever apprenticed someone? How did you choose them and what was the experience like (and if you haven't — would you apprentice someone, and how would you choose them)?

I have not, I've only been tattooing eight years. I figure I have another decade before I'd be ready to take an apprentice. Most likely my apprentice will be the hottest barely legal Japanese girl ever born, a demon possessed nymphomaniac sado-masochist and exhibitionist, with a hardcore fetish for larger, older, ugly Italian men. Luckily, I do not show a bias in my selection process.

If you weren't a tattoo artist, what do you think you'd be?

I was born an artist, I was doing art for fifteen years before I was ever tattooed. This last year alone I also did a number of concert posters, DVD covers, one real painting, and our work was featured throughout Guitar Hero 3, on top of running a tattoo shop 90 hours a week for 52 weeks. I would love to have the luxury of painting more often, and be one of those guys who can bitch about the gallery owners taking 50% of a \$25,000 painting.

Do you plan on tattooing your whole life? Are you planning for retirement?

Yes, I will retire. When they nail me inside a pine box. Or how about we get all Charlton Heston on it? "I'll stop tattooing when they take my tattoo irons from my cold dead hands!"

That was pretty tough guy; right?

I have the words UGLY FUCK tattooed on my knuckles. I'm so in this for life. Sleep when you're dead!

Have you experienced physical problems from tattooing (back, hands, etc.)?

My partner does. The funny part is he is the skinny good looking one. He smokes like a fiend, eats only cheeseburgers, and gets winded opening a sterile pack of needles... he has all kinds of back pain, and is at his doctor weekly. Me, I'm almost three hundred pounds, the largest I've ever been... but my doctor declared that I'm "very healthy", I have great blood pressure, clean lungs, and 20/20 vision. Thick rubber grips on my tubes and the occasional massage help keep carpal tunnel at bay. If I can get back in shape and drop this small child's worth of extra weight I'm lugging around, I'll be doing pretty well.

Do you find being a tattooist helps or hinders finding "that special person"? Does it interfere or help at all with your social/personal life?

Being an artist is weird. I'm bitterly divorced... I'll skip the play by play. When my clients tell me what a great catch I'd be, I tell them that artists aren't stable people, artists cut off their ears.

I'll be forty in December, I have a hell of a lot of notches on my belt, and yet I don't know one goddamned thing more about women than I did when I hit puberty. I have a suspicion that they all work for Satan.

Although I haven't really dated anyone in the scene who was a professional. I've hooked up with plenty of artists, but oddly enough they never wanted to hear about any of the things I've been working on, they just wanted a booty call. I guess as far as inspiration is concerned, my tongue has better uses than all this talking.

What are your feelings about the rising popularity of scarification and other forms of body modification as opposed to tattooing, which has a much larger modern history?

I'm glad to see it. Apply everything I've said about commercialization and the superficiality of our plastic disposable mall culture to this question. Anything that gets us away from being drones and back to being actual humans again is just fine by me.

How do you feel about scratchers and lower-end tattoo shops, and their role in tattoo culture?

I despise scratch shops. We just had two shops close here in Savannah, neither made it more than a year. One, the owner was a wannabe 1%er, a biker with no patch, who never tattooed, never drew or painted. Two of his artists left within days, the remaining artist had been fired from three separate apprenticeships from the worst shops in town. I'll give you an example of the kind of shop this was. A cat walks in, knowing the owner deals heroin. He hates tattoos, has no tattoos, doesn't want to see any tattoos, will never get tattoos. He scores, and asks if he can crash in the back and fix up, which he does. While out on the nod, the owner grabs a machine, and with no training whatsoever, just starts tattooing this guy, the same way you may draw with marker on a friend passed out drunk at a party. The guy comes to covered in scratch that looks like Helen Keller attacked him with a weed whacker... he can't really go to the cops, how do you explain being tattooed against your will out on a nod? The shop is now closed, because the owner is in prison for drug dealing, weapons running, and murder one.

This is a story I have to tell in 2008?

Now, when I walk into the zoning department or city hall, and introduce myself proudly as a tattoo artist, is this what they think of me? Fuck that! Not to mention, that I'm sure there were days that we were sitting on our hands while they were rocking and rolling. They had plenty of clients all too happy to show up and get stoned... they would pimp that shop as the greatest tattoo shop that ever was. Except now it's closed and the tattoos look like an experiment in flesh eating bacteria colonies. We live in a time when the Guy Aitchinson's and Anil Gupta's have raised the bar to staggering heights, yet these inbred assholes have helped keep people in the dark ages. It's disrespectful... to all who came before them, to the craft itself, and to all the people they've scarred up. This, of course, is just one of the real reasons why we named our shop SEPPUKU. Death before dishonor, gaigin!

When the health department comes in for inspections, I yell at them for being too easy. All that yellow paper tells anyone is that I know how to mop and wear gloves. What I propose, is the TATTOO LICENSE ROAD TEST! Get some prisoners, or kids who want a \$5 tattoo, like you get a \$5 hair cut at a barber school. The instructor comes out in a bad polyester shirt and a clipboard. He is going to test you on cross contamination practices, skin prep, stencil application, client comfort, lining, shading, coloring, bandaging, after-care, sterilization and biowaste disposal... you get three hours to put on a nice clean tattoo, some well done lettering, bright colors, smooth blends, maybe extra credit for real toothpaste whites or special effects. If you fail, you go back to apprenticing and try again in six months. A photo is taken of your first tattoo and is laminated on your license as a testament to your skill. Testing is done once every three to five years. Your license is copied on the client's release form with a check box to prove they have seen it before you begin work on them.

Why not? The shit is medically invasive. It's the 21st century. Tattoos are expensive. Imag-

ine a body shop that painted cars like some shops tattoo. Not everyone needs to be Corey Kruger or Mike Rubendall... but if you can't at least put in a clean rose and a dagger, find another career, please? If you want to suck at your job, go work for the DMV, people expect you to suck there.

Are there any times you've regretted your career path?

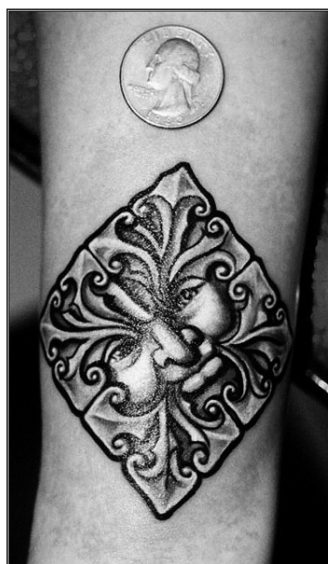
That's a tough one. I wrestle with it every day, as I've spread myself pretty thin. As I mentioned earlier I've been a set designer, a mural painter, an airbrush artist, an illustrator, a fanzine publisher, an art director, a screen printer, an offset printer, a digital artist, a concert poster guy, a wheat paster, a pinstriper, and a tattoo artist. All my peers my age are masters in their singular professions. For example, I have a passing friendship in Coop. He's the same exact age as me, but whereas I'm only known in select circles and bust ass to make bills each week, Coop is world renowned and lives large in a Hollywood villa with his dominatrix wife and a garage full of hot rods. So it goes with most full time poster artists I know, and especially people who were tattooing for as long as I've been working. I started working in '86, I still rent, I have only the slimmest of savings... if I had been tattooing for that long, geez, I'd love to think how far I'd have come.

Sometimes I wonder exactly how much tattooing played in my wife's decision to bail. It's been seven years, and I'm still just a mess. A MESS!

But on the flipside, I've had multiple careers, each one by itself is someone's unattained dream. My resume is as long as your arm. I've gotten my hands dirty in such a wide variety of mediums and done some of them really well, a bit of a post punk Renaissance guy. Which is great, too. I'm a tattoo artist who can design everything I need from camera ready magazine articles to signs to business cards to web sites, and is also in magazines, books, galleries and Hard Rock Cafes globally. This is no bad thing either. I never would be that one hit wonder guy, you know, like that shitty guy you hate so much but gets up so much for his specializing in fetish art, or some such shit. I'm glad not to be the 'old school guy', the 'scary monster guy', or the 'hot rod guy', or even conversely the 'neo-classical guy'. I have some jazz in all kinds of fields of interest and can move in and out of them as a true professional.

I imagine at the end of the day, I'd like to be well off enough to have no limits as to what I want to do with my life; for example, except for Hawaii and the Virgin Islands, I haven't been off the continent at all. I have a lot of traveling to do, both geographically and spiritually. I don't like stuff, you can't take it with you, it's just dust, after all, but man, if I had the freedom to create art with a capital A, that would be amazing.

Give me some of that time I wasted on suicide, drugs and marriage, let me drop fifty pounds, and come back in five years and see what I can do. ;)



Anders the Piercing Guy

I like guys like Anders who are normal people with normal jobs and lives that “snap” for the better and decide to drop out and become body artists, and then become successful at it because of how inspired they are about their new path.



At the age of thirty, Anders, a furniture maker and Swedish immigrant to Australia, saw an ad for navel piercing and decided it would be the perfect way to celebrate his birthday. A friendship was struck up with the piercer, and not long afterward he had left his previous career and started a piercing apprenticeship. He's never looked back, and is now known as “Anders, The Piercing Guy”. Now, nearly 46, you can find him in Marsden, Aus-

tralia at Dragon Lair Tattoo, and online at PhatPiercings.com.



How and when did you get into piercing?

If I count the gun piercing I had when I was ten years old, it's thirty-five years ago. Growing up in the late seventies, when the punk era brought us the Sex Pistols, we did a lot of self-piercing. There was nothing else back then, not in Sweden anyway, and being fifteen or sixteen years old at the time that was all we could do. After I moved to Australia, I rediscovered piercing in the early nineties. I was turning thirty, and I saw an ad for “The Piercing Urge” in Melbourne — they were having a special, so I headed right down and got my navel pierced. It was short-lived, but soon replaced with a 10ga nipple piercing and a 14ga helix, I never looked back!

How old are you now? What's it like being an older guy in a “youth industry” — is it a good thing or a bad thing?

I'm turning forty-six this year — “forty is the new twenty” as they say, hahaha! It depends on the person I guess whether it's a good thing or not — I feel pretty content with being older in this “youth industry”. I have done my “young” things — traveling, partying, and all that — and have nothing to prove to someone else. Young or old, I think people should just strive to be the best they can be.

Are you still getting piercings yourself?

I'm still getting some piercings done — over the years I have had a fair few different modifications. I feel happy with what I have at the moment, and I'm mainly stretching my lobes up to 40mm right now, as well as currently having my legs tattooed... I guess I have settled down. Right now I have a 6g septum, 1 1/4” lobes, my labret is cut and stretched

up to 7/16", and my conch is stretched from 14ga to 0ga, and I have a 2ga PA, a split tongue, and 5/16" genital beads.

How did you end up piercing professionally?

I'm sure we all have our reasons to be what we are. After getting pierced and tattooed (which followed very shortly after getting pierced), I started to collect magazines and books about modification and became fascinated with stretched lobes and the "modern primitive". I had just moved to Maroochydore in 1996 and started to stretch one of my lobes. I went into "Puncture Body Piercing" to get some jewelry, where I met Karl Schmidt, the owner of the shop, and we got along really well. I started my apprenticeship there and slowly started to pierce under the supervision of Karl. For me it was "the right place at the right time" scenario and I knew then that this was what I was supposed to do.

Since then I've improved through lots of study, anatomy books, research online, and talking to other practitioners in the industry. I also modify some of my tools to suit me better. And of course just doing piercings constantly — about two thousand a year — gives me an opportunity to keep my skills up-to-date. I also have first aid certification and two sterilization certificates through TAFE ("Technical and Further Education") — both courses include bloodborne pathogens.

What did you do before you started piercing?

I'm a furniture maker by trade — I was making fine furniture in Sweden before I moved to Australia. When I first arrived in the land of Oz I was doing some factory work due to language barriers. I moved on to become a production manager for a kitchen manufacturing company and I also owned and operated an award winning backpackers' lodge before I became a piercer.

What do your family think about your job?

I actually met my wife (iam:giftefeu) on BME in 2005 — we now have a beautiful daughter called Magdalena, born in April 2007. Our combined Swedish and Austrian families are both very supportive of my choice of work. I sent my mum a photo of me, pretty heavily modded, and she said, "you look great I think!" Haha, I love them!

Is there an Australian equivalent to the APP?

There has been talk of an Australian professional organization — the APA. A website has been set up (www.auspiercinginfo.com), and the site has some information, but there have been some snags along the way. As far as I know no more steps have been taken to continue with setting APA up.

Do you see piercing as an art form or a craft?

I see piercing and modification as a craft you learn and become good at, but when it's executed properly with well-placed piercings and jewelry, it can be an expression of art.

Is piercing "interesting"? I mean, do you think they could make a reality TV show about it, baba?

I think piercing is interesting. Interesting enough for a TV show though? I'm not so sure, and there are so many legislative limitations that I think a lot of the more interesting stuff

wouldn't be shown on TV.

To give you an example of a story I'd put on the show, I had a lady in her mid-fifties come in wanting a vertical hood piercing — it was from recommendations from her GP to help her menopause! She was a very happy lady afterwards. She came in and thanked me after a few weeks and said it had done wonders for her sex life.

There have been so many women that have come in to have their navel or nipples pierced because their husband left them and they were never allowed to have it before. I had another lady who lost a staggering three hundred pounds... She still had a hundred pounds to go but she wanted a navel piercing to mark her three hundred. I explained that the way her navel and excess skin around the area would make it uncomfortable, but after talking through it, we did the piercing and she was very happy. She lost the rest of the weight, but sadly she also lost her piercing — but she explained that it helped her to push on, which is awesome!

There are so many people that have piercings to mark an end or a beginning of an era, like myself, turning thirty and having my navel done.

What are your favorite piercings to do?

That's a hard question. I really like doing all piercings and modifications, but to mention some, I like doing ear projects like industrial/scaffolds and more intricate ear work like the daith and the rook. They are fiddly piercings to do and it's a great feeling when they are placed correctly in the ear — I think they look really beautiful. I also like doing surface piercings with surface bars — a nape or a sternum as an example. It gives me great satisfaction to see a well done surface piercing. Really, I get a lot of enjoyment from all the different modifications I do.

Still, you must have a least favorite?

Hmm, maybe the navel, but only because I have done thousands upon thousands of navel piercings and it has become somewhat boring and old-hat. I still do them with full attention, and every person is different and so is every navel, so I still enjoy it.

Which piercings do you find the most challenging?

All piercings have their own challenges, but paired piercings like venoms, snakebites, fangs, and so on could have a higher level of challenge to make sure they are even and level. "Extreme" modifications like tongue splits, transscrotals, and beading are always a challenge.

Which procedure do you use for transscrotals?

After all preparations are done and placement has been chosen and marked, I would use two large artery clamps to hold the testicles in place. Then the scrotum is clamped and the incision is made. I will separate the muscle and membrane from the skin and then suture the skin front to back. After the stitching is done I will insert the custom-made jewelry, every person is different so it may vary from person to person.

Would you recommend piercing as a career?

Definitely, the world needs good piercers! It's an excellent and rewarding career if you have the right attitude towards it.

My advice to would-be piercers would be to do your research so you know what the industry is all about, be the best you can and aim high. It might take some time to reach your goal, but don't give up — there is always an end of the tunnel. There are no shortcuts, and while there are courses which could help you with an introduction into the industry, they are just an introduction. Seek out the best shop in your area and ask if they are willing to put you on as an apprentice. Don't get upset if you get rejected the first couple of times — it will most likely happen. Be persistent and show that you are serious and keen: if you do, you will be piercing in no time.

Have you ever apprenticed anyone?

I retrained a girl — she already had a year of experience put needed a push in the right direction. I'm not sure if I could call it an apprenticeship, if and when the time is right I will apprentice someone. I will look for dedication and commitment in a person — willingness to learn is important, and some basic knowledge would be a bonus but not a necessity as the knowledge will come as we go along. Depending on the person an apprenticeship would be around two years.

You say it's a good career — do you think this is something you can do for a living, long term? I get the impression that some piercers seem to “burn out” after a decade.

I'm definitely in it for the long run. It's been more than a decade now, I'm still excited about piercing and modification, and I am making a living from it, but of course as any occupation, it can have it's ups and downs.

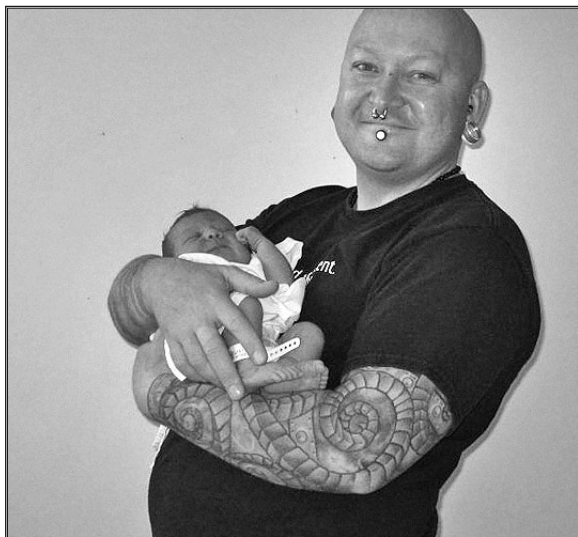
It can be a stressful job if you don't look after yourself. A lot of people work during the day and then going out partying all night and then back again the next day — that would burn you out pretty fast. To make it worse, in many cases piercing is a low paying job and some piercers have two jobs to be able to support themselves to do what they love.

What keeps you coming back to work?

Knowing that I will make someone's day by giving them the modification they always wanted makes me want to come back day after day.

If you leave piercing, what do you think you'll do?

A little motel at the seaside would be awesome! As I said, I used to be involved in tourism a lot before I got into this industry, so yeah, a motel on the coast... I would have mod-themed rooms so you can fulfill your fantasies, hahaha...



Piercers seem to meet a lot “weirder” clients than tattoo artists... have you got any?

I did have this guy come in and ask for some “piercings” ... he was kind of bending forward slightly, and had a strange look on his face. He was constantly looking over his shoulder to see if someone was following him. When we got in to the room he said he wanted a PA, and then mentioned that he wasn’t circumcised. I said that would be ok as long as the foreskin was “loose” enough, and he said he wasn’t sure so he took his pants off and jumped up on the chair. I was all gloved up, so I had a look — I pulled back the skin and it was very tight and his cock head was covered in white cheese! Did I mention he got an erection as soon as I pulled the skin back? Then he asked me if I could shave him, haha! I said, “sure, that will be 200 dollars,” and he ran out of the shop. I never saw him again.

Would I have done it if he’d said ok? Hell no!!!

What’s the youngest person you’ve ever pierced, and what’s your personal feeling on age issues?

I always judge a piercing on younger people on their body development and make sure the area that’s going to be pierced is developed enough to hold the piercing. The youngest person I’ve done a navel on was twelve years old. She came in with her parents and we discussed the options and risks — I had already turned her down twice due to an under-developed navel a year earlier. It’s always going to be an argument — I know shops that pierce navels and other basic piercings on seven year olds. Personally, I think that’s wrong — kids need to be kids and not focus on the trauma of healing body piercings. In the shop where I work at the moment, we have a policy of eighteen and older for genital piercing as well as nipples, scarification, implants, and tattoos. You can have the most basic piercings if you are over 16 and have ID. If you are under sixteen you need parental consent and it will be based on your body development.



That’s crazy that there’s a shop that’ll pierce seven year old navels!!! Is there any legal regulation of piercing in your area?

It’s totally insane! It makes me sad that some piercers and shops have no morals or ethics. Here in Brisbane and in the state of Queensland, you have to be at least eighteen to have nipple piercings and genital piercings (the same goes for tattoos). There is no law against other types of body piercing, and if you are under 18 you must be “capable of forming a sound and reasoned decision to agree to being pierced.”

Conversely, what’s the oldest person you’ve ever pierced?

I had a couple that wanted some piercings done — as far as I can remember, he was 65 and a she was 68. He had a PA and some frenums done and his wife had her vertical hood pierced. I have a fair bit of clients around the sixty mark.

How has piercing changed in the time you've been working?

There is more awareness about piercing, and many retailers now expect that their workers will have modifications. Looking around on the train ride home there are more people pierced — many who would have never dreamed about having any piercings five years ago. It's certainly more accepted these days.

Do you have a line as to things you won't do? So-called "extreme" stuff like vertical oral piercings, under-the-collarbone, achilles piercings, eyelids, uvulas, and so on?

I will always sit down with clients that want these and discuss the risks that may be involved with the procedure. It may sound like discrimination but I'm not going to do a piercing just because someone saw a picture and thought it looked cool.

I know you've had a lot of piercings, but how do you feel about doing piercings that you've never had — or done?

I have been doing this for some time now and I feel that I have a sound knowledge about piercing and modifications. I will do my research before I do a new mod to find out about the pros and cons so I can advise the person about aftercare and what to expect from the piercing. I always tell the client that I haven't done this particular mod before, and ask them to come back once a week — more if needed — for check-ups. Of course if I feel that I'm not up to it I will decline and send them to someone that can do the modification for them.

Do you do other modifications as well as piercing?

I also do genital beading and have done some subdermal implant work. There are a lot of inquiries about it, so I expect to do more in the future. I have also been doing scarification since 2003 and my portfolio is growing slowly but steady. The focus for me at the moment is to increase my scarification work.

How did you get into doing scarification?

In 2002, I started to look at photos of it and I was extremely fascinated with cutting and the process involved. I was looking at artists like Blair, Lukas, and others in that era. I did my first piece in 2003 — a pentagram on a friend's stomach and it's been a fairly steady progression since then.

Were you apprenticed?

I am pretty much self-taught. Plenty of practice on good friends laid the groundwork for how I cut today, along with seeing other artists' portfolios and the way they do their work. Forums like Shawn Porter's "Scarification Learning" forum have been an excellent source of information. It is also important to keep cutting on regular basis to stay up to speed with your technique and that can sometimes be difficult with customers wanting scarification being few and far between.

Do you only do cutting?

I do single line cutting and skin removal, either as separate pieces or a mix of both.

Which do you prefer?

I like both. In saying that, I seem to do more skin removal pieces lately. I like simplicity in scarification — symbols and simple tribal work — but I also like intricate art pieces. I pretty much like all scarification work, as every piece is a different work of art to me.

Did your art experience as a furniture maker help?

In that career I drew furniture and cut veneers in different perspectives. I can't say I'm the best freehand artist, so I do a lot of my design work by computer. With more intricate pieces I will trace the picture onto tracing paper and make changes manually from there. Lots of people bring their own artwork in which I modify slightly to suit, and some friends of mine are tattoo artists and they also customize some pieces for me.

Why do you think that most scarification artists come from a base of piercing, rather than tattooing?

Piercing is a more obvious process of breaking the skin, unlike tattooing. Lots of piercers also scalpel procedures, particularly on larger gauges, so the use of a scalpel to make incisions in the skin is natural for piercers.

Is it the same clientele for scarification as piercers?

Most of my scarification clientele are customers that I've previously pierced or otherwise modified in some way. Scarification seems to be more popular amongst women as opposed to men, but there is no distinct difference. More people are becoming aware of scarification, so there are a lot more inquiries about it now, compared to a couple of years ago. I do have some clientele with no other visible modifications, but wanted a scar due to the subtleness of it, rather than a tattoo. I think there is a great future for scarification as many people are looking for an alternative to tattooing, or even want to combine a tattoo with a scarification piece.

What are the laws in your area about scarification?

There is no current law that specifically mentions scarification by itself, but in Queensland we have "the personal appearance act" which covers body piercing, implants, scars, tattoos, and other "skin penetrating" services "in which the release of blood or other bodily fluid is an expected result". The law restricts it to eighteen and older which personally I think is fine, due to the permanent nature of the modification.

What are your feelings about laws regarding body modification?

I think that everyone should have the right to do whatever they want to their body, but unfortunately we live in a time with legislations and lawsuits, so to protect ourselves we have to follow the laws in place.

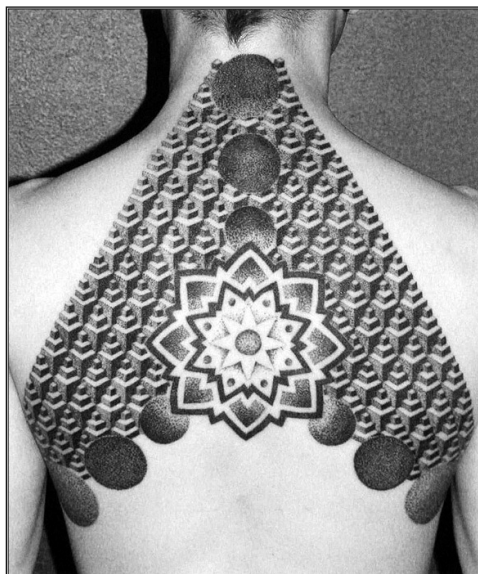
With that, thank you for talking to us!

Vincent Hocquet

Vincent Hocquet's stunning geometric tattoos have to be some of the most eye-bending tattoos a person could do. He joins Dan DiMattia in Belgium's pantheon of great neo-tribal tattoo artists.

*When Vincent Hocquet was a child, he had an artist uncle who had a disability which prevented him from turning the palms of his hands up, forcing him to develop a unique way of painting and drawing. This uncle passed on his passion by starting little sketches for young Vincent to finish. Vincent also had an older cousin who was covered with tattoos which he emulated in marker all over his arms and legs. Then at fifteen he was inspired by the book *Papillon* by Henry Charriere to get his first tattoo.*

Finally, in 1996, he met David Kotker of No Hope, No Fear in Chicago who pushed him to invest in proper equipment and showed him how to build a machine. At the time, he was working at an antiques and art auction house, surrounded by a large variety of inspiring artwork, and a few months later he left to open his own studio. Soon he was tattooing four days a work both at Wildcat in Antwerp — where he worked with his girlfriend Peggy — and weekends at their own studio in St. Idesbald. They currently co-own and can be found at Beautiful Freak Tattoo.



The Polynesian Legend of the creation of tattooing

During the Po' (the dark ages), tattooing was created by the two sons of the god Ta'aroa and his wife. Mata Mata Arahū (he who makes marks with charcoal) and Tu Rai'i Po' (he who lives in the dark sky). The two gods belonged to the same group of craftsmen as Hina Ere Manua (Hina of the quick temper), the eldest daughter of the first man and the first woman (Hina). As she was growing up she was closely guarded by her mother and her aunt to preserve her virginity, but the two brothers were determined to seduce her. They invented the new art and tattooed themselves on the face and on the hands so they were able to lure Hina Ere Manua from the place she was guarded. She too wanted the new decoration so she eluded her mother and aunt's supervision and was finally able to get herself tattooed. Then they taught the art of tattooing to the human race, who found this extremely attractive. Mata Mata Arahū and Tu Rai'i Po' became the patron spirits of tattooing.

How did you meet David Kotker?

I met David at the first tattoo convention I visited. He caught my attention because he was the only one not to have a bunch of flash books on the table and had nice photographs of his work instead. He also had a different attitude, and seemed more low profile. We started

talking and his vision on tattooing was completely how I felt about tattoos. I decided to get tattooed by him and he asked me if I could help him out at some conventions. He recognized my interest in tattooing and that is why he motivated me to start tattooing.



You opened a studio fairly quickly — tell me about your early work?

My first tattoos weren't very good — it takes a while to get used to the techniques and to working on skin. My father offered to be my first customer. I made him a small tattoo on the arm, and he paid me one symbolic Belgian frank, which I still have as a lucky coin. We enlarged it to be a quarter sleeve a couple of years ago. My family is very supportive of what I do.

Were you always doing this type of geometric dot work, or did you try other styles?

I started trying out many styles to figure out what I was feeling most comfortable with.

The Polynesian style always attracted me and I spent a lot of time on researching the origin

and the symbolism of the old tribal arts. I tried to draw my own interpretation of it and started to put little stories in the designs, and hide many little elements in the design that are only seen when pointed out. I try to entangle the different elements into each other so they have unity. My daughter plays with them, using them as mazes.

I started combining this Polynesian-inspired style with touches of dotwork, and it was a small step from there to making larger dotwork designs and patterns.

Did you apprentice? How did you learn?

Like most tattooists, I did my first tattoos on my own legs. I never apprenticed but was lucky to get good advice from many good tattoo artists.

These days, my thirteen year old daughter Naomi is a tough critic, and I get a lot of stimulus from doing other creative things. I do a lot of designing for projects that are not tattoo related.

I'm also making music, drawing, cooking, painting, and I play with my two year old son. I think all of these indirectly help me in making better tattoos.

I find that limiting myself to one category is limiting my general creativity. I also collect books and imagery from many forms of art, which help me feed my imagination.

Who are your artistic influences?

The artist I most look up to is M.C. Escher. I also like the prints of Masereel, and Bridget Riley's work. David Kotker taught me not to work from flash, but to create my own designs. I like the works of Daniel, Xed, Tomas, and Pink.

Who did your tattoos?

I had work done by David Kotker from No Hope No Fear, Daniel from Calypso, Lutz from Artcore Ink, Tattoo Pink, Horitatsu from Dragon Tattoostudio, Robert from Clean Solid Tattoo, Marco Zopetti from Zoptattoo. Some of my tattoos I designed together with the artists, and for some I gave full liberty to the artist.

What are your favorite sorts of tattoos to do personally?

I like the look of big and bold tattoos, but the process of a smaller, well thought out tattoo can be just as enjoyable.

When you're putting on a large tattoo, how do you lay the stencil? Or do you freehand it?

The bigger complex pattern work is done with different pieces of stencil in combination with freehanding. A lot of my other work I do is done freehand, as this is often easier to make the tattoo fit the body shape.

Do you tend to design by hand, or on a computer?

The computer is a tool like a pencil or a compass — I only recently started working with the computer and this is a big time saver when it comes to making complex pattern work. I draw almost every tattoo by hand and made a habit of drawing every tattoo together with the customer, thus giving every customer a unique design. They love the process of starting off with a blank sheet of paper and seeing it evolve into a unique tattoo design in front of them.



What do you think of the current popularity of tattoos?

In the past, all you heard was that tattooing had to get more socially accepted and that people had to stop judging people with tattoos. Now that this is finally happening, the same

people are complaining that tattooing isn't "underground" anymore! I feel, the better tattooing is accepted in our society, the more blank canvasses are available to express our creativity.

Definitely, and a broader range of people come in for tattoos.

Yes — a couple of years ago a sixty-five year old nun came in my shop and asked me for a tattoo. At first I thought it was a prank, but she was the real thing. I put an interpretation of the "agnus dei" on her shoulder blade. The tattoo took about two hours but afterwards we spent a whole evening discussing religion, music, the differences between our generations, and much more.

She still visits me every year.

These days you see more people getting big tattoos as a first tattoo, and people are more conscious about the different styles and possibilities. A lot of people are traveling to get tattooed by their favorite artists.

Is tattooing something you'll do forever?

I probably will be tattooing as long as I can, but maybe I won't do it forever to make a living. I still have other skills and ambitions I would like to develop and who knows where these will take me?

Do you just tattoo in Belgium, or do you travel as well?

I have one guest spot I go to every year — the Dragon tattoo studio of Horitatsu in Kanuma, Japan. The cultural differences between our countries are very big. In Belgium I've never had a customer offering me dried squid as a first-meeting gift! I very much enjoy the subtle unspoken way of interacting socially and in business, and the good sense of humor.

Do you ever make mistakes in your geometric work? You must have to pay intense attention!

I don't make mistakes because I do indeed pay intense attention — I hardly make any conversation while doing these, and after a while the repetition of the work in combination with relaxing music in the background makes me feel like I'm doing mantras.

Doing these tattoos brings me to a state of complete concentration and peace.

That's definitely reflected in the pieces. Thank you for talking to us!

Trepanation

As a special treat, Bryan Henderson of modifiedmind.com, who did a few interviews for BME in the early days, allowed me to include a pair of those interviews. First I'd like to present this interview on a very rare DIY modification, trepanation, the drilling of a hole through the skull!

The medical community argues against it ... media has used it as a shock story ... but it's a procedure that has been around for ages, and some people believe it to be effective: trepanation. The desire to increase one's consciousness permanently has led some brave people to undergo this procedure. This is the story of one such brave individual...

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Trepanation Diary Entry: 03-22-2000

This weekend I had a hole drilled through my skull. I read that this increased one's consciousness permanently. I read about the supposed de-conditioning properties. I read about more parts of the brain working simultaneously as there would be more blood up there to help this happen. The arguments for it all seemed to be quite lengthy, quite detailed, thought out and researched, and very intelligent. The arguments against it were based solely on the opinion that it is 'crazy' and talk like,

"What's more conscious than conscious?". I heard from an acquaintance on telephone that she was glad she had done it, felt more mental energy, and had days of brilliance. I came to believe that the key to a permanent consciousness increase was a hole in the skull, to restore the full brain pulsation of infancy. After several months of research, discussion, speculation, watching surgical videos and trepanation documentaries, and even an actual viewing of a trepanation, I decided I certainly did want to be trepanned, and sought a way to do it.

My girlfriend and I met a friend at the airport and took him out to dinner first, and then went home to discuss how things would go. We made a list of some things we needed that we didn't have yet. List in hand, we went out over the next two days to home medical supply stores, hardware stores, to autoclave our bits and get smocks, to a pharmacy, and some hobby shops. We picked up the drill, the gloves, sterile gauze, sheets of plastic, sodium chloride, hypodermic syringes, sterile wipes, irrigation syringe, etc. etc. After acquiring all that we needed, we set up my best friend's bedroom as the operating room and prepared to perform the operation. After talking about it at length, two of my friends who were to be present during the operation were expressing extreme apprehension due to the overall lack of experience, and one of them was really concerned that a suture was necessary and



none of us were equipped or knowledgeable enough to do a good one. Not suturing could potentially cause a rather hefty amount of scarring and possibly complicate the healing process. Since we were both hesitant to proceed without my friends', and since they were scaring us a bit, we didn't do it that night.

I awoke the next morning still very much wanting to move forward with the operation. I thought to myself, "The key to more consciousness is sitting in the next room over. How can I know this and not unlock the door?" I explained my sincere desire to my girlfriend, and though she was still apprehensive, she agreed to try to be there for me if it was really what I wanted to do.

We had coated every wall of a room in plastic sheeting, had a placement tray ready (a sterilized tray to set the instruments on), had the drill sterilized and ready to go, autoclaved bits set out, etc and proceeded to trepan me. One person was to do the drilling and another was to help by passing instruments, turning the drill off and on, by holding a light in the right place at the right time, and by irrigating the wound every so often. (Irrigating is rinsing, with Sodium Chloride in this case, the blood away so the doctor can see what he/she is cutting) All was finally ready to go.

Everyone put on smocks and masks and entered the room. I had already shaved the cutting area (and two or three inches around it in every direction) with a razor and washed it w/nutri-biotic soap (kills many germs and combined with the sterile wipes we used would've even killed TB). I put on a shower cap (that had been washed with sterile wipes) and cut a square hole in it where the cutting and drilling would be done. I made the blood rush up to my head by choking myself so we could see the veins, and using a sterile pen we marked the major veins so they would be more noticeable and avoidable. We drew up 1cc of a Lidocaine/Epinephrine mix and injected it all around the area to be cut. This was done to numb my skin and nerves for the incision (the Lidocaine) and to constrict all the blood vessels in the area to decrease bleeding since head wounds bleed a lot (the Epinephrine). We waited a few minutes for the numbing action to occur, and then proceeded. My friend, using a sterile scalpel, pushed the blade in all the way to my skull and made the incision in the shape of a half-circle a little bit bigger than a nickel's size in diameter. The plan was to pull that flap back and tape it down while drilling. We just thought it'd peel away from the skull like chicken skin or something, but it did actually adhere to the skull though, so one person held the tip of the flap with forceps and another cut away the adhering tissue from below and pulled the flap back. It laid back on it's own and did not require tape. Then one person irrigated, the other applied pressure with sterile gauze, dripped a few drops of the Epinephrine on a few of the bleeder veins, and the bleeding quickly subsided to a workable level. Then we turned on the drill to speed 4.

We were using a flex-shaft Dremel with a ball burr and a flame-shaped burr. The process would turn the bone and marrow to dust which would be rinsed away as we went, down to the meninges, at which point the brain would be pulsating visibly as our sign of success. We began drilling and the sound was resonating extremely loud through my skull. He was calm as was I, and one of was very noticeably uncomfortable, but not about to pass out or anything. We drilled and rinsed, drilled and rinsed, occasionally wiping with sterile gauze to keep it very visible. The first layer of skull was through in about 20 minutes, the marrow in about another 20 to 30, and it took about an hour to get through the final layer be-

cause of more concern then.

We slowed the drill speed to 2 or 3 and began with extreme caution, the final layer of skull between me and full pulsation. I was feeling no pain and was doing fine. The person drilling for me was sitting Indian style on the floor with my head in his lap for more control (plastic over everything including his lap, and wiped with medical hard-surface disinfectant wipes from the medical supply stores). A friend asked me to follow his finger and tested my eyes for focus, twitches, etc. He said I seemed to be fine and normal.

As it got closer, we drilled more and more slowly. At one point he hit what we thought might be meninges because it squirted a bit of blood but quickly subsided. We were still doing OK. It was just a bone vessel and we knew that it might happen once or twice more. Luckily it did not. We drilled more and more, slow and careful and eventually saw what we were fairly certain was meninges. As he said he was seeing it, I felt a shivering tingle of energy up my back and up the back of my neck. We told him how to probe to be sure.

He turned one of the bits over and tapped around in the hole. Most of it went click click, because it was hitting bone still, but one part did not make sound. He had made it through to the meninges! I saw a video of this moment, and yes, you can see the brain pulsating!

Now we just had to widen the hole. As it was being widened I felt another shiver in the same way. Minutes later, they were sure the hole could be opened no more before risking cutting scalp with the drill, so we were done. Then I sat up and had it sutured and discussed what to watch for during healing. We discussed how to clean and not to clean too much till it was healed. The follow-up cleansing has been minimal to be certain, but enough to do the trick. We are still using Sodium Chloride to clean it.

I was overjoyed. I would attribute most of the joy at being done with the whole affair, as it was months in the coming, and it was about a 3 ½ hour procedure overall. I immediately went to the bathroom after, 'cause I'd been holding it in the whole time, and then went to my place to hang out, chill, and feel the effects. The room seemed taken on an intense clarity and I was able to pay attention to my thoughts and the world around a little more simultaneously. I thought at the time that by having multiple parts of the brain starting to work a little more simultaneously, since they would have enough blood to do so, it was enabling a different faster thought process and more quickly assimilating somatic sensations my perceptions of them. I think that's what was giving a clearer picture. That night I was fairly blissed and weirded out, glad to be alive and well, and out of the hospital. My major fear, even more so than a mistake happening, was that I might have to rush to the hospital and they might've committed me if I told them how the hole got there. All went smoothly though, and I was successfully trepanned! I went to bed about 5 hours later with a bandage on my head. I paid very close attention to the sensations of the veins in my head and neck. They were pulsing in an effort to establish a new equilibrium between the cerebral spinal fluid and the brain blood volume. I had achieved a return to full pulsation, rallied together with several good friends to safely pull off an ancient medical procedure, in my own home. Much like the many millions of tribes before us, we worked together to get what was needed to do the deed and do it well. I fell into a contented series of dreams. I awoke the next morning feeling even better, and still in great spirits. I attributed the growing pleasure sensations to two things: it may take varying degrees of time from body to

body for the Cerebro-spinal Fluid /Brain Blood Volume ratio to readjust itself, and that once all these dormant parts of the brain start to get blood, it may take a while for them to 'wake up'. I mean, blood goes to parts of the brain when they are stimulated, and now there is more blood up there sitting, but it still may gradually be happening that those new parts are being stimulated and gradually my brain is getting all those stiffened gears in motion.

I had read that it increased dream memory recall, and so far this has proven to be true. I have remembered my dreams in some detail every morning since. I've also read however, that if you smoke marijuana regularly, and suddenly stop, that you begin to remember your dreams more. I stopped smoking so I could be clear on the trepanning effect. I have mostly noticed a general increase in mental energy and alertness. I haven't been drinking coffee every morning like I used to. I just wake up, and moments later I am ready to go and in good spirits. I have continued to notice an increase in clarity of thoughts, more rapid thought processes in general, and a higher degree of focus. Everything has taken on a new glow of sorts, and I feel great. I have also noticed an increase in sensitivity to somatic sensation of all kinds. I generally feel more alive, more awake, closer to the now.

I've not had a moment to ponder intense intellectual or philosophical matters, as my friend is still in town and hanging out has mostly consisted of going from one place to another, but I will keep notes of everything I notice. I believe it will take quite some time for all the changes that this will cause to actually happen and make themselves noticeable. For now, it is a mild trip, a permanent one. I will give it a week's time to see which effects remain, and which may be placebo. At present, I am glad I did it, and look forward to the rest of this life, with all eyes open.



For those who don't know much about trepanation, can you please explain the procedure and it's believed benefits?

Trepanation is the act of drilling, cutting, or scraping a hole into the skull. It is the oldest surgery known to man and has been used to treat head injuries, brain tumors, chronic headaches, insanity, and most recently, touted as a cure for chronic depression and/or chronic fatigue syndrome. It has been theorized that by cutting a hole into the skull and leaving it open permanently, you would allow a permanent increase in brain blood volume, or that the brain would adjust itself to a new equilibrium, a new 'brain blood volume to cerebro-spinal fluid' ratio. The idea is that by re-opening the skull you would allow more blood to flow to the brain, on a permanent basis, and that you would restore the brain pulsation level to that of infancy, when the skull had not yet sealed itself shut and forced much of the brain blood out of the head. The increased blood to the brain would mean more oxygen to the brain, and the theory is that it would again function at the levels of youth. The recent resurgence of interest in trepanation, largely due to websites on the internet and the continuing popularity of body modifications of all kinds, has been largely due to the idea that trepanation brings with it a permanent high. Smoking pot, drinking caffeine, dropping acid, all these things, along with any other effect they have, increase blood to the brain. Many think that this would restore the energy level and mental stamina of youth, that having more blood to the brain would make more of it work and enable to function

at a higher level.

What thoughts were running through your mind as you underwent the procedure?

As it happened, the main thought was the sanitary state of my opened skull. We had prepared ourselves as much as possible and then some, so I wasn't really too worried really, but that was the thought that never left my mind. I did think, if a mistake is made, if we penetrate the meninges and CSF (cerebrospinal fluid) begins to flow out of my head, we would have to rush me to the emergency room? I thought to myself how to remain as calm as possible if that occurred so that I could convince the doctors that I am a sane healthy man and not to have me committed. I was honestly more concerned of getting caught doing it than any other thing. I was afraid of legal repercussions of any kind. My thoughts were also on the physical sensations of course. I was focusing more and more on inner feelings and sensations than anything going on in the room or otherwise. I was paying as close attention as possible to any feelings of blood flow through my neck and my head. Was I feeling any different yet? Was I feeling more energy? It was hard to tell. Of course I was excited. Of course I was feeling like I had never felt before. "Man this is loud," was a continuous thought as well. A flex-shaft dremel to the skull creates quite a loud noise.

Did the friend who performed this procedure have any medical background?

No. They had cut and pierced themselves and others and had experience with implants and things along those lines.

Did you try to seek out someone with prior trepanning experience to perform the procedure, or was your friend the immediate choice?

I met someone who had trepanned himself but quickly realized he was more lucky than he was prepared and intelligent. I didn't believe him and still don't that he actually did it himself. He didn't know anything about autoclaves, sterility, what kind of tools to use or anything. My friends and I were much more prepared, educated, and safe about it. I didn't try to find a doctor for all the obvious reasons (cost, trust, opinion, etc) but mostly because I think even if I found a doctor, they bother me. I hate vested interests like the medical industry is so prone to.

What made you decide you could trust this friend with such a procedure, both in the physical performing of it and the acceptance of something that is sometimes considered as being insane?

I go with my feelings about trust, and I felt absolutely certain I could trust this person and their intentions. As for ability, it seemed, after seeing them done and reading about them and having used the tool on drier harder bone, that it would be harder to be careful and slow than to be smart enough to pull it off. The procedure itself is not very complicated. Keeping it clean and knowing how to, and being comfortable around blood and the opened body are the major factors. My friend seemed perfectly suited in all those ways. As for the acceptance level, the plan was that we would take turns trepanning each other, me one day, my friend the next. After mine was done and it was the long ordeal it was, and that I was so high from it at the time, I told my friend I wasn't very comfortable doing it and that perhaps it'd be best to wait and see how mine 'held up' or whatnot.

So, did your friend ever undergo the procedure, or has he followed on your opinion and opted not to be trepanned?

I believe it's still being sought actively, but since I never became comfortable with the idea of performing one while he was here, and he doesn't live near me, he may have it done elsewhere. I believe he is still seeking it.



Trepanation Diary Entry: 04-06-2000

I have paid considerable attention over the past 19 days to my state of mind since the trepanation. I am generally in a better mood and this is holding true especially in the morning, when I had been notoriously grumpy, and through total caffeine lack. At the state of (caffeine) addiction I was in, it's amazing I didn't get even a headache, but I haven't been made grumpy by it at all either.

I have also noticed a seeming increase in attention span. This has been one of the most enjoyable aspects, because I hadn't expected or necessarily desired it, nor did I notice how short my attention span was prior to the trepanning. I am surprised daily by my ability to hear, and actually listen, to all of what anyone is saying to me at any given moment. It has increased my understanding of what is said because of that I'm sure. This has also been very noticeable and applicable to musical situations. I can hear and pay attention to not only the rhythms being created, but also am now more attentive to tonal qualities and chord progressions and whatnot. Not that I hadn't heard these things and paid attention to them before, but I hardly noticed or paid attention to them while I was playing. I've mostly centered on the rhythms and trusted the rest to work itself out.

Somatic sensations of all sorts are little more noticeable, that is to say, I feel a little more sensitive to sensory input of all kinds. This is mild to be certain, but also quite real. I am surprised at the amount of sensation I am registering at any given moment. Probably most noticeable is the sense of touch. I have been much more fascinated with textures since the trepanning.

Probably the most beneficial effect though, has been the increase in stamina and rapidity of thought processes. Not only do I falter less along the lines of not completing entire thoughts, but also I do not procrastinate without reason or because of laziness any longer. When I think I want to do something now, I just do it. I had maintained a lot of personal laziness prior to this, and it has been a big help in getting things done that would previously have continued to be put off. I don't walk into rooms and think, "What was I coming in here for?" and I think then do.

I have been remembering my dreams much more regularly. Actually, there was only one day I woke up and couldn't recall my dream, and it was after a night of quite a lot of alcohol. I still smoke pot, though not as much and not as habitually. When I do smoke it, the sensation is a little different. I definitely don't get nearly as fatigued, and because of the increased attention span and sensitivity to somatic sensations, the buzz is more mild but more enjoyable and functional.

I am aware that some of these effects may be partially suggestive being that I endured what

could be considered a traumatic experience. The power of suggestion is tremendous, and may certainly be taken into account when considering many things, but I hope I've not experienced anything that could have been entirely a product of suggestion. There were, for the first four days or so, several physical sensations that moved throughout my entire body, both pleasant, and so strange as to have concerned me. Sensations and experiences I certainly cannot attribute to suggestion.

I will continue to monitor myself, and see what sustains and what does not. All in all, I feel better than I did, and the pleasantness has been continual. Even in the depths of a recent 2 ½ day cold, I felt mentally clear, alert, and fairly pleased anyway. Trepanation has certainly not been nearly as intense as I had imagined it might be. I will be prepared to admit to myself, and even more importantly to my friends, if I think we have been fooled.



What originally inspired you to look into trepanation?

I was inspired to consider trepanation at first by hearing of it through a few friends who took interest in it for reports they were working on and through a desire to decrease regular headaches. Upon closer investigation, I found out about all of the other speculated benefits of going through this procedure. Out of all the writings I found available, all the reports, articles, websites, interviews, etc that I could find were two-sided of course, but only the arguments in favor contained anything that seemed like intelligent statements. There would be someone who had been trepanned raving about how great it was, or someone interested who was intelligently theorizing at great length, about how pleasant the effect would be and why. Then there would be the opponents. They would generally be doctors and medical practitioners and psychologists. They would say it was placebo, that the theories made no sense, that it was insane to consider, but would not argue against it nearly as well as the proponents had. This made me think that perhaps they were against it because it did indeed work. I thought that perhaps vested interests were keeping it down as they do with natural birth control & any other thing that can be easily performed without their professional and very expensive help. I was made even more curious when I began to theorize a relation between the mental control techniques of modern day philosophers such as Timothy Leary, Robert Wilson, Christopher Hyatt, and the idea of blood to the brain giving it even more energy. I theorized that trepanation could be used to these ends, to enable more mental ability and enjoyment of life. I began to be curious enough to look into just how possible it would be to do this or to find someone to do it for me.



Trepanation Diary Entry: 04-12-2000

Well, it's now been 23 days since the trepanning. I still feel very rejuvenated. I'm sure I will eventually be used to it, and it will have been fully assimilated into the way I live, and perhaps then the effects will be far less noticeable. For now, they are still quite noticeable. There is a very pronounced awareness of the processes of the body. I am much more sensitive to various tiny movements of matter in the body. I have a lot more energy. Some mornings, I feel like a chugged a coffee even though I didn't.

The healing process hasn't been nearly as horrible as I was told to expect. I was told that

due to the severe amount of tissue damage (attributed mostly to the cutting away of the tissue that adhered the skin to the head) there might've been some serious itching up there when that part began to heal itself. Maybe I'm jumping the gun here and that itchy part just hasn't happened yet. I can't be certain. What I know, is that so far there have been a few tingling sensations, and an occasional itch, and the hematoma. The hematoma that formed has felt very strange at times. It's a sort of liquid-like substance, and I noticed it most intensely Monday when I jogged for the first time since the operation. When it first formed, it was a fairly decent sized lump under the scalp. Looked like I'd been hit on the head with a baseball bat. It shrunk very quickly though, and is almost gone now, but not quite. Anyway, when I started jogging Monday, I could feel the watery substance moving around under my skin. It kind of tickled in a really unusual way. It moved a little bit backward that day, and it has been shrinking away gradually each day. I'm guessing it must be absorbing into the meninges or wherever it came from.

I have still not walked into a room and forgotten what I was going in there for. I am still remembering my dreams every morning (which I am actually attributing mostly if not entirely to the fact that I am smoking a lot less pot). Still most noticeable is the increased stamina. It is hard to explain exactly the effect this has had, because it is largely mental. One thing that has been very pleasant, that I will very likely tend to take for granted after I'm accustomed to it again, is the general enhancement of mood. I used to use a particular metaphor when describing my moodiness. Keep in mind this is only metaphorical. I don't hear voices or think there are little men in my head. I have always been extremely moody. I wouldn't go so far as to say I was chronically depressed or clinically experiencing mood swings, but I was very moody. It would usually come on for no apparent reason. The metaphor I used to describe the odd experience was that there was a little man in my head. The little man would sit there by a switch. The switch only went two ways, happy, and depressed. The little man could throw the switch at any random moment, and this would cause a very sudden depression, or a very sudden joy. I would be feeling very low, and then for no apparent reason be practically giggling with joy. That would feel good, but when conversely, I'd be feeling rather well and I would all of a sudden be so depressed I almost wanted to die, it was pretty hellish. My girlfriend would have to unbearably be around this, and it was not a rare occurrence by any means. This hasn't yet happened again since the trepanning.

I really enjoy the increased attention span, which is applicable to 100% of every situation I am ever part of. It's heightened my enjoyment of conversations, music, etc. I also am very much enjoying the increased sense of self-control combined with greater stamina and clarity.

Trepanation Diary Entry: 04-19-2000

I have come to the frustrating conclusion that the trepanation has had no lasting effect. I mean, the effects were subtle the whole time anyway and they appear to have worn off. I have considered that very likely it was a combination of two things. One, the blood most certainly did rush up to those unused parts of the brain pretty intensely and very regularly for the first few weeks while I was healing, and very likely drawn back out of those areas now. Two, I was more attentive to every sensation and all somatic input because I was just being very attentive consciously in an attempt to notice the effects. Since I paid more at-

tention to everything, it was all a little more intense, yes. As much I hate to realize it, I believed what I wanted to believe.

On the most honest level, I so very much desired to find that there was a little more to the perceptions of life than I had previously known, that I was willing to take a big risk to find out for sure. I don't feel any major differences in my perception now than before the trepanning. I am no longer trying as hard to pay attention to any differences and subsequently am no longer feeling them. Trepanation has no more physiological effect than any other trauma. I believe it is possible to so thoroughly convince yourself you feel different that you will, but I don't believe there is any pronounced or otherwise verifiable physiological improvement. I have been trepanned and restored to full pulsation and it has ultimately meant nothing more than I am brave enough to have done it. I enjoyed life more afterward because of the simple fact that it was still happening and I didn't kill myself. This kind of renewed vigor could be created by any survival of a possibly near-death experience. I conclude it does not do what many hope it will.



Based on your diary entries, you suddenly came to a change of opinion on the results of your trepanning experience. What caused the seemingly sudden change of opinion?

It was seemingly sudden mostly because I didn't write down much between those last two entries. I started doubting it when I realized that there was nothing happening that couldn't be attributed to either the fact that I was paying extremely close attention to every feeling in my body and process in my head and/or pure placebo effects. It also happened as some of the initial feelings I reported waned and disappeared altogether. Some initial weirdness was very intense. I was experiencing the sensation of thinking multiple things at once, and seeing and hearing what was going on around me, and was being able to pay attention to and focus on all of those things pretty simultaneously. I could talk to someone and both hear & understand all their statements even while I was thinking about something else. That was a new feeling for me. Usually if I don't pay close attention to someone, their 'volume' gets turned down in comparison to my thoughts, or I sometimes miss parts of what they said. I was feeling similar to someone on an acid trip in that all my sensory impressions were more clear. Touching and textures were more intense, I could focus on various parts of sounds more, I was thinking very quickly and not losing track of my thoughts. I was remembering all of my dreams. My moodiness seemed to have gone away completely. I wasn't feeling grumpy every morning until my first coffee. As these sorts of things happened less and less until eventually I was pretty much back to normal, I realized it was all placebo. I feel the need now to speak about this because it's not being mentioned by anyone who's actually experienced it, that it is not a physiological phenomenon. I don't think it is a physiological phenomenon at all.

Do you now believe you've come to regret the trepanation experience, or do you think it has possibly benefited you in a way other than those believed to be the physical result of the procedure?

I wanted to do this, and I was able to do it, and lived through it remaining in full health, so no, I don't regret having done it. I would say however that it was not worth the risks overall nor were the results nearly as pronounced as I had hoped it would be. I do feel that

I got in touch with my thought processes and more in touch with all my senses in general, by maintaining such a focus on them all that time. That taught me the level of focus that is possible for me at this time. I'm thankful for that. It also drove home how things that seem impossible to do aren't always as impossible as we are often told, and that my friends were trustworthy and willing enough to help me accomplish just such a feat. As much as I have said that I don't think it caused much physiological change, there have been some lasting effects worth mentioning, both mental and physical. One thing that I have continued to enjoy is the seeming elimination of the bipolar emotional instability I experienced before trepanning. I haven't gone into one of those long unprovoked depressions that I was prone to before. I am also still not walking into rooms wondering what I went in there for, and so believe that by focusing on that for so long right after the trepanning that I have largely improved the ability to keep my line of thought clear till it's end. The strangest things to me have been a few recurring physical happenings. The first sounds silly I know, but I no longer get headaches from eating cold food or drinking cold drink, no matter how much I take in. I can no longer, it seems, get brain freeze headaches. I think this may be because my brain temperature is higher than what it was with less blood. The other and strangest has occasionally been so pronounced and strange that it can kind of scare me sometimes. I smoke marijuana, and when I smoke a lot of it, I feel strange sensations now. Sometimes it feels like my whole head and face are swelling with blood, that my skin can feel it filling up my head, moving through me to my head and filling it up to capacity. If that wasn't strange enough, I swear that I can feel heat in my head now when I drink a lot of coffee. I seem to feel the heat of my blood moving through different parts of my head. It's not at all similar to anything I've ever felt before. I also, and this is the scary one, feel 'flashes' of heat in my head when I smoke a lot of marijuana. I can feel an area quite suddenly get a burst of heat. The first time it happened, I was driving, and what scared me more than the heat was that I even heard a squirt sound accompany it, from inside my head. I still feel these heat flash sensations, but I haven't heard a squirt like that since then. I have not experienced any kind of pain or any impairment of any kind whatsoever.

Would you recommend or warn against an individual undergoing this procedure?

I would, at this time, warn against undergoing this procedure, mostly to anyone who was considering this as a way to alleviate chronic depression. If someone underwent this hoping it would be a panacea for all of their troubles and then it wasn't, that might just push them off the edge. I would also warn against doing this for the most obvious reason that hardly anyone is going to be able to pull it off properly and safely. You don't see interviews with hundreds of self-trepanned people because they don't exist. Because it is not easy and you can certainly cause serious damage by doing it incorrectly, or by doing it without having done a certain amount of research or by knowing those who have some sort of experience in these kind of strange areas. My main concern now is that it would become an underground craze and that a great many people whom I would love to meet or get to know or experience would damage their brains and their lives trying to attain an experience that isn't really there anyway. One that is perhaps not what many speculate it could be. I feel that the Amsterdam clique who started the first wave of interest in trepanning are doing it again and that they believe what they want to. I am trying not to fool myself or anyone else about this.

Trepanation Diary Conclusion

When I take in much caffeine or THC, I feel flashes of heat from within my head. They happen in different parts of my head each time, always on top, but never by the hole itself. The first time it happened, when I was in a car with a friend, pulling a big bong hit, I started to feel the heat in my head and I heard a squirt sound inside my head. At first, I silently panicked (what's the past tense of panic?). I thought to myself, "Am I having a hemorrhage in the brain or something? Is the sensation about to get more intense in general? Am I OK?", but then it passed and I was fine. I still feel the heat in the head sensations now, very regularly, and sometimes now even when not smoking pot or drinking coffee. I've not heard a squirt like that again since then though.

On my belief that it is not necessarily a physiological phenomena: I do think trepanation causes lasting and permanent pleasurable effects, but I don't think they are caused by more blood being in your brain. I think it definitely does increase the brain blood volume, but I don't think that causes the pleasurable mental side effects. I think that by undergoing an intense physical process, while focusing extremely intently on your sensory impressions, that you can become quite aware of every sensation and every stimulus that you usually would miss or overlook.

There is an intense joy and renewed vigor that comes just from living through it. Time and again you hear how those that live through a near-death experience are re-awakened to the ability to appreciate life again, like a child. You are happy that you are still alive at all, and along with that the days are cherished and exciting again. You get to keep living them!

In closing, I'd like to admit that due to the fact that there are these physical sensations, and the curiosity that everyone who's done this at a much older age than myself has raved about how much younger and more vital they feel, I can't say there's no lingering doubt about the worth of a pulsating brain. It will be interesting to see how I am in the long run. I have heard accounts of older persons who were trepanned to cure some problem or after a car accident or whatnot, and people have noticed that these certain older people are still more active, vital, and generally happy than their peers of the same age. Maybe 30 years from now when my friends start slowing down, getting up later, and losing their vitality, I will still be an exuberant young-acting man. We shall see.

For now, I am happy to be alive, very alive, and am simply expressing my doubts, and the honest facts, the other message about trepanation that is: this may or may not be what you are looking for, and you may be able to achieve the same effect through any carefully planned very intentional physical ritual. It should be called a ritual with magical intent. The intention to renew and recharge your perception of life, your energy, and your consciousness.

Frances Sand

For many, Frances was — and continues to be — the epitome of the beautiful self-made and self-defined modified woman. This interview was also done by Bryan Henderson of modified-mind.com for BME in 2000 and is reprinted here with his permission.



I've spent most of my life feeling uncomfortable. Uncomfortable with myself, with other people, in public and in private. I grew up knowing that something was missing, that something was not right. I was not a happy child and did not find it easy to communicate with others, maybe because I was not what I wanted to be. Many people that I know say that they feel their urge to modify themselves comes from earliest childhood. This is certainly true for me, I stumbled into this without a clue what I was doing and without having really seen it before. I made some bad decisions, and sometimes mistook what I was doing as something negative. I often wondered if there might be something fundamentally wrong with

me, if I might be slightly insane, that I needed help. Maybe I did need help, I needed someone to tell me that it was alright, that I was doing something that would turn out to be the healthiest thing for me. That no matter what it looked like I had found a path that would lead me to the right place. We are born as a basic model... and one of our first urges is to change that, yet as we grow up, we are told time and time again that it's wrong. It's wrong to have that hairstyle, it's wrong to get a second ear piercing, it's wrong to wear those clothes... to say those things. It takes a certain kind of strength to go against these things, and a lot of the modified people that I meet don't see themselves as brave, or as being anything better than what we are taught. Myself included. I never saw myself as showing any kind of bravery, this was not a conscious decision for me. All I knew was that it didn't feel wrong to me, and that as I grew older and those feelings that I was harming myself in some way faded away as being insignificant, something in all of this was building the person I was to become. All I have is an urge to be myself that exceeds the propaganda that it is wrong. All I know is that if I don't do these things I can never be happy. I was seen as odd before I even started, as a child I was the strange one, the one bullied through school for no good reason, the loner, the one that grew up with only a few close friends. Do I do it because I have nothing to lose and everything to gain? Do I do it because I am curious, because I'm looking for something... because I have to? Or do I do it because it's a natural urge that I can't suppress? It is so unhealthy to me to hide what you are and what your body

tells you, it is unhealthy to the spirit. I walk down the street and I know things these people never will because they are too afraid, or too suppressed, or too tired now of who they are to change it. Sometimes I might wish that I had grown up with someone by my side who had been here before and could assure me that I was not a bad person. It might have made things easier, I might have had more confidence in myself, but then I worry that I might have escaped somehow this feeling of humility. This feeling that keeps me grounded when someone takes me aside and tells me that the choices I made are incredible and worthy of something great. Maybe they are in a way, but I see nothing incredible in being who I am, it's only the inevitable, you can deny it your entire life but all you are in the end is a bizarre combination of events and lessons and acts.... you are only you. I see a greater surprise in the person that spends their life in denial, that spends it pushing feelings down, covering things up, taking their soul and starving it of everything it needs to survive.

My achievement is one of submission, I chose not to fight what I knew from my earliest memories, I chose to let it take me where it saw I needed to go. All I can do is hope that I get there in this lifetime.

I grew up in a small town where I was run to ground because of what I did. I hid most of my teenage years because I couldn't explain why I was the way I was. My parents did their best with me, they always told me that I was to do whatever made me happy and that they trusted that my decisions would be the right ones. I was never told to take out a piercing or that I couldn't dye my hair or wear something that I wanted to. I was simply told to be careful and that there are very few decisions in this life that cannot be undone if it happens to be a mistake. I made some decisions that didn't work out, I did some things I should never have done, I lost myself along the way more than once... following something that led me the wrong way or simply deserted me at a dead end. These scars are a part of my journey, they are fragments of the path I took to get here. I have made enough mistakes to know roughly which direction I am headed in now. I am just now starting to get to a point where I am happy to stay for a while, sit back and see what I know now, see where I am and where I am going. My body is an ongoing transformation. Like my life, it changes with me and despite me. When I started this I was in denial, I thought it was the stupidest thing to say that I did this for the good of my soul. I wanted another reason.. I wanted a reason that was more black and white, cut and dried into a shape I could handle. But it's not simple, there is no one good reason. There are a thousand good reasons and bad reasons for every person out there. I can take a certain point in my life and turn it this way and that and know that what I thought at the time was wrong or misled. I can take another point and see that maybe I should have known something different. This isn't about being bigger or better, respect is due to the hidden mods that nurse your soul as much as it is due to the person who will not hide their choices.

I have made permanent decisions, and I made them consciously. I made them because I won't change who I am simply because I'm told it's wrong to be this way. I don't believe it's wrong, I don't believe I can't get by in life looking this way. You would be surprised at the amount of people out there willing to respect the decisions you've made for yourself. You would be surprised at the people who you can make feel small because for whatever reason they've chosen a life that stifles them. People do not always understand, and I don't think that there will come a time in my life where they always will. Maybe it's too late for

them, or maybe they don't realize yet, or maybe they aren't willing to face the fear that this life isn't planned out for you, there isn't a user guide, there isn't one mold that we all fit into.

But it's not about the mods, not really, it's about knowing yourself and it's about being true to whatever drives you. I used to think that knowing myself would mean that I truly **knew** myself.. It doesn't, all it means is that I have made enough mistakes to know when I am making the right or wrong decision now, I don't have a plan, I don't have a set of rules, all I have is an intuition, a voice inside me that I have chosen to hear.

My mods are part of me, they always have been, I need this to get by, I need this to be happy. Every day I realize a little bit of something that brings me closer, and that's because every day I am thinking about why I do what I do. And the answer is simple if a little hazy. I do this because my body asks me to, because it needs it to learn, because without it we don't match, we don't have harmony. I cherish this feeling of unrest because it is what drives me, it is what brought me here. This all might sound a little sure, a little self congratulatory but I don't have an apology for that, I know that I still have a long way to go, and I know that 27 years hasn't taught me even a fraction of what I can learn, but I also know that whatever I might have thought, I grew up following a path that was right for me, and whatever bad decisions I made I knew that all I needed to do was turn around and start again. It is one of the best things my parents ever taught me, that there are few mistakes in this life that cannot be undone. Believing something like that takes away the pressure, it gives you freedom to take chances, to jump when you might not, if you don't burn your bridges there is always a way back, and on the way back you can be safe in the knowledge that you learned something else.



What has inspired you to modify yourself, both in the beginning and at present?

At the beginning I don't ever remember feeling much in the way of inspiration... more that it just felt as though it was what I wanted to do. I had no-one else to learn from or look up to, when I was 15 or so I did my first piercing on myself and I suppose you could say that is when I made a conscious decision to alter myself in that way. More recently my inspiration has come from a growing realization that what I do is necessary to my well being.

Do you already have a vision of what the final image will be or has it continually changed as time goes by?

It changes every day, sometimes I wish I could go back and do something differently, sometimes I have a vision of a certain thing, a tattoo... whatever. But mostly I go with what feels right at the time. I try not to think too much about it and just to let it find its own course... tell its own story so to speak.

Does every one of your mods tell its own story, or are there some that are purely decorative?

Some are decorative in a sense that I feel they look right, but I don't think too much about what will be beautiful, just about what looks right on me. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder after all, and how can something not be beautiful when it is what is right? Most

things that I do will find meaning later. I'll look back and I'll be able to clearly see what I was going through at the time and how what I did at the time ties in with that.

You said you started piercing yourself at age 15...when did you make the next step, to more serious mods that become a life-long commitment?

I was 17 or 18 I think when I got my first tattoo. I had already scarred myself before I even pierced myself, and failed piercings left lifelong reminders. I've never been afraid of permanent decisions and I think that is part of what makes this relatively easy for me. This was always intended to be a commitment for life, I've never thought of it any other way, I've been through some extremely difficult times because of it, but I have never wanted to back out. What I have done has always been visible, my first piercing besides ears was a facial one, I don't think I ever wanted anything less than permanence.



And where did you go from there, in regards of mods? What was next?

Next was a lot of experimentation with piercings, I've pierced almost everything and abandoned a lot along the way, I had begun to stretch out my right ear, I got another tattoo, bigger than the last, I was fighting with the urge at the time to cover myself, looking back I'm glad I didn't since it has so much more meaning for me now. I then went through a rather testing time in which all of this was put on the back burner. Looking back, I think I felt that if I had done anything at the time it wouldn't have been healthy and would have served as unpleasant reminders, and I didn't want that. Once life started to get better I took up with the stretching again, took out some old piercings, got more tattoos and started to think about implants and facial tattoos.

What caused the interest in implants and facial tattoos?

The implants for me were a way of pushing myself further, starting to find out where I could go in terms of actual alteration. Changing the shape and texture of things, actually making things look *different* as opposed to decorated or enhanced. The facial tattoos... I agonized over that thought for a while, it's not something to take on lightly... but I didn't want to go back, and I wanted to make sure I never could. I've never felt happy with my face, it hasn't ever felt right to me, and I'm hoping that the facial tattoos will help with that, they have so far.

Did these thoughts soon turn into realities?

On the grand scale of things I probably took that step sooner than I should have, but really, I think that I waited long enough. It was maybe a year after I first knew I wanted to do it that I got my first facial tattoo. The implants took less time, it wasn't such a big decision for me, as soon as I found out it could be done I knew it was something I wanted.

Tell us about the implants...

They were done by Steve Haworth in August of 99. I had researched it as much as I could, I was informed enough to realize that the people attempting it in the UK were not really aware of what they were doing nor the mistakes they were making. I wanted a good experience and Steve is definitely the person to go to for that. I have 9 beads in my forearm, 3 rows of 3. They healed extremely well and I'm in the process now of talking with Jon Clue to have him tattoo them like a crocodile.

...and the facial tattoos?

My first was a bad experience. I had just moved to the states and was feeling unsure of myself in general. Not the best time to do it. And the artist who had done some good work on my husband seemed like a good choice. But he messed it up, He drilled me, it scabbed enormously, the ink would not go into my skin, we went over it and over it and it just kept on coming right out again. It was quite agonizing and extremely disappointing, the ink was patchy, it got infected in places, and the artist hadn't done what I wanted him to, the line was too severe. I had our current artist, Eric go over it again and it looks much better now. My second tattoo was the pink bubbles on my temples done at a convention by a man named JD. He did an excellent job and I love those bubbles to pieces, and I've just recently had Eric take them over my forehead, another 3 hour sitting.

What effect has the facial work had on people's reactions to you?

Actually, very little. Jason and I are rarely seen apart and people either think my facials are drawn on, or they are too busy looking at Jason! Plus the fact that I was heavily pierced to start with and the hair always draws attention, reactions to me haven't changed much at all.

I did have someone at a convention tell me that they thought it couldn't be real because I'm female which I found hilarious.

Has being with Jason, both on a personal level and in public, changed your outlook regarding mods at all?

It has made me more secure in my decisions. Things I might have worried about afterwards seem less important when I have someone else close to me making the same decisions. It always feels better to have an ally.

You mentioned moving to the States, in your opinion, which is a more mod-friendly place, the States or the UK?

I can't speak for the South of the UK, but the North is very close minded whether its because you're black, female, modified or 'different' in any way. They find it hard to see past prejudice and I don't see it changing soon. The cities are not too bad but I still felt threatened in most situations that I found myself. In the town where I grew up there was maybe 2 places where it was safe for me to go for a drink. I had quite a few violent reactions to my appearance; it seemed to make them angry. I became quite antisocial. The states, or Florida at least still has its narrow mindedness, particularly as far as sexism goes, but on the whole I find that people here find me funny or interesting as opposed to something they might like to beat into the ground. Having said that though it is becoming difficult to stay

here, not really because of negativity though that does play a part, but because we are hounded wherever we go, it takes us twice as long to do anything because of all the questions we are asked, we can't wait to move to a bigger city, somewhere where we can be a little more anonymous.

You were in some media stories in the UK?

Yes, probably against my better judgment I took part in a television program called 'Body Beautiful' It was intended to give the viewer a glimpse into the modified persons life, covering things from make up and nail painting through to transgender. I was in quite a number of Newspapers, most of them wanting to mourn the terrible things I had done to myself. It was quite pathetic but unfortunately not surprising. The word 'mutilation' came up quite often, as did the fact I had 'disfigured' myself.

Did the television program follow the same path as the majority of the newspapers?

I haven't seen it yet. I had left the country before it was aired. Those in the modified community who saw it seemed to think it was fairly terrible. My parents liked it.

How supportive have your parents been of your decisions?

They have been extremely supportive. My mother seemed worried when I was younger, and rightfully so. She could probably see that I had no idea of what I was doing or if I might damage myself. As I've got older they've been unfailingly understanding. My mother didn't want me to tattoo my face, but doesn't judge me for it. My father is proud of who I am, they both are. They are glad I think, that they brought me up to have the courage to be who I want to be.

And to those who judge you, as the UK newspapers have, what would you say if you had the chance to confront them face to face?

Just that they have no right to judge me or anyone else. Nothing incredible, just that as long as they continue to reinforce such narrow mindedness for the sake of sales, people like you and me will deal with the results every day of our lives. Not that it would even go in one ear, let alone out of the other.

You've had experience with the modification industry in both the US and UK, is one far superior to the other in techniques or artists?

Not as far my experience shows. I had an excellent piercer in the UK. He did some things on me that he hadn't done before. The navel scalpelling, the ear scalpelling, but he was extremely good. The states has more practitioners as far as volume goes of course, and due to the media and the laws there the UK seems less exposed to some of the heavier mods, so for that reason you could say that the states is better. I haven't met a piercer in this area that I am as comfortable with so far, but I have a very talented tattooist and of course the UK did not offer any of the heavier mods, at least they didn't advertise it .

You have recently gone from being the one receiving the mods to being the one performing them, tell us about this...

I have performed piercings on myself and friends many times in the past, I've cut myself but never anything surgical before. The most recent thing I did was my husband's subin-

cision. I have enormous gratitude for everyone that helped me in my research and of course for J who assisted us. He did the suturing, as I wasn't comfortable with that. I was very nervous right up until we started, but it all went so smoothly, J was a very calming presence and made us both feel much more confident about what we were doing. It was a beautiful thing to share, and I'm so glad that I made the decision to do it. I'll be going back in to lengthen the cut at a later date. I also split Jason's tongue, but we made the mistake of not deciding where we would cut before we numbed it. The swelling threw things off a little and it turned out to be off center. However it grew back almost entirely and we'll know better next time. I did a full calf length cutting on our friend Shauna's leg not long ago. It came out really well. Then there was the penis branding experience. Four horizontal lines at the



base. We knew it wouldn't scar too well due to the nature of the skin, but it has left some nice ridges on there. I have a feel for cutting i think, more recently I did a chest cutting for Jason and it turned out beautifully.

What type of preparation did you do before undertaking these procedures?

For the tongue splits we already knew most of what we needed to know, it is something that we had both been researching for some time, we had both talked to a lot of people about it, discussed various methods until we felt

confident enough to attempt our own. We made sure that we had at least one other person present for everything we did in case anything happened and of course to take pictures. For the cutting, I had already done that on myself many times and although it was a little different on another person I really knew what I was doing for that one. The penis branding was a bit experimental, I just kind of jumped right in there and had a go, we had quite a fun time with that one, we seem to be laughing on most of the pictures! For the subincision, I talked at length with some friends of ours who had used the same method, they were extremely helpful. They had advised me that scissors are much easier to work with and were right. We wanted to have someone there too who had done something like this before so we were very excited when J said he would meet up with us and assist. We were glad that we had the cautery pen, it was useful for stopping bleeders along the way.

Any advice for people planning on undertaking a home procedure?

Don't overestimate your capabilities, research every possible complication, talk to as many people as you can who have not only done the same thing but used the same method. Make sure you are not alone if its a bloody procedure. Mostly it is common sense but there can never be too many precautions taken or too much research done. And if you are the slightest bit doubtful you should not even attempt it.

Do you have anymore home procedures planned yet?

Well, there is the tongue splits of course. I need to go much further back with mine and Jason's needs redoing. And we are itching to get to work with the cautery pen again. We will be going further back with Jason's subincision, maybe I will be confident enough to suture this time also. Other than that, the usual stretchings, piercings and cuttings. I need to redo the scars on my foot.

And you just had some work done by Blair?

Yes. We flew Blair out here at the beginning of February to cut in our lip plugs. We had originally planned on a bigger size, but due to unforeseen complications we had decided to go for something a little smaller. Mine was cut from nothing to an oval plug of 20mm by 9mm, Jason's was cut from his existing labret which was already stretched to 22mm by 11mm. I was expecting the procedure to be a lot more brutal than it was, but Blair is so good at what he does, and so quick, the pain really wasn't an issue in the end, it felt... interesting. The following days were quite difficult though, our lips swelled enormously, I could barely talk for a couple of days, and now that the swelling has gone down its just a case of getting our jewelry comfortable and functional.

Do you plan on stretching from there, and if so, how big do you think you'll go?

I think I will just wait for a while and see how I like it. If I can just drop a larger size in after its fully healed... which is looking the case, then I will do so. But other than that I am going to wait a while.

What other mods do you have planned for the future?

Full facial tattoos, extensive implants, I am looking forward to when finances allow me to start talking to Steve about facial implants. I have just found a piercer who I'm comfortable with and I have been talking to her about some scalpel piercings that I've had in mind for a while now. I've talked to Luis Garcia about some scalpel piercings too, and Ted Frater has been working with me to devise a good jewelry for those since I want them very deep. Silicon seems to be the best choice. Taking the tongue split further. I'd like to replace some teeth with something in a silver color, my dentist back in the UK advised white gold. I'd like to remove some parts of my ear and replace them with prosthetics, I'd like to scalpel my navel more, an inch is my goal... but we'll have to see how likely that really is, and my ears of course as big as they will go. I may need to reposition my septum somewhat as it stretches as I think it's a little low for the size I want.

What direction do you see mods taking in the future?

I hope that they will remain positive, and I hope that they will always make me feel better. I'm not looking for anything earth shattering just a sense of peace. I will always do what feels right, and as time goes on and with the advances that are always being made in this field who knows where that is going to take me. What I do seems to be more spiritual and more personal as time goes on. I'm feeling an increasing need to be more removed from people too, just because its getting harder as I get older to deal with them, and I'm starting to feel futile towards them, when I was younger I suppose I thought I could change the way people saw me if I took the time to explain, but the feedback I get hasn't been encouraging of late and I don't get many intelligent responses, and few people seem tuned in to what I am trying to achieve. I know that it doesn't help anyone to hide, and I have al-

ways told myself that I wouldn't, but it's getting harder not to.

Any predictions on where those advancements will take the industry?

Just that people are always going to keep striving to do what everyone always says they can't. I think that most people would like to see more acceptance as far as surgical mods goes so that things don't have to be as cloak and dagger and people don't have to be afraid that they will end up in a mental institution or arrested if they are caught doing what they're doing. I would definitely like to see that change. I am tired of being afraid that people might think I'm insane because of what I do.

Is there any advice you'd like to give young women just starting out in their journey of being modified?

To make sure that you remember that you're opening yourself up to a whole new prejudice and to prepare yourself for that as best as you can. The way things are now, women have a more enforced standard of beauty and people are going to find it that much more offensive when you don't comply. To remember that to be true to yourself is all you really can be, and to try to remember that when people are telling you that you can't do things because you'll never be able to get where you want to because of it. The mod community can be discriminating like any other, and it is still male dominated, I often find myself referred to in ways that I don't agree with, but the more of us there are, the better things can get.

“Semi-Voluntary”

One of the things I worked hard to do with BME was to “normalize” body modification — to demystify it and make it less “crazy” to those not interested in it. Amputation was by far one of the hardest nuts to crack, so with this interview I hoped to tackle it by talking to people who had solid medical “reasons” for their voluntary amputations, although they were all still individuals who fell inside the general BME universe.

Between all-out voluntary amputation, like Jason’s hand amputation story, and medically-dictated amputation from injury or disease, is a grey area of semi-voluntary amputation where amputation is chosen — often pushed for — to solve a medical problem that would not normally require amputation. Doctors often resist it, but the amputees persistence at a “quality of life” argument eventually lead to surgical intervention. In this set of interviews (all of which I started with the incorrect assumption that they were purely voluntary amputations) we talk to three such individuals, one who removed a toe, and another who removed his leg, and a third who removed a finger.



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Tell me a little about yourself?

I’m a person who enjoys “foot art”. That is, bunions, overlapped toes, feet that look different, and toe amputations.

So not an interest in amputation per se, but just different sorts of feet?

Yes... My foot fetish started, I think, when I was a kid, probably seven or eight years old. Since then I always looked, searched, and observed different shapes of feet and toes — the more “odd” a woman’s foot, the more curious I became.

Tell me about your foot.

In my case, the second toe always overlapped my big toe, but over time it overlapped more and more. I went to a foot doctor and asked him to remove the toe. It wasn’t a medical necessity, and I liked the way it looked [with the overlapped toe], but I had to stand at work all day for years and the pain overcame the desire... The next step was to have it removed.

Was it hard to convince the doctor?

The doctor wanted to straighten the toe, but the result would be a stiff toe and the procedure would be eight to twelve weeks. I didn’t want a stiff toe and didn’t want to lose the time... So, we agreed on the toe amp.

To what extent was it something you had to do, and to what extent was it something you

wanted to do?

It's like the chicken and the egg... I'd say both... The desire was always there to do it but this made it possible. I liked the look of my overlapped toe but it was time to move on to a toe amp... I guess it would be "wanted to do". My wife also had it done and she didn't mind, so, "What the Hell"...

Your wife also has toe amputations?

Yes, she had it done twenty years ago, and she adjusted to her toe amps. She had similar, overlapping toes, and it was easier to remove them than deal with the pain and time to rebuild them... We're very busy people.

Does she know you have a foot fetish of this type?

Yes, she knows and we share my foot fetish. Her feet have bunions — at one time overlapped toes — and now toe amps plus extras...

How do people respond?

Not many people know about my toe amp, but some people stare at it when I go barefoot or wear sandals, more so than they did when my toe was overlapped... Their curiosity excites me.

What was the aftercare and healing from the procedure?

The doctor told me to keep it covered until the next visit, but I just had to look and take pictures. The healing process was fast, and there was no pain from the "get-go". In about ten days it was all over.

What does it feel like now?

It feels like something is touching where the scar tissue is. I like it a lot. My bunion also got bigger, because my big toe took the place of my second toe. I'd have preferred it if the doctor removed all the excess tissue where the toe was, because one gets a pressure sensation where the tissue was left, so I returned to the doctor a year later and he did that. It now feels and looks much better.

I always loved feet and what I have seen with foot modifications, bunions and odd deformities all my life, amputation is my favorite "fetish".



Tell me a little about yourself?

I'm a 51 year old bi-sexual man with some ink and other body mods. I'm Ex-US Navy Sub Forces — "Deeper Longer Faster" — and happily married to a RN.

Tell me about your amputation?

The procedure was done by a doctor and was a trans-femoral (above the knee) amputation of my left leg. It was a very difficult procedure actually as there was titanium hardware in the bone from prior surgery. They had to make a step cut of the tissues, avoiding previous scar tissue as much as possible. The step cut, if you took the leg and looked at it from the side was cut to look like a step. This allows a thick flap of meat and fat to form a cushion

and also a good closure of the remnant limb. All the major arteries needed to be tied off as well as the nerves being cut. Also, tendons need to be reattached in a fashion that will help you walk with a prosthetic. Trust me, a leg amputation is not for an amateur to do! Slip up and, well, you can easily bleed out very quickly and not have any real mobility even with a prosthetic.

What story do you tell about how your amputation?

Well, it depends on the person (LOL)!!!

Mostly I tell the straight out truth short version. The long version is what leads up to me deciding to do this.

Roughly six years ago I was hit head on and my left leg was shattered along with numerous other injuries. I almost died. I had lots of pain and the left leg never re-



ally healed. Trust me, after being in a wheelchair or on crutches for almost five years it gets tired real fast, especially if you are an active person like me. I went round and round with various doctors and got the song and dance “it’s a viable limb,” meaning, “yeah, it’s alive, so what if it’s useless.”

Total bullshit — typical of the attitude in medicine today. Seriously, it’s a double standard in medicine. We can keep a limb alive even though it will never be useful again, so we will and let the patient go through hell. It even comes down to a double standard in other areas as well. Women can get lipo, boob jobs, or reductions hysterectomies... mastectomies, hey no problem, no letters from a psych... just “can you pay?” Yet if a man wants an Orchi, well, he must be nuts — better get two Psych’s to say hey it’s okay... bullshit. Medicine has ignored the most important thing — your quality of life and only you can say what is best for that, not some white robed geek. I was fortunate that my personal MD knew of a vascular surgeon who takes that into account, so no psych board. I know many other amputees who went through hell before they got the surgery they needed to get on with life.

What was your aftercare and healing process like?

Very painful and drawn out. The burning sensation was enough to drive me up a wall. Healing took about eight weeks for the initial period, and total healing almost a year. Getting comfortable was the hard part, especially in bed. You need to relearn sleep posture. Aftercare was like any other major surgery but with an exception — daily checking the stub with a mirror, looking for wound openings and tissue break downs. The process also was getting used to showering sitting down. The first time after staple removal I tried standing up — it felt like the leg was still there and down I went. That’s the hard part. You still feel the limb even though it’s gone.

Aftercare involved eight weeks of PT to re-strengthen the limb and my back for normal posture, and then another twelve weeks learning to walk again with the prosthetic and also to straighten my back out from years in a chair.

What does it feel like now and how do you like it?

It's painful many days... I have what are called neuromas. These are nerves that were cut but have regrown into ball-like structures that are very sensitive to heat, humidity, cold, and touch. But truth is, I feel great. I can walk again and enjoy walking along the beach like I used to. I feel whole again.

Most days I am happy with my decision — remember I elected to do this — but there are other days I wish the hell I had my leg back.

Anything you would do differently if you did it again?

Yes, I would have done it much sooner than I did

Are you at all interested in other amputations? You mentioned an orchi (castration)?

For me where I am in life an Orchi is a viable thing from several aspects. First off, I am prone to epididymitis due to a series of injuries to my testes. Seriously I have had two bouts in the last year and the pain is very exquisite — not the nice kind any way. Second, my partner has a very low sex drive and, well, masturbation just staves off the itch only so long. Even though I am bi I am monogamist so relief outside of the relationship is both not in my character or realistic. There have also been six cases of testicular cancer on my fathers side of the family developing around the age I am now. So from one view it would be health insurance so to speak. I also have no need to reproduce with my son grown and moved away as well as my daughter being a parent as well. No need to be a dad again for this kid, LOL. From an erotic point I also find it appealing to have a large degree of control of my sex drive and also find the whole thing a big arousal. Body image comes in as well I really never have felt totally comfortable with my testes, or for that matter, my birth gender as well. Latent Transsexual I guess. Seriously, when growing up Westerns were the big thing on the tube and while my male friends always wanted to play the cowboy or gunslinger, secretly inside I wanted to be the one rescued.

Remember the era I grew up in SRS was a new thing with only one in the States at the time as far as we know Christine Jorgensen and Stonewall was a recent event.

How did you decide to go through with amputation?

Almost five years getting my mind set right and it still was a hard thing to do. I mean, sure, mine was sort of driven by a health need, albeit I could have gone on without having it done, but it is not a thing to take lightly. I have seen some of the photos of folks taking chisel to a joint or toe or more, but I bet most of them did not think it through long term. An amputation is not like ink in that you can laser it off or remove the implant or jewelry. Once that part is gone, that's it, game over, for that part of the body.

There are also many things to research before doing this things like “Phantom Pain” — for example your left toe hurts like you stubbed it but it's not there. “Phantom limb” — your leg is folded under you sitting on couch but it's really not there. Then there are neuromas — nerves that have regrown into a ball... very very painful! Then there are the looks you

get. People staring, but when you catch them, they avert their eyes — they are sackless assholes staring like that.

Would you call what you did a “voluntary” amputation, or something that was medically required?

It was a completely voluntary amputation. I wanted to try to have some form of normalcy again. I was hoping to end the pain I was in 24/7 and get off the pain killers that were fogging my mind. Plus the messed up leg was to me an eyesore on my body. I also couldn't really do anything prior to the amp. It was pure hell sitting and not being able to take part. Well, I did get some normalcy back. I like my body again, but I still have pain... oh, well, trade offs... LOL.

I had to more or less kick and scream and brow beat people to have it done. The Doctors were not willing to do the surgery as it was not a life threatening issue and the soft tissues were healthy. The Femur itself had never healed completely. As far as they were concerned it was healthy for me to spend my life in a wheelchair or get around on crutches. It really took a lot of effort to get the amputation. With the exception of one doctor they had “ethics” issues cutting off what they perceived as a healthy (LMAO) limb.

I definitely understand what you mean though on the pain issues — I had a surgery (bone tumor removal) that messed up the nerves in my leg, and while I'm physically fine, I'm in constant pain from it and have thought for a long time about whether it would be better to amputate it (not that a doctor would for me, and realistically, the phantom pain could easily stay after an amputation).

You could do the route that I took and keep telling your primary care MD that the pain is intolerable, pain meds are not an option, and that it is affecting your overall quality of life. I was fortunate that when I relocated to this area and my new primary care MD is an extreme advocate of quality of life for the patient. Many MDs are still of the mind set that as long as the limb is viable they won't do it even though the patient's life is miserable. There are patient advocates around — a web search can help.

Phantom pain is a weird thing — it is totally different then what I even thought. Best thing I can describe is it feels like you stubbed your left toe yet the toe is gone on up to cramps and stuff in the limb like it is still there it is not in the remnant area but below that. Now what I have is different — that is the neuroma where the nerves have regrown into a ball. Phantom pain can be controlled and eliminated by several means from using a mirror to trick the mind to scratching or rubbing the non existent limb. Yeah it sounds odd, but it works and it can also be controlled with acupuncture. Besides, in 99% of the cases it is not a constant thing, and for most people well it stops after a while once and for all.

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How old are you?

I'm 25 years old and currently enrolled in welding school in Manhattan.

What lead up to your amputation?

In june of 2005 I was working for Steinway and Sons, at their piano factory in Queens.

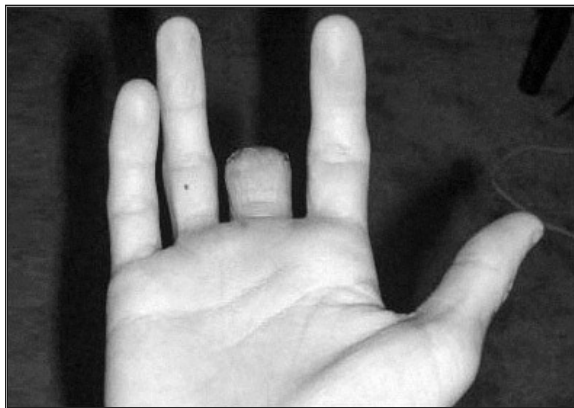
My hand slipped into one of the cutting machines and cut across the tops of my knuckles on my middle and ring fingers, severing the tendons. I had surgery on them and regained most of the use of my ring finger but the joint on my middle finger fused due to the bone being damaged as well. About eight months later I had surgery on the middle finger again to cut out the fused part and try to get my finger to bend. After months of physical therapy, my finger wouldn't bend. It was permanently crooked, swollen, purple, and painful. I was always getting it caught and banging it on stuff. There had been too much damage and it had sat too long without bending to do anything else. I went to see a different doctor, as the first doctor refused to amputate, and he immediately approved the surgery. It had been over a year since the accident. On September 19th of 2006 I had the finger amputated.

How was your finger removed?

I had it amputated by a doctor in Massachusetts. They knocked me out and cut through the PIP joint (proximal interphalangeal joint). The doctor left a flap of skin on the bottom of my finger at the joint that he then pulled up and over the joint and sewed it to the top of my finger to seal it off.

How was aftercare and healing?

Aftercare was easy. My entire right hand was bandaged for about six weeks. I wasn't allowed to remove the bandage until I went back to the doctor's. The healing was pretty intense — pain like I had never felt before and an incredible itching deep inside the bone.



The first few nights were particularly rough. I had been prescribed vicodin, but it didn't do anything and I pretty much laid there in bed cradling my hand until I eventually fell asleep — passed out. After the first couple of weeks it hurt less and less, but it was still painful, itchy, and very tender. Once the bandage came off, the stump was swollen about twice the size and I had to wear a little silicone sleeve over it to make sure I never acci-

dentally bumped it on anything... which still happens a surprising amount considering it's tucked away between two full fingers!

I also had ghost sensations. Pain was actually not all too common. The biggest ghost sensation I had was an itching in the tip of my finger. I'd always reach out to scratch it and then realize what it was, and there was nothing I could do to stop that. I did occasionally have ghost pain sensations and they are really easy to deal with. I couldn't do anything to alleviate the pain so it didn't matter that it was happening on a body part I no longer had. I also occasionally had the sensation of my fingertip touching something when the rest of fingers did. The first time it happened was when I went to pick up a glass. I distinctly felt my middle finger tip touch the glass as I wrapped my real fingers around it. It was a weird

mental trip for sure. I had been expecting the other ghost sensations, but not that.

What does it feel like now that it's well healed?

Now it's hardly noticeable. But to be fair, it was hardly noticeably as soon as the initial pain went away. My middle finger had been immobile for over a year before it was cut off. I was used to not being able to use it for anything, so once it was amputated I never had a period of adjustment. It was a relief once it was gone. I'm much happier now that it's been removed. I see it as a positive thing and have fun with my stump. I have a tattoo on my side that is a portrait of my hand missing the finger, "MINUS ONE" is tattooed across my knuckles, and I wear the mummified finger around my neck.

Anything you'd do differently?

I'd try to get it done a lot sooner — that year with it still attached was hell.

Do you have any interest in further amputations?

Probably not completely voluntarily, but I do definitely have a much larger interest in amputations now. I've thought about cutting off the other middle finger to be symmetrical, but I doubt I'd ever go through with it. It's kind of funny it happened. When I was in high school, an anatomy teacher I had spoke of a guy he knew from when the teacher worked in a hospital. The guy was a mechanic and had damaged his ring finger several times. It got to the point where his ring finger was useless and he had very little control over it. He ended up having his ring finger amputated all the way into his palm and had a four fingered hand, with no spaces or stumps. I always loved that story and thought it would be awesome to have a four fingered hand. That, and all the exposure through BME and people I've met with amputations — my landlord is missing the same finger as me, as well as part of his index finger. That all made it really easy to have my finger cut off.

“De-Fingered”

Finger removal is the attention-seeking little brother of limb amputation. While on the surface one is a smaller version of the other, they're powered by very different drives... While large scale amputation is a very low-level “need” — BIID — finger amputation tends to be something closer to traditional body modification (a la “needing” a body piercing).



Yesterday we talked to a few individuals who “needed” amputations for primarily physical reasons, so today I’d like to chat to two people who chose amputation for purely psychological reasons, each choosing to self-amputate one of their fingers at home, disguised as an “accident”. Both of them did this privately and secretly, for themselves, so the pictures in the article are not actually of them.

Tell me about yourselves?

Douglas: I am a thirty year old male from northern Europe, and I live in a small community with me wife and son.

Beth: I’m completely sane, and to all intents and purposes ‘normal’. I just happen to be driven to do things in a way that most people can’t understand, and I’m capable of doing things to myself that a lot of people are not. I believe I’m somewhat unusual as I’m female and I did this entirely alone and without any assistance or help from anyone. I have five digits on one hand, four and a small nub on the other, having removed most of my ring finger.

Why did you choose to amputate your finger?

Because I wanted to, I could, and it made me happy.

Douglas: A few reasons — one of the reasons is actually your fault Shannon! If it wasn’t for BMEzine and the ModCon book, I probably wouldn’t have been thinking about it the years before I did it. BMEzine has opened my eyes to various body modifications, and I have always been fascinated by people doing extreme things to their bodies. Amputation is as far as you can go if you ask me, and I wanted to see if I was able to do it myself.

Was it rewarding or worth it in terms of that way of thinking about it?

Yes, it was. I haven’t gotten pierced since the amputation, and I have some tattoos left to be done, but otherwise I feel complete in my body transformation. I used to be somebody else, but today I am me.

Do you feel that BME should do more to discourage people from cutting off fingers, or would this just make it even more appealing on that level?

If people want to cut off their limbs, they will do so even if BME discourages them from doing so. What I think is more important is that BME should provide “safe” guides on how to DIY and that someone (not necessary BME) should tell the person to slow down and think about the consequences it will have for the rest of their lives. That goes for all modifications.

You said you have other reasons as well?

We have a friend of our family that is missing fingers from different accidents and wars. I can't swear that it formed my interest, but from a psychological point of view, it probably did.

The first time I came across DIY amputation was when I was twelve years old. My mom and I went to the movies and saw a film named “Black Rain”. It's a film about an American cop going to Japan to deliver a prisoner, but something goes wrong and the prisoner escapes and blah blah blah. It's not a very good movie, but the Japanese prisoner is a member of the Yakuza, and in the movie he cuts off his own finger in a traditional way. That had a huge impact on me. I remember thinking “WOW!! That is some heavy shit! Are people really capable of doing that!?” Yes, they are.

That's funny — I remember that scene making a big impact on me as a kid as well. How did you do your amputation?

I got intoxicated with alcohol, put a rubber band on my pinky and injected some lidocaine with adrenaline in it. Then I waited about thirty minutes or so, and then I took out a huge kitchen knife and ‘popped’ the joint in the finger with some heavy pressure.

Beth: I had no desire to go through the knuckle joint — disarticulation. I wanted to go through in between knuckles. My need was very specific. I obtained injectable xylocaine, a syringe, a rubber band, a scalpel, butchers poultry shears, a paring knife, a belt, and a towel. I found out how to perform a digit nerve block from a nursing guide. After administering the xylocaine in the appropriate places I tied off tightly with a rubber band and placed my hand on a chopping board. Originally I intended to excise the tissue away from the bone first, leaving a longer flap on the underside. I figured this would make patching it up easier, having studied closure procedures on medical websites. Of course it didn't occur to me how suspect that would have looked in the emergency room but that idea went out the window anyway once I began to cut.

I started on the top side by pressing down with the scalpel as hard as I could. It cut easily, but I was surprised by the sudden bleeding — that may sound stupid, but I guess I panicked. I sat on the floor and placed the blade of the poultry shears into the cut I had started and squeezed as hard as I could. The nerve block was perfectly administered and I felt no pain whatsoever as I closed the blades. It didn't require too much pressure to go through the bone — it just kind of went ‘clunk’. It took a couple of goes to cut through the flesh. My finger was still partially attached, so I returned to the chopping board and quickly sawed through the remaining piece of tendon. It was very tough. I had a brief look at my new hand, removed the rubber band, used the belt as a tourniquet and wrapped it in a towel before presenting myself at the emergency room.

What story do you tell people about how it happened?

Douglas: I used to tell people some bullshit lies, but it always ended with me not being able to follow up the questions. My friends knew beforehand that it was about to happen, and most people that know me “know” what really happened, but they can’t prove it. Nowadays I tell people that I was drunk in my kitchen, and that I really don’t feel comfortable speaking about it. I don’t lie, do I...?

Beth: I say I had an accident boning out a joint of meat. I played the female hysteria card. That helped me avoid too much close questioning, and gave me an excuse for failing to bring the digit with me for re-attachment — far too icky and gross! Ha-ha! Plus of course the unhygienic manner in which I became detached from it made it less attractive an option.

Only one doctor made an issue of re-attachment, and I made it quite clear to him that it wasn’t going to happen. The happiest moment was when the nurse took me to have an x-ray and as I laid my hand on the cold plate I was very aware that that finger was not making contact and was no longer there. It suddenly hit me — it was gone and I felt elated. I had surgery under general anesthesia to repair the stump.

How was your aftercare and healing? One of you went through the bone, and the other went through the joint, so I assume it was different.

Very, very painful. For the first few days it felt like I had hit it with a hammer but the pain didn’t dull — it was persistent. And very slow indeed. I took antibiotics and pain killers. After ten days I had the sutures removed and began massage and exercise. It took a long time for the swelling to go down.

Douglas: Mine was very easy. I went to the hospital and the surgeon did an amazing job. They fixed all nerves and tendons, so I don’t have any phantom pain at all! The first few days I was on some heavy medication, and I got out of my job for a month or so. That made able to rest up properly.

Was there an aspect of guilt? I know in previous interviews readers have raised the concern that it’s “taking advantage” of the system to make the healthcare system pay for voluntary mods?

I have always paid my taxes, and I would be happy to pay more, so no, I didn’t feel guilt at all. I see your point, but I don’t see it as stealing from other people by using a system I pay for.

What does it feel like now that it’s healed?

Beth: I’m very aware of it; it feels different. I guess it’s slightly tight feeling when I make a fist, and it’s much more susceptible to cold than my complete fingers. I love how it looks, and how differently my other fingers move and behave in order to adapt to the loss. It’s very sensitive. I enjoy having it sucked and nibbled very much indeed. It’s one of the best choices I ever made.

Douglas: It is very hard to describe, but the easy way out would be me saying that it feels normal. I don’t remember how it felt with the finger still attached to my body. My body reacts like if it had been like this since day one. I use what’s still left of the finger as I used my old finger.

That's interesting — so there's no “phantom fingertip”? It just ends mentally where it ends physically now?

That's right. At first, my mind was set on still having the finger, so when I tried to “tab” the computer or itch my nose, or even biting my nails, I found out my body didn't comply with my brain. Also, I dropped things all the time. It took about a year or so for the mind to be ok with it.

Is there anything you'd do differently if you could do it over again?

There are four things I would have done differently:

1. I would have seen a psychiatrist before I did the amputation so they could tell me that I am normal. I went to one after the amputation, and they couldn't find anything that was wrong with me.
2. I would inform my family before the amputation.
3. I wouldn't be drunk.
4. I would've used a better lie for people that are asking.

Beth: Not that I can think of. I'm very satisfied.

Will you do more amputations?

Douglas: I will never say never, but at the moment I don't have any plans on it.



Beth: I don't think I could pull off another ‘accident’.

Finally, how did you choose the specific digit to remove?

Douglas: I don't know actually. I have always known it would be a finger or a toe, but finger seemed easier to do by yourself.

Beth: It's strange. I don't remember what made me focus on that particular finger, or for how long I had wanted to do it. There are reasons which I not prepared to divulge which may have triggered me to begin with. Then I simply became obsessed, driven to remove it. I fantasized about it constantly. I would bend it down and pretend it had gone. I wouldn't say I had a dislike for it, it just wasn't ‘right’ and I wanted it gone.

In my mind it was gone long before the actual act of removing it.

Allen Falkner

Since BME began, Allen and I have been working in parallel to further body art and body ritual. He's got a remarkably broad set of skills and credits to his name, and after this interview was published, I kept second guessing it because so much was left out, even though it's quite long.



Allen Falkner (and TSD) is probably best known as, along with Fakir Musafar, the singularly most influential suspension artist in the modern world (see his site, suspension.org) — a vast majority of similarly influential artists credit him as their inspiration and how they were introduced to suspension. In addition, he's an accomplished piercer and body modification artist, and until recently, the owner of the decade-and-a-half old and consistently successful Dallas piercing studio "Obscurities". He's now retired from performance suspension (although he still works behind the scenes and facilitates suspension for others) and in addition to his work as a photographer, he's opened a new business, "Fade Fast", which offers tattoo removal with the intention of helping people improve their artwork through cover-ups and touch-ups rather than eliminating tattooing from their lives. In this interview he reflects on his suspension career, studio ownership, and talks about his feelings about tattoo removal.



How and when did you get started in suspension?

Strangely enough, the performances came before suspension. I was involved in performance art as far back as the mid to late eighties. My initial interest and involvement in suspension, which was far more ritualistic, didn't actually happen until '92. Even then, hanging didn't become a part of my performances until '95. For me, the first three years of suspension were purely experimental and soul searching. It wasn't until I met several other like-minded people and formed TSD that suspension started playing such a crucial role in my public/performance life.

How were you involved with performance art in the mid 80s?

Strangely enough my first experience with performance art was also my first business venture. Back 1987, my friend Damon Law and I started a graphic design company called Baffle Logic. I think the original idea was to promote Damon's artistic ability and to generate business designing print ads. You see, this was before inexpensive desktop publishing programs were available and not many people were on the Internet. So, the flyers were simple photocopies of designs that were all drawn up and laid out by hand and our contact info was a PO Box.

At the time we were eighteen, couldn't get into any bars, and I was straight edge anyway. So, passing out the flyers in the nightclub area was our entertainment on Friday and Saturday nights. At first Damon designed flyers that were purely artistic, but soon they changed to pseudo propaganda leaflets that were riddled with bizarre disinformation. Our nights of distributing flyers turned from a simple PR plan to a strange sort of street performance where we started saying a number of different odd things to people so they would take the flyers. In the end, nothing ever became of Baffle Logic — Damon went on to become a musician and a graphic designer (theStark.com and damonDesign.com) and my experience not only peaked my interest in performance art, but it was the beginning of my career as an entrepreneur.

How many shows have you done — and how many people do you think you've brought into suspension? Nearly everyone in the initial suspension “boom” in the late nineties cites you as an influence.

I've actually lost track of how many suspensions I've done; private, public and performance. These days I like to look at it in terms of places. Without creating a list of states and countries, I can say I've hung on every continent except Africa and Antarctica. It is still my hope to hang in Africa, and crazy as it sounds, hanging at the South Pole is one of my goals to do before I die. There's no good rhyme or reason, and there won't be many people to see it, but as silly as sounds it's just something I feel compelled to do one day.

As for bringing other people into the suspension, wow, no clue. It has always been my stance that suspension information should be available to everyone. Over the past fifteen years I've tried to help anyone that has asked for it. Not only does this make it difficult to give any kind of number, but I know for a fact that many people I have influenced have gone on and done the same thing. Directly or indirectly I know I've brought in more people than I can count.

What made you decide to leave performance suspension? Is this just as a performer (ie. will you still be doing “production”), or are you completely leaving?

The decision to quit performing was very difficult, but it was time. Back in the day it was amazing just to see someone hang from hooks. Nowadays, you need to do something really impressive and unfortunately I made a niche for myself by doing cutaways and falling onto hooks. It's a pretty impressive stunt, and it's murder on my body, but it's more than that. My final decision to quit actually came while performing in Greece last year. During my show, I pulled a muscle in my lower back. I was in pain for a week straight, sleeping on a friend's couch in London and trying to recuperate for the show I had booked the following weekend. During that time I had plenty of time to think. The conclusion... my body just doesn't heal like it used to and it's better to just quit now while I'm at the top of my game.

As for my future, I'm sure I will stay involved in performance suspension on some level. I still have some ideas I would love to see happen. So, yes I may very well keep working on the production side. Another reason why I want to quit is that there are just too many jobs for one person to do. When I'm on tour, I have no crew. So, teaching local people to throw strange hooks and handle rigging can be a bit disconcerting. I think doing more behind the scenes work would be much less stressful and then I could truly be involved in

the safety side suspension performance, an area that is always hard to manage when you're the one hanging.

Looking back on your performance career, what shows are you most proud of?

That's tough to answer because for the time, each performance was very cutting edge. For instance, the nine-man mobile — theatrically not a very interesting piece, but the engineering behind it was incredible, especially for a bunch of kids from Texas. I think my favorite performance is still the "Hurt" show, named for Johnny Cash's rendition of Nine Inch Nail's "Hurt" that I use. I have done several different versions of the piece but the song always plays an integral part and sets the stage for a cutaway drop onto another set of hooks. The reason I'm so proud of the piece is that it's unique and still rarely duplicated.

As a performer and artist, who have been your favorite people to work with? Who do you think is doing the most interesting suspension shows these days and why?

As life experience goes, the people I've met and worked with while suspending have been inspirational. I hate to make a list of people because I know I will leave out so many but the top of my list are definitely Ron Athey, Lucifire and even Fakir, even if we don't see eye to eye on many levels. In suspension performance there are too many to name but I will definitely mention Samar. She has been my performance partner off and on for a couple of years now and hanging with her is always so much fun

As for suspension shows, I'm still a big fan of CoRE, but in all honesty, I rarely see other performance suspensions. I know the crew from Ascension performs regularly and I'm good friends with them, but I've never actually seen them on stage. For instance, I've seen Havve from Pain Solution perform a couple times, but I've yet to see a show that involves suspension, well, no live show. And I've seen Aesthetic Meat Foundation perform as well, but never any hanging. I have seen Operafication perform several times, but suspension is in my opinion a minor part of the act. The true focus is the singing not the hooks.

I think the future of suspension will be more aerial work. I believe the Flying Tigers Circus were the first to incorporate suspension and trapeze work, but unfortunately they have retired the hooks as well.

Will you still do private suspensions for others?

Oh yes, my focus on suspension has turned to the community, especially in the arena of education. I want to help others that are interested in suspension. That's always been my primary goal and in many ways I feel that I got a bit lost in the performance side. For me, the act of hanging others has always been an amazing experience. To see some else hang is just as, if not more gratifying than doing it myself. I doubt very seriously that I will ever stop suspending other people.

Will you still do private suspensions yourself? Why or why not?

Yes, of course. I still love private suspensions. In fact, all these performances have actually diluted my experience. I need to get back to my roots and just hang. When you are on stage, you need to worry about timing and music cues. When you hang just for you, you can just relax and immerse yourself in the sensation.

As one of the "fathers of the modern suspension movement", and someone with a long

history in both public and private suspension, what is suspension's value?

Heh, what value does any act have? For me, suspension is one of the most important finds in my life. For others, who knows? I have never been a big fan of pushing my ideals or beliefs on others, and in the case of suspension, this is most definitely true. So, rather than answering your question directly, I will answer it indirectly with another comparison. Smoking tobacco is socially acceptable. Annoying to some, a vice to others, but for most it's just viewed as an activity that has little to no value. However to certain Native American cultures, the smoking of tobacco is part of an important ritual that has been passed down for generations. So, what is the tobacco's value?

How is suspension different from self-harm?

This question is difficult to answer in that everyone's view of self-harm is different. Do the hooks hurt going in? Sure. Is hanging from hooks painful? A bit. So why do people do it? Simple, the sensation is amazing. Plus, many people have an experience that is life changing. Is it just a biochemical response to pain mixed with a euphoric sensation of getting close to shock while hanging feeling almost weightless? Do people have out of body or religious experiences? Is it just the fact that someone has just overcome their fears and done something that seems impossible? I really can't answer these questions. Everyone gets something different.

My personal view is that when we modify are bodies on any level we are putting ourselves back in touch with our tactile sensations. In western society we communicate with our outside world mostly through sight and sound. For some people, smell and taste play an important role as well, but what about touch? We, as a species, rarely use this sense. Other than sex, when is the last time you remember the sensation of what something actually feels like?

Yes, suspension could be viewed as self-harm, but so could that ringing in your ears from all those loud concerts you attended.

You mentioned that it's getting harder and harder to make an impact on a crowd with suspension. As a form of performance art, is suspension "done"?

Not buy a long shot. In fact, I think quite the opposite. Suspension is actually an accepted art form now. With all the media hype and exposure, hanging from hooks has come out of the closet and entered mainstream conversation. It's actually difficult to find anyone that's never heard of suspension. Some of the old timers disagree, but I think this is a very positive thing. People may not be as shocked as they used to, but now hanging from hooks can be seen as entertainment. What role will suspension play in performance art in the future? Who knows.

I don't suppose you could have imagined that suspension would be where it is now when you first started, and things have changed a lot in the last fifteen years. That said, do you think it will change much from where it is now, or has suspension hit a stable point socioculturally?

I think everyone is pretty surprised at how far suspension has come. Just like piercing, when I first got involved I never really thought it would be much more than an under-

ground activity. However, unlike piercing that has hit its peak and is now either stable or on the slight decline, suspension will never really gain much acceptance. I realize that it might seem pretty mainstream, but I doubt hanging from hooks will ever become the new navel. You never know though. There might be a future of “suspension spas” just on the horizon, but I definitely won’t be behind that venture — but I will happily take a paid position doing guest lectures.



Can you give me a really quick history of Obscurities?

I opened Obscurities as a piercing studio back in 1992, as hobby more than anything. In fact, the name came from only fifteen seconds of thought, and in some ways I regretted the decision because it’s difficult to spell and doesn’t really roll off the tongue. I was setting up the business, and didn’t even have a location yet, but I need a sales tax permit to be able to buy jewelry. I went to the county tax office to apply for it and realized I needed a company name for the document. I’ve always liked the word “obscure” because of its multiple meanings and how it can easily represent almost anything. So the word Obscur...ities just came out of my mouth when they asked for my business name. I planned to change it at some point, but a few months later I opened a piercing studio in a vintage clothing store. A year or so later the owners of that shop and I partnered to open the tattoo side, Triloggy Tattoo — there were three of us. A year later I sold my part to them. Then by 2000, the clothes were gone, it was one big tattoo and piercing shop, and I bought back Triloggy and combined it into one shop.

Was it difficult choosing to sell your shop after having it for so long?

Difficult wasn’t even the right word. Gut wrenching is more like it. In all honesty I don’t think I would have ever sold it if the right person hadn’t come along and offered the right price — yes, money did play an important role. However, the sale was also based on the new owner’s character. If I thought for a minute he was going to tarnish the shop name or not take care of the employees it never would have happened.

It must be hard seeing “your baby” under someone else’s control?

LOL, you don’t even know. Technically I only work as a consultant for Obscurities now, but I’m still in the shop every week. I know I haven’t really let go, and I’m not sure if I ever will. I am still emotional vested in that shop. I guess in a way it’s a good thing. What better than to have a former owner still supporting a shop that really gives him nothing? In a way it’s a huge compliment to everyone that works there. I still give praise to them all and consider it one of the best shops in the industry.

How have your feelings about the industry changed in any way, now that you’re not longer doing it for a day job?

I’m not sure my feelings have changed, other than to say that I miss piercing a bit. I think the biggest difference now is that I can speak my mind, where before I was always afraid to bite the hand that feeds me. In all honesty, I think the biggest change is that no one is my competition anymore. When you work in any industry, especially if you own a business, there is a certain amount of “us against them” mentality. Now, I can walk into any

tattoo or piercing shop and I feel welcome. Actually, even more than that, people now greet me differently. Now that I'm working in tattoo removal, artists are beginning to see me as an ally.

Having now gone through the full cycle in this industry, would you do it over again if you could rewind to being, say, sixteen?

Would I do it again? Of course! The last two decades have really shaped who I am. I can't imagine what I would be like if I had finished my engineering degree. Yes, there are numerous things I would change if I knew then what I know now, but my general direction would have been the same.

You went to school for engineering?

Prior to piercing I was a full time student and in my spare time I worked on several projects. I started a company doing a specialized form of tax filing. Yes, I come from a family of accountants. I worked in a movie theater, an art gallery, and even partnered with a guy to open an all ages club called the Discowtech one night a week at the gallery. It was actually my involvement in the club/gallery that led me to my first meeting with Fakir Musafar. He came to speak one day, took a shining to me, and I guess the rest is history.

My education has always been a bit spotty. I was an exceptional student when I wanted to be, but more often than not I didn't. In elementary and junior high I was an honor student, but high school was boring. So, I dropped out and got a GED. I became interested in computers so I went to college to get a degree in computer science engineering, but I discovered body piercing and chose to drop out. My father almost killed me. He put me through school and I quit to put holes in people. In the end, he was actually impressed by my accomplishments. He never liked my mods or the suspensions, but he was my accountant and did my taxes. He saw that I was a successful businessman and for that he was proud.

Did you ever consider going and finishing that degree?

I think about it a lot, but it's not the degree per say I want — it's the learning and gaining of knowledge I crave. At this point in my life, a degree has little to no value to me. It's simply a piece of paper. If I really wanted to get a degree I think an MBA would do me the most good, but I don't really care enough to pursue it. Although I'm an entrepreneur at heart, the business classes I've taken just weren't interesting enough and never seemed to apply to my businesses. I would rather sit in on lectures about quantum mechanics or human physiology. Oddly enough, I think most piercers, especially the old school ones, have a similar mentality. We just can't conform enough to deal with the politics of the educational system, but on the other hand we are obsessed with self-improvement and learning.

Looking back, what moments do you most treasure in your experiences as a shop owner and piercer/body modification artist?

I think I could write a novel answering this question. Off the top of my head, one of my oldest memories is sitting in my shop, after closing. I was alone and it was dark except for the neon in the windows and the lights from the clubs outside. I remember sitting there think-

ing, “This is mine... I built this and I am proud.” As for experiences with clients, there are just too many to name. I constantly think I’m done, I’m retired, I’m through, but I have so many positive memories of piercings that I think about taking it up again. I really don’t think the answer to this question would be complete without a suspension experience. Again, there are so many things I could name, first tandem, first knee, first suspension, Night of 1000 Scars, but the nine man mobile really takes the cake. Besides pulling off an amazing engineering feat, the whole trip with I think 20 or 22 people, the largest membership of TSD ever, was an experience I will never forget.

Is there any advice you’d offer to a piercer or tattoo artist that wants to also become a studio owner? What are some things you did right, and some things you did wrong?

I could write a book about the dos and don’ts of being a studio owner, so I will try to pick a few highlights. As with any business it’s location, location, location. You can have the greatest shop in the world but you will never succeed if you are in the wrong area. If the studio is difficult to find, there’s no parking, or in an area that won’t attract your clientele, you will never make it. Stability is key as well. If your artists switch every few months you’ll never be able to keep a decent client base. People like a certain amount of change, but they want reliability too. Also, customer service seems to be a big problem for many studios. It doesn’t matter how good you are, people want to be treated with respect. Why some shops think it’s ok to grunt at and ignore customers I will never know. Last but not least, quality. If you offer shitty jewelry, your shop is dirty and your tattoo artists suck, you won’t be very successful. Strangely enough, the average customer cares more about everything I have listed above, over price, but people still feel the need to offer discounts and slash prices. This might be a good way to get people in the door, but if you offer a cut-rate price, people perceive you to be a low quality service.

This last point leads to a good story. I know this tattoo artist that is such a good salesman. People would ask about a tattoo and he’d say something like, “You know the tattoo you want would look best with this ink.” Pulling out a random bottle he would say, “This ink comes from Tahiti and the color will really pop in your skin tone.” All along it was just regular bottle of ink. It didn’t really matter what kind of ink it was or where it came from, but he made his clients feel like he was giving them special attention. Even if this practice might not be the most ethical, people came back and loved him.

Now, all that said, honestly, opening a new shop, with all the competition and the sluggish US economy, may not be the best decision. At the very least, a new shop needs to have some serious funding behind it... But good luck to anyone that tries. If you are looking for a consultant I am definitely available.



How do you approach tattoo removal differently than someone who’s coming into this starting as a tattoo removal person, rather than someone who started with decades of pro-tattoo experience?

I always encourage people to lighten tattoos and recover them. Many tattoo removal clinics push total removal with the angle that getting a tattoo is a mistake. I feel very differently. It’s not that people hate tattoos — they are just unhappy with they have. As I try to

explain to people, doing a few treatments and covering the old tattoo is usually the best option. Yes, total removal is sometimes necessary for certain career moves, but total removal is a big commitment. Using a laser to lighten existing work is cheaper, faster, and is better for the tattoo industry. I see it as a win-win situation for everyone.

What is your goal with Fade Fast?

As I mentioned, using a laser to lighten tattoos is the perfect pretreatment to getting better artwork. Yes, I founded the business to help my clients, but it's more than that. I am working directly with tattoo artists to fix, rework, and completely change their client's tattoos. I know that some removal clinics are becoming more and more tattoo friendly. However, other than Fade Fast, I only know of one other company that works directly with artist to laser edit tattoos, Rethink Your Ink in Marion Illinois.

Realistically, what percentage of people eventually regret their tattoos?

Regret? Well I don't think anyone should regret any decision, but that's not how most people see things. I think that people's decisions to alter or remove tattoos have more to do with how their lives or ideas have changed. What was once a good idea may not be a good idea now. I would say that most people with multiple tattoos want to change them, whether it's to remove, cover, or even add to them. As for true regret, it's hard to say. Most people I work on say they regret their tattoo, but once I get them talking, more often than not, they don't regret getting it, they just aren't happy with what they have now. To me, this is more about perception. So with that said, 90? 95? 99? percent of people with multiple tattoos want something about their designs altered. True regret? Well, maybe tattoos that hinder their lives or remind them of an ex... but then again, aren't those the things that have actually shaped their lives and made them who they are?

As someone doing removal, what advice would you give to someone thinking about getting their first tattoo?

Now that's a loaded question. Should my answer be, go crazy and pay me to remove them in the future? As funny as that it is, it's really not the answer. Yes, the technology is getting there, but removal is not a quick, simple process. Lasers are great tools for providing more options, but you can't expect miracles. My real answer, "Think before you ink. How will this tattoo affect your future? Will it interfere with any future decisions? Make a plan. At eighteen you might not be thinking body suit, but at thirty will that tiny piece affect the flow of a half sleeve?"

If there are any life lessons best learned early on, it's that we all change. The more you plan and the better you prepare, the happier you will be. From a very early age I wanted hand and neck tattoos, but I got 3/4 sleeves and tried to be patient. At thirty-six, I had created a life and a career that allowed for my mods, so now my hands and neck are tattooed. Did I make mistakes? Sure, my back piece is a huge mess. I rushed into it, and now I'm a stuck with it. Will I remove it? Maybe... Who knows?

What kinds of tattoos are easiest and hardest to remove? Are different parts of the body different to do removal on?

The technology of laser tattoo removal is based on light absorption. The darker the color,

the more energy it will absorb and the easier it is to remove. Simple answer, but the problem is bit more complex. Different inks react to different wavelengths. Skin types and skin color also play an important role in laser removal. Plus, the quality of the tattoo is a key component as well as your immune system. The body's lymphatic system does most of the work so each person varies dramatically. Generally poor quality, dark tattoos on high blood flow areas on light skinned people with strong immune systems are easiest to remove. Conversely, well-done, light-colored tattoos on people of darker skin in low blood flow areas of the body that might have slower healing are much more difficult.

How have your friends in the industry responded to your new business?

For the most part I have been greeted very positively by most of my peers. However, I have had some very close friends react very negatively. I chalk it up to a misunderstanding and after a small discussion most people come around when they realize I'm in it to help the field of tattooing not hurt it. There are of course a few exceptions. I think laser tattoo removal and tattooing are complementary services and work great in the same location. However, one tattooer that is an old friend of mine still thinks the two do not belong in the same location. I guess we will just agree to disagree.

What would you say to people who believe that tattoo removal is fundamentally wrong or a betrayal to the tattoo industry? Not that I can imagine anyone with any sense or objectivity actually believes this?

You would be surprised. I have found it to be a first reaction by some tattoo artists — not many, but it has happened. Usually I just explain who I am, my work in the industry, and how I see the laser as the perfect pretreatment for cover-ups. Nine times out of ten I get a very positive response, but there is always someone that thinks I'm Judas. In the beginning I was got very defensive, but now I just smile, shake their hand, and give them some promotional materials.

What do you think about the “easy to remove” tattoo ink that's been in the media lately? Good idea or bad idea? How do you think that “easy” removal would change the tattoo industry and culture?

I used to have mixed emotions about the Freedom-2 ink, but now I'm starting to think it's a good idea and here's why. No matter what ink you use, tattooing is still a long and painful process. I can see the modified culture not liking the fact that people can get a tiny tattoo and remove it a year later, but think about it this way. You sat under the needle to get it done. As far as I'm concerned you still “earned” the piece. So, yes, perception about small tattoos might change, but what about big work? What if you could spend ten, twenty, thirty plus hours on a piece and then remove all or part of it a few years later and start over? The impact on tattooing would be incredible. More work for artists, more modified people walking the earth, more social acceptance. “Oh that, I will get it removed later if I have to.” In the beginning there might be some disgruntled heavily modified people, but once the ink starts being used on a large scale, no one will complain. There will still be people that love tattoos and people that hate them.

Do you think tattoo artists should tattoo with removal in mind?

Well, I don't think my opinion matters, but I have never thought people should get tat-

toos done with the idea of removing them. Even if the ink is easier to remove, there is a permanence that is inherent with tattooing. I've always tried to consider the future in every decision, so in a sense, yes I'm sure some will tattoo with removal in mind. My guess though is it will be a small percentage. Tattoo artists are proud of their work and I can't imagine many of them want their clients to remove their artwork.

I do think there is one huge application that people are overlooking. Tattoo apprentices have to work on people. If they could work on clients with less worry of mistakes, wouldn't inks like Freedom-2 be a huge asset? Plus, wouldn't artists feel a bit less guilty about tattooing a piece of flash or name if they knew it could be removed later?

What sorts of changes have you observed in people via removal? That is, what sort of things do people usually get removed, and why?

My business is different than most in that I work with heavily tattooed people. Many of many clients are clearing way for new work, so I spend a good portion of my time simply lightening dark areas. When it comes to the realm of total removal, you guessed it — the number one request is to remove names. Other removals have to do with placement. For instance I am removing a wrist tattoo on a woman that needs to hide it for work. Technically my job is tattoo removal, but I always try to encourage people to lighten and recover. In the grand scheme of things it means less treatments, faster results, and it helps people keep a positive attitude about their tattoos and the modified community at large.

Do you think this will in time become the norm?

I can't say if it will become the norm, but I do believe it's the wave of the future. Complete removal is great and for some people it's the best alternative, but for the modified community, laser removal will no doubt become a companion service to tattooing. So far most of my clients want entire pieces faded for complete cover-ups. However, I have been working with people to target specific areas just for the sake of editing the piece.

What equipment do you use, and what training was involved?

I use two pieces of equipment. First is the Palomar Q-switched YAG laser. There are lots of lasers available and they all have their pros and cons. I decided to purchase this unit because it's designed to work best on blacks and reds. Being that I focus heavily on lightening dark tattoos for re-cover, this laser is perfectly suited for my needs. Plus, it has a unique wave-blending feature that gives it enormous flexibility that no other system offers.

Second, I use a Zimmer Cryo unit, which blows negative 22 degree air to keep the area cooled during the procedure. Blowing cold air on the skin isn't necessary, but after polling multiple people that have experienced constant cooling during a removal treatment, I determined it was a good investment. Plus, when it's used in conjunction with pre-icing the area, many people say the pain is comparable or even less than getting the initial tattoo.

As for training, my initial education came from the National Laser Institute in Arizona. The school is definitely geared toward estheticians, but they also offered a course on laser tattoo removal. Then upon purchasing the laser, Palomar provided further training on the use of the unit. In all actuality, my biggest learning curve came from doing treatments on myself. I not only worked within the standard parameters of the laser, but I have and still con-

tinue to do tests to determine better methods to speed removal and to reduce the number of treatments.

What “test” have you done and why?

The main thing I have done is to tattoo nine black rectangles on the inside of my right arm, specifically to remove them. The first was not treated, the second treated once, the third twice and so on. I wanted a physical example of how the process works. Plus I wanted to show my commitment to the trade. How better to earn a client's trust than to perform laser removal on myself first? I actually liked the image so much — I use it as my company logo.

I now have four other tests in the works that I plan to start in the near future. Once I get each of them rolling, I plan to blog each of them step by step.

Are there any people you turn away?

Actually, there are far more to turn away in this field than in a tattoo or piercing studio. As with any modification, I will not perform any laser treatment on clients that are on drugs or intoxicated. Plus, certain people either are not good candidates or simply cannot safely have laser treatments done. For instance, if the person has taken Accutane in the last year or are on any photo reactive medications there can be serious complications associated with the procedure. Also, there are numerous other factors to take into account. Were you aware that laser treatments can cause herpes flare-ups? The treatment area would have to be where the viral outbreak appears, but still, removing lip liner is a request I do get... bet you were thinking about different area, weren't you?

How do you promote or market Fade Fast? I know that a lot of tattooing marketing involves word of mouth and handing out business cards, but I don't imagine you walk up to people and are, like, “hey, your tattoo sucks — I can help you with that!”

Funny that you say that, I see bad tattoos all the time, and yes I want to walk up and hand them a card, but how do you that? I think I'm pretty creative, and I've tried to think of a funny and non-insulting approach, but I have yet to figure it out. I do several things to market the business; print advertising, keeping a laser removal blog, bugging an old friend to do an article for BME, but my main marketing has been through local tattoo shops.

I've been in the business so long that I know a good chunk of the artists that work in Dallas. So, my first plan of action was to go door-to-door, hand out promotional packs and simply tell everyone more about what I doing and why. It has actually been a very cool and educational experience. Back when I owned my studio I'd only been by a handful of local shops. Now I've seen the insides, artist stations, and even bio areas of eighty shops. Well, truth be told, only a handful of shops gave me the full tour, but still it was great seeing all those places.

Although I do get business from all my PR work, my main referrals still come from tattoo shops.

Mohan Gurung

Nepalese tattoo artist Mohan had me seriously thinking about a much more exotic excursion than my normal travels on the Baja! This was part of an ill-fated series of interviews with artists in lesser known international locations that unfortunately I was never able to continue (next was a small-town artist in India).

If you find yourself in Kathmandu, Nepal (a small nation just north of India) with at least a thousand rupees (about \$20) to spend on a tattoo, the best known artist of the fifty or so working in the city is Mohan Gurung at Mohan's Tattoo Inn (mohanstattooinn.com), a modern studio with all the sterility control you'd expect from a Western studio. His clients are both locals and tourists, and he leads the wave of popularizing tattoos at his studio where he tattoos — often in twelve hour shifts — teaches tattooing, and sells equipment. Mohan and I recently chatting by email about his art and the experience of running a studio in the Hindu Kingdom of Nepal.



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How were you first introduced to art?

When I was a child, I used to draw portraits of my family members, and I still have a stone carving that I did at the age of seven. I drew only for my personal satisfaction, not for any sort of fame or to have others appreciate my art.

You grew up in Nepal?

Yes, I grew up in Nepal and have traveled to a few other countries.

Were you exposed to tattooing as a child?

As a child I saw traditional tattoos like names, moons, suns, and Hindu gods, which were of low quality and had limited color. As a teenager I began to see saw modern tattoos of astonishing quality on tourists visiting Nepal — we used to observe them with fascination. Also, I was into rock music, where I saw rock stars with tattoos that fascinated me. However, in the beginning I never thought this could be my mainstream job. I decided to start doing tattoos because I loved doing art, and I feel so disconnected from the materialistic world... Tattooing totally freed me from it.

Was there a tattoo scene in Nepal that influenced you?

We do have a traditional tattoo scene in Nepal, and I was also influenced by European

and American artists.

What did your family think of you becoming a tattoo artist?

In the early days none of my family members were supportive, except one of my sisters, but at present all or most of them are happy with what I'm doing.

How did you actually learn to tattoo?

I was visiting Korea, and went in to get a tattoo. I became captivated by it, and learned from the very same person that I got tattooed by. The deeper I got into the intensity of this art, the more polished my craft of tattooing got. In addition to this, I met so many other artists from whom I got more knowledge that helped me refine my art.

Who are your influences as a tattoo artist?

Guy Aitchison, Horiyoshi family, Leu family, Sailor Jerry, Paul Booth, to name a few, and Boris from Hungary as well as Aaron Bell.

What kind of equipment do you use?

I started with Mickey Sharpz brands (machine, colors, needles, and so on), which was recommended by my mentor, and then I tried a lot different brands. However I found Mickey Sharpz to be the best and at present I am still using it. In addition to all this I am using colors from Dyanamic, Japanese Sumi, Starbrite, Intenz, and Premium, and needles from Jetfrance. To control sterility I use an autoclave.

Is it hard getting equipment in Nepal?

Back when I started it was very hard to get all the equipment necessary for tattooing. Now it's easily obtainable due to the Internet.

What are your favorite tattoos to do?

I do all sorts of tattoos with realistic touches, but my favorite is to do portrait art.

To what extent is your tattoo art influenced by local art, culture, and religion?

Nepal is rich in local art and culture and has multiple religions, cultures, and arts — as I grew up in that, it got me inspired to some extent.

I've seen quite a few religious tattoos that you've done — why do most of your customers get tattoos?

It really depends on the customer... Much of the time people do it for memories, and for some of them it's fashion and passion. I love tattooing on customers who understood what the tattoo means.

Do you tattoo mostly local people, or tourists?

Probably about 80% are local and the rest are tourists. To some extent their choices are similar, but most of the time it's pretty different.

Tell me about an interesting tattoos you've done recently...

It may surprise you that one of the most touching tattoos I did was that of a portrait of

Osama Bin Laden.

After hearing about my interest in portrait tattoos, a high school buddy came to my shop with the notion of having incomparable people's portraits on his back. We were pretty much confused as to whose face we should start with. Despite the controversies, he wanted to start with Bin Laden's portrait — we had no political views regarding the concept and did not intend to offend any ethnic group. It was never a big controversy here, however it is something provocative to many Westerners. Anyway, the back piece is still in the process of becoming a masterpiece. We've been tattooing important figures from different walks of life that have made an impact on the world, and leave it to the public to decide who among them is "good" and who's not. Overall the concept is "Humanity's Different Faces".

With Nepal being a Hindu state, are there any Hindu religious "laws" or traditions about tattooing?

There are no specific laws, but there are beliefs that Hindu mantras or God-related things shouldn't be tattooed below the chest.

Is the general public friendly toward tattoos?

Tattooing is no longer taboo. These days the general public are accepting it with ease, and slowly it is going towards becoming mainstream industry. There are a few tattoo studios in Nepal at present.

How do you feel about tattooing hands, faces, and other "public" skin?

I feel fine tattooing on faces, hands, or on public skin as long as a client understands the whole situation. I only turn people away — sadly — if they are intoxicated, or have skin-related problems or health complications.

Besides your tattoo school, have you ever apprenticed anyone?

I've apprenticed people a couple of times. On the whole I choose them on the basis of interest and enthusiasm, the learning attitude, hard work, and the patience they have.

What do you think you'd be if you weren't a tattoo artist?

Absolutely no idea! I can't imagine life without tattooing. I suppose I will retire when I am old, but I will be always be in touch with this world no matter how old and physically weak I become. I have never regretted this.

I heard one of your customers suggest that Nepal should use you to attract more tourists, offering people "tattoo vacations"... What advice would you have to people who want to travel to Nepal, and maybe get tattooed while they're there?

Nepal is a beautiful country with good-hearted people, and modern tattoos are becoming a fast trend here. Just be sure you go through the artist's work and the environment of the shop you are going to have the tattoo at.

Thanks for talking to us! Return flights to Nepal seem to start at around \$800 return... hmmm... time for a vacation?

Jacki Randall

As much as Jacki comes from a traditional motorcycle-leather-tattoo background, she's very much an outsider to modern refined tattoo culture. I think she must feel that as well, because when this article was first published she felt that I'd disrespected her or made fun of her — which couldn't be further from the truth, as the article was meant to celebrate her special contributions.



Jacki Randall is a self-taught artist and tattooist working at her shop Charm City Tattoo in Baltimore. She's had shows at the Harrisburg Museum of Art, Pendragon & Fontanne Galleries, the Nat'l Cathedral College of Preachers, and other venues, and her publications have been widely seen including in International Tattoo Art, On Our Backs, and Independent Biker, and she's been publishing lesbian-themed cartoons professionally for twenty-seven years now. You can see a portfolio of her tattoos on BME, as well as visiting her at Charm City Tattoo.com. In this age of slickly presented superstar artists like Kat Von D (with all due respect to Kat's obvious talent), Jacki Randall remains one of the few tattoo artists still deeply immersed in the original outlaw outsider spirit of tattooing

Have you always been an artist?

My mother had saved a drawing of our Amazon Parrot I made at eighteen months... I don't recall doing it, but I don't ever remember not drawing.

What did your mother think of tattooing and how did you get into it?

My parents had a very biased, narrow view of tattoos and tattooing. They didn't understand it at all.

Over the years I've become personally acquainted with their stereotypes, but I don't identify with them.

As a kid I'd see tattoos sporadically. Like most parents, my folks tried to protect me from interesting things. In elementary school, I was the one handed the marker and begged to draw the skull and dagger on your arm. My attention wasn't focused on tattooing till one

In tattooing the finest illumination happens when you're in the zone where the work speaks to you, as in any art.

What sorts of tattooing do you most enjoy?

I enjoy anything I can use as a vehicle. Bizarre and intelligent clients are the most fun.

Beautiful subject matter is always desirable. Most of my fun pieces were drafted on the spot; Winnie the Shit, DeathChef, Bongstoner, Notre Dyke, PMS Skull/RudeGirl for example.

Most bizarre? The Holy Royal Cheeseburger, Prune Juice Dominatrix, Goddess Kali disemboweling a hermaphrodite...won't see that everyday, even now!

From time to time, I have just picked up the machine and worked 'cold', but that's on the very few who know me well. There seems to be a consensus of tattooists who don't understand the term 'freehand'. My understanding from the old farts who worked thirty and forty years or more, was that anything drawn on the skin, then tattooed, is Freehand.



Tell me about some of your experiences as a tattoo artist?

I can't say which stories are more absurd; accounts of tattooists, patrons, hangers-on or spectators.

People setting themselves on fire, dancing in the work area with swords, bullets through the floor, junkies, nude drunks, perverts, obscene calls from slumber parties and

shut-ins, street people en route to the drunk tank, bored troublemakers looking for places to be ejected from, winos, smelly lawyers, cops wanting to be gangsters, convicts, pseudointellectuals obsessed by 'coolness', clients automatically regressing to previous lifetimes, lewd geriatric exhibitionists, sufferers of psychopathia loquatia, 'performance artists', gamey tweekers, ghosts of dead artists, etc...ad nauseum...

I must've called this up with the 'Telling Them What They Want to Hear' 'toon...

It is because of these abysmal work conditions I am only now getting around to doing what I am capable of.

There was this nasty, arrogant gal who looked down her nose while informing me that I would have the rare privilege of painting her as a nude goddess on a pegasus. Snowballs in Hell.

I recall a hanger-on who told one tall tale after another. Couldn't help himself. He finally embarrassed himself gone as soon as he realized no one was buying his shit about being contracted by the gov't to design a special tattoo machine. Like his '48 Knucklehead wasn't embarrassing enough.

What do you think of the tattoo “reality” shows?

I consider the tattoo shows to be unwatchable crap. Every time you hear ‘reality’, get ready for scripted soap operas. If I had a buck for every time in the 90’s I said; “..one of these days they’ll make a show out of this...” But a shoot where I worked could only safely be nestled between Taxicab Confessions and OZ.

I watched the occult, motorcycles, feminism, culture, lesbianism, and more get co-opted, assimilated, pasteurized, sterilized, homogenized, sanitized, neutralized, bastardized and misrepresented, made palatable, and packaged for mass-consumption; why would tattooing be any different?

All part of the New World Odor pushing us ever nearer to ‘Armageddon’ (courtesy; The ‘faith’ industry) and the peasant/aristocracy model endorsed by Caligula on the Potomac. Marketing/programming is sponsored by financiers who support the three guys who own the media and approved by the lords of the mcprisons, insurance, medical, and pharmaceutical behemoths.

If you can get it at the mall is it still desirable?

Do you turn people away?

Of course I turn people away; No business is better than bad business. But who am I to judge? I’m the person who refuses the act of holding humanity back by propagating ignorance and hatred.

In regard to hands, faces, etc., it’s only responsible to let them know what their limitations will be.

Why make life harder?

What is Art?

What is Art?

“Shit-in-a-frame” is NOT art.

People proudly flaunt hideous tattoos as though they were Michaelangelos.

“What is Art” is subjective, and political.

Some of what I love are; creating, museums, guitars, birds, archeology, locomotives, stained glass, anthropology, forensics, astrology, thunderstorms, occult sciences, paranormal phenomenon, culture, history, and my partner of nearly twenty years, Robin.



John Joyce

John Joyce is the ideal modern piercing artist — deeply talented and technically precise, clean with an eye for running a professional studio, and with an exacting hand that makes him a great scarification artist as a bonus. In addition, John has been a long term contributor to BME, as well as being part of its “Question of the Day” volunteer staff.



After being turned on to quality piercing by a dedicated body artist after a series of body piercing and tattoo misadventures as a teen, John Joyce decided to set himself on a career as a piercer. With much hard work — and very long hours — he’s now the owner of Scarab Body Arts in Syracuse, NY, where he’s the head piercer as well as an experienced scarification artist. He’s run his shop and his life with the code his parents raised him with — “anything worth doing is

worth doing well” — and he works with a focus on quality materials, quality service, and safety.

Tell me a little about yourself?

I’m thirty years old and grew up just outside of Syracuse, New York. I’m the oldest of three, and had a very normal childhood. We grew up in the country, so most of my childhood was spent making forts in the woods, riding ATVs, or playing hide and seek in the corn fields surrounding our house. My father worked hard, and my mother stayed home to take care of myself, my younger brother, and my younger sister. I did very well in school, was on the wrestling team, and like all kids that grow up in the country I worked hard and partied just as hard. After high school, I went to college briefly for Architecture, and joined the Carpenters Union.

What did you do before you got professionally involved in body modification?

I’ve been working for as long as I can remember. My father is a workaholic. He believes if you want something you should work for it, and you should never have your hand out unless you really need it and have done everything you can for it first, and he instilled that in both myself and my younger brother. When I was a kid, I used to spend summers working on farm in Canada. I learned all about hard work there. They had hundreds of acres in Dacre, Ontario. They milked their cows by hand, and did everything the old fashioned way. When I first started going up there they didn’t even have electricity. I would get up every morning and get on a 3-wheeler and go find the cows with a couple herding dogs, we would bring them back to the barn and that was the start of my day, then it was on to working in the hay, or the pigs, or the chickens, or whatever. They were some very long days, but I loved it. Any free time was spent playing on the lake, sitting around a fire, and just enjoying the outdoors.

When I was about fifteen I started working for a commercial flooring company on week-

ends or whenever there was a break from school. I started as a laborer, and by the time I was seventeen I was installing floors by myself and sometimes had guys working underneath me. This is when I joined the Carpenters Union. I worked at three different flooring companies by the time I was nineteen and did some warehouse work at one of them. I put a lot of hours in and even though I haven't been doing it for eleven years, my knees are still a mess from it. I would look at the older guys that had been crawling around on concrete for twenty years, and they could barely stand. I knew I needed to figure something else out.

Since I had been reading blueprints for the last few years while doing floors, and I liked to draw and design things, Architecture seemed like a good thing to go to college for. I did very well in school and liked it quite a bit. There was a lot of creative freedom at first and even though it was a lot of work, it was fun. Then, they took that creative freedom away, and it just became tedious, and soooo much work. My hats off to anyone in an Architecture program at any University.

I had a bunch of other little jobs as well. I worked retail at a store that was a lot like Hot Topic, only before Hot Topic was around, as well as a Halloween store. I also served ice cream at a Friendly's, and when I was very young I mowed lawns at a cemetery with one of my uncles.

But these days you're the owner of a tattoo and body modification studio.

Yes, I currently own Scarab Body Arts in Syracuse, NY. I do full body piercings, henna design, scarification, and I am also a NY State Licensed Massage Therapist. People can get in touch with me through the studio email, scarabbodyarts@gmail.com, the studio phone number is 315-473-9383, the studio myspace page is <http://www.myspace.com/scarabbodyarts>, and my IAM page is [j_scarab](http://www.myspace.com/j_scarab).

When did you first become aware of body piercing?

I'm not sure when I first became aware of piercings. I was always around people with tattoos — my dad had two, my mom had two or three, and their friends had a couple. Other than ear piercings I never really saw anyone with piercings, and this was before you saw people with piercings every time you turn on the TV. I guess my first exposure to piercing in a broad sense was National Geographic Magazine. I grew up next door to my grandfather Ray — he was a man full of knowledge and stories.

Since this was before every house had at least one computer and was hooked up to the Internet, I did all my research for school papers at his house. He had not one, but three computers, can you believe that, haha? He also had two or three full sets of encyclopedias, and in chronological order he had every issue of National Geographic Magazine. Whenever I was doing research on outer space, or underwater sea life, or whatever, I would run across these pictures of people in Africa with stretched lip piercings, and stretched earlobes. I thought it was amazing! I started going to see him every time he got a new issue to see the photos in these magazines. I was intrigued and the first time I saw a septum piercing in one of the photos, I couldn't help but wonder how it was done, and how I could get one. It still to this day is one of my favorite piercings.

Was that your first piercing?

No, my first piercing was my earlobe. I was probably thirteen or fourteen and had been bugging my mother about getting it done. She finally agreed, but only if I let my uncle do it for me. Since I was the oldest in my family, my uncle was basically my older brother, and I thought he was the coolest dude around. I mean, he introduced me to Pink Floyd The Wall, Led Zeppelin, KISS, Motley Crue, and Mountain Dew — all the good stuff, hahaha! Anyway, how could I turn that offer down? So, to my mother's surprise, I said yes. My uncle took one of his piercing studs, soaked it in rubbing alcohol, and stuck it through my ear. The whole time my mom was telling me I could back out at anytime. I know it wasn't the cleanest, safest way to do it, but I wouldn't have had it any other way. My favorite person in the world was giving me my first piercing, while listening to Led Zeppelin! It was my very own coming of age ritual, and I loved every second of it.

I still hadn't met anyone with any professional piercings done, and hadn't seen any, until my parents made the mistake of taking me to get my first tattoo. I started asking for a tattoo on my sixteenth birthday. I didn't know what I wanted. I just wanted a tattoo — I needed a tattoo. My father had one, my mother had one, and all the adults I looked up to had one, so I thought I should have one too. When I turned seventeen, I got my first tattoo. My parents took me, and my mom got one with me. I had no idea what I wanted, and it was basically a flash shop, so I started looking at the walls. I figured since I was a scorpion, I would get a scorpion. Super original huh? Haha...

Well, I found a flash page that had some scorpions on it and I picked one out. The one I wanted had a rose in its claw, so I told the guy I wanted that scorpion without the rose. He told me "NO." He said, "that scorpion comes with a rose — if you want one without a rose, pick a different scorpion."

I was seventeen, maybe 115 pounds, and he was in his forties and probably 250 pounds. I didn't know any better and man was that guy intimidating. So guess what, I got a scorpion with a rose. Fan-fuckin-tastic!!!! For about six months anyways. Then I hated it. But while I was there, for the first time, I saw a jewelry case full of body jewelry, and I saw a portfolio full of things that I had no idea you could pierce. This got my wheels turning and I couldn't stop thinking about getting something — anything — pierced. Two weeks later I went back and got my tongue pierced. I asked him about piercing my septum, but he told me I wouldn't be able to hide it until it was healed so I settled on a tongue. He didn't ask for ID, he didn't ask anything actually, just sit down, pierce and done. On the way home, the ball fell off the barbell and I almost lost the piercing. On top of that, it was not pierced straight at all. That was my first professional piercing, and the first of many not so great experiences.

When did you decide you actually wanted to become a piercer?

Once I got my first piercing, I was hooked. I started looking into getting other piercings done. Unfortunately, even though my parents were fine with me getting tattooed, they didn't understand my desire to get pierced. Out of respect for them, and maybe a little out of fear, I stuck to piercings that were easy to hide. And thus began my journey of bad piercing experience after bad piercing experience. I got my nipple pierced, which turned out to be placed far too deep. I got my tragus pierced, with jewelry that was far too large. On top of that, after the needle was in, the guy left the room to take a phone call before putting

the jewelry in. After this I got my nipples repierced, and while one came out perfect, the other side was horribly crooked. I had a Prince Albert piercing done that was far too deep and done with jewelry that was too thin. It ended up tearing and bleeding like crazy. I even had problems when I went to get me lobes pierced at 10 gauge. The guy pierced over the one hole I had and it went well, but the other ear he lost transfer on. He reinserted the 10 gauge needle and lost transfer again! This happened four times before he got the jewelry in. He turned my earlobe into hamburger. There wasn't a lot of information back then and I went through every studio around. I could go on, but I think you get the point by now. I was always taught that anything worth doing is worth doing well. Obviously the majority of piercers then didn't grow up with that mentality. It wasn't like today when you could walk into any number of \$20 piercing studios to get that kind of service. I was paying just as much, if not more, than I charge today for piercings, and that is with much lower quality jewelry. I would say I was paying an average of \$60 a piercing, sometimes more.

Eventually I was recommended to a new piercer that had just set up a small studio in Syracuse. It took me a while to find, since it was hidden in the very back of a salon with no sign outside. Once I found it, I decided to get my tongue repierced. I was completely amazed at the professionalism of this piercer. his knowledge, his demeanor, and his bedside manner — everything was top notch. I started having him redo all the piercings that I had done from other studios. He showed me a septum retainer and explained that I could start with that to hide it. Finally, I could get my septum pierced — the one piercing I had wanted for sooo long. I became a very loyal client and we became friends. I watched his studio grow into a new location, I watched him bring in a tattoo artist, and I spent as much time as possible in his studio.

One day he mentioned to me that he was thinking about apprenticing someone. I jumped at the chance. He told me that it was very important to him that whoever he brought in knew about the history of modern piercing, and that the person proved themselves. He gave me all kinds of articles and interviews to read. He gave me a copy of *Modern Primitives*, which I read cover to cover and was completely in awe of the people and the stories in it. He showed me *PFIQ*, and *Body Play* magazines. I loved all of it. He introduced me to *BME*, where I found even more information — I couldn't get enough. I read about Fakir, Jim Ward and Gauntlet, Keith Alexander,

Jon Cobb, Sailor Sid, Doug Malloy, and more... I figured a good way to prove I was serious was to sign up for either the Fakir Intensives in California, or the Gauntlet courses in NYC. I filled out the information for the Gauntlet courses, I booked a room at the Gramercy Park Hotel and I spent a lot of money getting the trip together. I received my Gauntlet handbook, read it cover to cover and couldn't wait for start date. I took a bus to NYC, found my hotel and decided to walk around and find where the classes were scheduled to take place so I could get there on time first thing in the morning. I was only about



a block and a half away, but when I got there the doors were chained shut and it looked abandoned. Being a Sunday I convinced myself that they were just closed on Sundays and all would be fine in the morning. First thing Monday morning, I show up at the address, and it's still chained up. I waited around for a while and no one else showed up. This was my first time in NYC and I had no idea what the hell I should do. I went back to the hotel, made calls to every number I could find on the paperwork I had. Most of the numbers had been disconnected, but I eventually got a hold of someone. They told me that they were very sorry, and that I must of somehow fallen through the cracks because everyone was supposed to be notified that Gauntlet was no longer in business and the classes were canceled. I asked about getting my money back, and was told that everything was tied up in legal matters and it was just gone.

So here I was, in New York City for the first time, nothing to do, and stressing about all the money I was out. I found as many piercing and tattoo studios as I could and checked them all out. I went to Venus, I went to NY Adorned, I went to some place called East Side Ink (I'm not completely positive that's right), but at this place I talked to guy named Brian who said he had just left a position at Gauntlet and was very sorry to hear that I got stuck in the middle. I called Shawn, the guy I was hoping would train me and he was also surprised at what had happened but said as soon as I was home, my apprenticeship would start. I guess I proved I was serious about getting into the industry.

I loved every second of my apprenticeship. I was there six, sometimes seven days a week, and on top of that I was working thirty to forty hours a week to pay my bills. I soaked up everything I could, and couldn't of been happier.

What did your family think about your decision?

Starting off, my family was apprehensive. My father especially just didn't understand piercings. That being said, even though he voiced his concern constantly, he was still very supportive. His main concern was stability. He's a family man and he worries a lot. Not getting a steady paycheck, not having health benefits, and the lack of job security really made him nervous.

Those concerns really bothered him when I started my own studio. Like I said, he worries a lot, and he knows how hard it can be to start a new business. Not having the stability of a paycheck every week, and probably never having health benefits, really made him nervous. But he supported me through all of it. He helped me with build-out of the new studio, he bought me lunch when I couldn't afford it, and stood by my side through all the tough spots. I really can't thank him enough. Now that my studio has been open for a while, he's very proud. I took a chance, I worked my ass off, and I pulled it off.

Now that you're on your own, how do you continue improving your skills?

I'm always improving my skills as a piercer. I've been doing this for almost eleven years now and I still change how I do things. There is always someone better out there and you can always strive to be better. New techniques, new tools, new products, there is always something new to learn. I remember the first time I talked to Tom Brazda online. I had already been piercing for years at this point, but in one conversation he opened up so much to me. It made me realize how much more there was to piercing. That guy is a piercing nerd

— he is so knowledgeable, so open, and so willing to share. There are so many people out there like that. They know so much and are so willing to help other piercers. I think that is why so many of us “old timers” are looked down upon for our view of the new breed of piercers. When I first started piercing I talked to everyone I could to gain information, and there are so many people now who are completely willing to share that info — Tom Brazda, Ron Garza, Brian Decker, Dave Gilstrap, Pat Tidwell, Brain Skelle, myself... The list is endless, but the newer breed of piercer doesn't seem to care. They don't look for that information before they try something new — they just jump in. The information is so much easier to get now, and they just don't seem to care as much. The learning forum on IAM is a great example.

Are you an APP member?

Oh the APP... where to begin...

I am not a member but I love the APP. That being said, I think whether you are an APP member or not, if you are a piercer you should make every effort possible to attend the APP conference. I spent years piercing in an area where I was the only one using implant grade internally threaded jewelry, and practicing proper aseptic technique. It was amazing going to the conference and being surrounded by piercers with the same ethics. I learned a lot, not just in the classes, but in the discussions that happened throughout the week, over food or over a beer. I made some great contacts, and great friends.

What secondary education do you have on top of your apprenticeship?

I keep my CPR, first aid, and bloodborne pathogens certificates up to date. On top of that, in 2006 I enrolled at the Onondaga School of Therapeutic Massage. I took Anatomy & Physiology, Pathology, Myology, and so on... We talked a lot about how the body heals, and it really went hand in hand with my piercing background. I graduated in December 2006 with the Salutatorian award. I would have had valedictorian but they dropped a couple points off my grade point average for missing time to go to the APP conference and for Scar Wars in LA. Going through massage school really got me excited again about learning new things. I also take classes yearly at the Association of Professional Piercers conference.

Do you see piercing as an art form or as a craft?

I think piercing is more of a craft, at least on the technical side of it. But to be a good piercer you need to be able to put an artistic spin on it. You need to be able to look at someone's face and be able to see if that Monroe piercing is going to look good where you have your mark, or maybe a millimeter or two to the side. Anybody can learn the skills to run a needle through someone and put jewelry in, but a good piercer takes placement and angles, and everything else into consideration to make it look as good as it possibly can.

Do you think they'll ever make a reality TV show about piercing? You could star on "Syracuse Steel" or something?

Oh man, I hope not. Who knows though — I never would've guessed that there would be shows like Miami Ink, or LA Ink, or London Ink, or Wherever else Ink. I don't know about a show just on piercing, but I think sooner or later instead of just tattoo studios, there

will be studios that offer both tattoos and piercing on these shows. Piercers meet some interesting people so I'm sure it's only a matter of time. In fact, one of the artists that work with me, Mike Haines, has been saying for years now that they need to do a show on a whole studio environment. He started saying that back when American Chopper first started and the bike shows were just coming out — this was before Miami Ink and all those.

I've had so many great clients over the past decade. I had a woman who had been in the studio with her partner a few times and eventually asked me to pierce her as well. It was a very emotional piercing not only for her, but for me as well. She had been abused as a child, and since then had never had a male touch her or look at her without clothes on. Even her doctors were female. Watching me work with her partner eventually made her comfortable enough to ask me to work on her. We did a Christina piercing — there were many tears shed, but there were also many smiles and hugs when it was all over. It was great to be a part of her self discovery, her growth, and her reclaiming of a part of her.

I once had a 68 year old man come in for a Prince Albert after his wife died. He had always wanted one but his wife just didn't understand. Out of respect for her, he never got it done. Once she passed away, he decided it was time. First and only piercing he had ever had, and he did fantastic. Smiled through the whole thing.

I also had a woman that was in her seventies. She had never had a piercing before and had always worn clip on earrings. Every year for Christmas and other holidays people would buy her all kinds of nice earrings, because they had no idea her ears weren't really pierced. She decided it was time to wear some of those, so she came in. Even though it was just a set of 18 gauge earlobes, she was so happy and excited. She came in a couple times after that showing me some of the jewelry she had never been able to wear in the past, now in her ears.

I just recently had a couple come in for their 25th wedding anniversary. For their first piercings ever, she got a vertical hood and he got a scrotum piercing. It was great — they were a lot of fun, happy, and everyone left with smiles.

One of my absolute favorite clients is a guy named Aaron. He originally came to me about his ears. He had two stretched lobe piercings in both ears, and the skin between them was dieing due to poor circulation. I scalped the holes into one larger hole. He had a bunch of piercings done at other studios in the past and had problems with most of them. He was surprised at how easily everything healed up after I worked on him and he became a very loyal client. I have since done a number of procedures on him, including a bunch of piercings, dermal punches, and a lip scalpelling. He now wears a 9/16" labret plug in his lip. He was amazed at the difference the higher quality jewelry made and has had no problems with any of his piercings since having them done at my studio.

I really like being apart of people's lives like that. So many people get piercings to mark an occasion, whether it's a birthday, an anniversary, a new job, whatever, but it's always a positive thing and it's great to share that with people.

Do you have a favorite piercing to do?

I've been doing this a long time now, and at this point I don't really have a favorite pierc-

ing to do. It's more about the person now. I like working on people and making people happy. If the client was fun and we had a good time doing the piercing then that is what it's all about now. It amazes me how many people come in to get a piercing or a tattoo for that matter, and are a complete asshole. I just don't get it.

That being said, I still love septum piercings. I also really like philtrum piercings [central upper lip piercings], and my new favorite has to be high nostrils. I absolutely love the look of high nostrils.

Do you have a least favorite?

If the person is an ass, then I'm not going to enjoy working on them very much. I really don't mind doing any piercing but for me the least favorite piercings in general are tongue web piercings and upper lip frenulums — I just don't like them.

Which do you find the most technically challenging?

It's hard to say. Everyone is built so differently; a piercing that is very easy on one person can be a complete pain on the next. Every piercing is going to be different, and as soon as you think you've seen every possible shape of a navel, a hood, an ear, or whatever, someone will come in with something completely new. I mean, try lining up a pair of nostrils on someone who broke their nose three or four times, or finding the perfect spot for a surface piercing where there is limited movement — it's great! I like the challenge, it keeps me sharp, and keeps me growing as a piercer.

Is this a career that you'd recommend to others?

I absolutely would recommend piercing as a career. But, you got to love piercing, and I mean really love it. The cool factor wears off, there isn't a lot of money in it, the hours are usually long, and it's not always a glamorous job. A lot of piercers work another job, especially during the slow season. I've been working at least six and usually seven days a week for most of the last ten years. I remember a year or two after I opened up, I took what I made, figured out the hours that I worked, and it worked out to \$2.68 an hour. It's really just the last two years that I've made even a decent amount of money, and it's not a lot by any means, especially once you factor in the hours. So yeah, you have got to love it, because you're not going to get rich being a piercer.

Having gone through an apprenticeship yourself, have you apprenticed anyone?

I get people asking for apprenticeships a couple times a week. For the longest time I had no desire to apprentice anyone. I just didn't see the work ethic, or the determination in the people asking that I had. I finally decided that I needed to bring someone in. He was someone I had pierced a few times, seemed really interested, and very eager. He reminded me a lot of myself when I first got into the industry. I explained he wouldn't be making any money at all for about a year, and he wouldn't be piercing anyone for at least six months. I explained the long hours he would be putting in between being at the studio plus working outside of the studio to pay his bills. Everything went really well, he was right on schedule with everything I had planned out, and we got along very well. He really seemed to fit in with the studio. I brought him to Vegas with me for the APP conference, introduced him to people that I had looked up to for years, we took classes together, it was great. Then

about eight months in, he started slacking. After about a week of that, he just didn't show up. People don't realize that this isn't an over night process, and it seems cool at first, but it's a long road, and it's not always fun, it's not always exciting, and people just get impatient. I was very surprised when he stopped coming in — it caught me completely off guard. I guess somewhere in there he decided he wanted to be a tattoo artist instead, and piercing just wasn't in him. I wish he had just talked to me about it, but he decided to just bail.

I waited a little over a year before I even thought about bringing in another apprentice. I had all kinds of offers, but I was really let down, and just didn't want to deal with it. I recently brought in a new girl, Shelly. I've wanted a female piercer here for a long time. She was someone I had done a bunch of work on, proved that she was serious about piercing, took care of her piercings, and was always respectful and nice when she was in the studio. It always amazes me when people that don't take care of their piercings, or who come in with an attitude ask me to apprentice them. Shelly just started her training in November, so she has a long ways to go still, but so far things are working out very well.

I assume you're in this for the long haul?

Man, I hope so! I just recently turned thirty and just had my ten year anniversary in this industry. That means a third of my life has been devoted to being the best piercer I can be. I still love piercing, and have no intention of quitting. I do however want to change my focus a little. I can't keep working seven days a week — it's just not healthy. Once Shelly is done with her apprenticeship, I'm hoping I can take some more time and devote it to doing massage therapy. I have a separate space for that now, but most of my time is still taken up by piercing. There are so many different modalities and techniques that it's opening up a whole new area of research and training that I want to do. So, I'll probably still be working seven days a week, hahaha...

It seems like a lot of piercers seem to “burn out” after a decade and leave the industry... Why do you think that is?

I've noticed the same thing, and it's something I worried about as I approached the ten year mark. Shawn, who I apprenticed under lasted about ten years in this industry and then basically walked away. For him, I think most of the stresses that pushed him out of piercing were from owning a business, not so much from piercing itself. That is something that I can definitely relate to now that I own my own studio. I love piercing, no matter how stressed I am, or what I'm stressed about — piercing actually calms me. The stresses from owning a business on the other hand just pile up. It's a very up and down road, and you have to be able to look at the big picture and not focus on things on a daily or even weekly basis. If you can't, you'll drive yourself crazy. I think the biggest thing that most piercers end up walking away from is the seeming lack of responsibility from clients and from other piercers. It's frustrating when you are doing everything you can to ensure the highest quality, safest, experience possible and all the client cares about is saving \$5 somewhere else. The majority of piercers out there are clueless — they don't know what type of metal they are using, or why they should be using something else, and they aren't up to date with after-care methods, and they have no idea what aseptic technique is. \$20 or \$30 piercing shops are popping up all over the place. There is no way you can offer a piercing at that price with

high quality jewelry and be doing everything properly. It just isn't possible. It gets very frustrating at times when you are doing everything you can to do things the right way and to educate the public, working long hours for little pay, and it goes unappreciated. There have definitely been times when I've been at the point where I've been ready to just throw in the towel and go back to installing floors, or doing anything. But then I get one of my regulars walking into the studio and I remember why I love doing what I do.

So that's what keeps you coming back :)

I make people happy. People leave smiling and excited, and wanting to give me a hug because I pierced them. It's a great feeling. Sure there are the asses that just want to save \$5 and are rude, and don't care about their safety, but fortunately, I have some of the most loyal clients around and they make it all worth while.

Do you get many "weird" clients?

You know, I don't meet nearly as many "weird clients" now as I did when I first got into this industry. But, I'm just going to change that from "weird", to "interesting" — that sounds much better. When I first started piercing, there was still a huge percentage of slave-and-master and leather daddy clientele coming into the studio. I still get some now, but not nearly as much. It opened my eyes very early on to how diverse people were and I loved it. I met so many different types of people. I'm not gonna lie — I kind of miss those days. It made the job a lot more interesting when I was doing a couple scrotum ladders a week, or large gauge PAs, or whatever, compared to now, when it's just nostril after nostril.

One story comes to mind right away though, and I don't know how many people can ever say they experienced this, so I feel pretty special, hahaha...

This was years ago, but we had a regular that was full of stories. He had been castrated, had a urethral reroute, had male breast implants, two inch earlobes (which were very very uncommon at the time), and so on... He still had a fully functional penis, and right below that where his scrotum used to be, he had an opening for a urethral reroute, and just below that he had a vagina made. He had a conversation with the owner of the shop about his procedures and offered to show him. They called me into the room, where I watched this man jerk off with one hand, insert a metal sound into his vagina with the other hand, and ejaculate out of his urethra relocation. Now that is Amazing Stuff!

Oh — yes — he's great! I know exactly who you mean (this individual is also featured in the ModCon book). We've already talked about this a little, but what do you think is it that makes you — or anyone — a good piercer?

I think a good piercer is someone who knows their limits. Knows when they need to do more research and knows when to say no. So often I see piercings done on people whose anatomy just doesn't allow for that particular piercing. A good piercer needs to know more than just how to push a needle through the skin — anyone can do that. They need to practice and understand aseptic technique. I've seen piercers change gloves at the weirdest points during a procedure. They don't understand when or why they should be changing gloves — they just know they are supposed to change their gloves at some point. A good piercer needs to know what they are putting in people. So many piercers have no idea what

type of steel they are using. They don't know the difference between "316L", "316LVM", or why they should be using "316LVM F-138". A good piercer understands how the body heals and understands the aftercare they recommend, and knows how to troubleshoot if there is a problem. A good piercer is confident, but not arrogant. Most importantly, a good piercer is always learning.

We talked about some of your oldest clients, but what have your youngest been? What's your policy and feeling on age requirements?

The youngest person I have pierced was five — it was a set of earlobes. My insurance company has since changed their policy and I am now no longer allowed to pierce anyone under the age of fifteen.

It's really hard to say, "at such and such an age, you are responsible enough to care for a body piercing."

Everyone is so different that it just doesn't work that way. I've had thirty year olds come in and act like complete asses. They don't listen to me when I go over after care, they act very immature, and I can't get them to stop text messaging long enough for me to go over any-



thing with them. All they want to know is, is it gonna hurt, is it, is it, is it?? A couple weeks later they call back or stop in complaining that it's not healing, and when I ask them a few questions, I find out they are doing everything the exact opposite of what I told them. Then I've had fourteen year olds come in, ask what the jewelry options were, ask me about sea salt soaks before I even mention it, ask about retainer op-

tions, and other jewelry once it's healed, and a bunch of other good questions. Questions that show that they have done some research and are completely ready for the piercing and they heal with no problem at all.

On a technical level, what range of tools do you use to penetrate the skin?

I use needles, scalpels, and dermal punches — it really depends on the situation. In my opinion, it's a matter of the right tool for the job. A 5mm dermal punched cartilage piercing is going to heal a lot easier than a 4 gauge needled piercing. I know this from experience because my conches were pierced with 4 gauge needles and immediately stretched to 2 gauge about eight years ago. Not only did this completely suck balls, but the healing took forever and was very problematic. I also have been using punches for all my surface work for a couple years now. I have found the punch and taper method to work far better for me. I know a few piercers who have great results with a needle, but for me the punch and taper technique has drastically improved the success rate of surface piercings that I have done. Anatometal's new flat surface bars don't hurt either [hey, Barry, maybe I can get some free ones for the plug, hahaha?].

I'm not a fan of using dermal punches on soft tissue like earlobes. I think in that instance, you want to leave as much tissue as possible for future stretching, so a scalpel is better off. Like I said, it's all about the right tool for the job, and a proper understanding of how to use that tool.

What do you think of ear scalpelling?

I do quite a bit of ear scalpelling. Most of the time it's to redirect the piercing. An example that comes to mind is on one of the tattoo artists that work with me, Rick. He had his ears stretched to 1/2" from regular gunned piercings. They were drastically uneven — one was very far forward and one was very far back. I scalpelled them up to 3/4", cutting one side only in the front and one side only in the back. It evened them out very nicely and he is now at 1 3/8".

How do you draw the line of what you will and won't do?

If I think it has a good chance of healing, and not cause any problems, I'll do it. I'm not into shock value and doing piercings just to get the photo, knowing they'll probably be taking the piercing out in a couple days or weeks. Under the collar bone piercings completely freak me out. They go so deep into the body cavity and in some people there is a chance of hitting lung tissue. Most people don't realize how far up your lungs actually go! Eyelid piercings just seem like a bad idea — I mean, come on!

It's not that I don't think people should be able to get these things done. I absolutely think they should be able to, but I'm not comfortable doing it. There is too much liability involved and if something goes wrong, even if it's months later, that person could very easily come back after me. I love seeing people push the boundaries when it's done safely, and the research has been done first, and the parties involved take full responsibility for their actions. I'm not just talking about whoever does the work, but also the person who gets the work. I'm reminded of two recent ModBlog posts. One was the 1/2" or whatever it was Achilles piercing, and the other is the implant gone wrong on the girl's leg. That Achilles piercing was very impressive, and I absolutely loved it. I know a lot of piercers gave you a lot of shit for posting it, but I'm very happy you posted it. I love seeing what the human body can pull off, what can be done to it, and how far it can be pushed. That being said, I'm not going to pierce anybody's Achilles, I can promise you that! The girl with leg implant is a great example of the client taking responsibility for her actions. Things can and do go wrong, and everybody was ready to jump on the practitioner and wanted him called out. She wanted an implant in her leg, she took the time to seek out a practitioner, she knew the risks, and unfortunately it didn't work. She understood all of that before hand, and when it didn't work, she didn't get all pissed off and want this practitioner's head on a stick. Even though it got pretty bad for her, she took responsibility for her choices. If the practitioner did something wrong, and was negligent in any way, and she could prove it, then sure, go after him. What people need to understand is sometimes things just go wrong, it's not anybody's fault — they just do. When that happens, you need to do exactly what this girl did, and just call it a loss, deal with the consequences, and move on.

Sometimes shit happens, and it doesn't mean you get to sue somebody or are entitled to anything. We're pushing limits here, and there are risks with those limits, know them beforehand and be willing to take them, for better or for worse.

Over the ten years you've been in this industry, how has the public attitude toward piercing changed?

Piercings are definitely becoming more common and more acceptable. Sure it can still be a hard to get a job with a lot of facial piercings or 1 inch earlobes, but it's a hell of a lot easier than it was ten or even five years ago. I'm getting a lot more people in their thirties and forties who work in office settings getting nostril piercings. I still hear people complain all the time about how they don't get treated with respect because of their piercings. While I'm sure there are times when that is true, I think a lot of it is also in how you carry yourself and how you present yourself. Ten years ago I had a lot of visible piercings, far more than I do now. This was definitely not the norm back then, and I never felt like I was being treated poorly. I treated people with respect, and they gave it back to me. If you act like a punk kid, then you'll be treated like one, whether you have piercings or not.

Are you still getting piercings yourself?

I have settled down a lot with my piercings. Many have been retired, but I still have quite a few. There are a few things I still want to do, my high nostrils being one of them. Unfortunately, I do not have a lot of faith in the majority of piercers around here. This means I either travel the four and a half hours to a piercer I trust, like did for my 4 gauge nostrils, or I wait until I'm done training Shelly. What could be a better test for an apprentice than to pierce the one who trained her?

Finally, is piercing a trend?

Well, when I started my apprentice just under eleven years ago, my grandmother told me that piercing was just a trend, a fad, and then what was I going to do? When I opened my studio, just over six years ago, she told me the same thing — she still loaned me money to get started though. So, is piercing a trend? Sure, just like tattoos is a trend — a couple thousand year old trend!

A lot of piercers seem to move into scarification and implants in their later careers, yourself included.

I've been performing scarification, both cutting and branding for about six and a half years. It's just within the last three years that I've really become comfortable with my cutting skills, especially removal. I really love doing scarification pieces, and while I don't get to do it as often as I would like, I've been fortunate enough to do some great pieces on some great people. Shawn, the guy that apprenticed me for piercing had taken the Branding Intensives offered by Fakir. He actually did quite a few brandings and I learned a lot from him. Implants are something that I was very interested in for a while. I got into them a little, got a lot of info, and performed a couple on close friends. The few that I did healed up very well, and are still in to this day, but doing them stressed me out tremendously. I still perform genital beading, but for now I'm not really interested in doing transdermal or subdermal implants.

Tell me about how you became proficient in doing scarification?

Shawn taught me quite a bit and I eventually started doing some brandings under his supervision. He eventually started doing cuttings on some of his clients. This, he didn't mas-

ter quite as well as branding, and even though he wasn't what I would call a good cutting practitioner, I still learned a lot from watching him. Eventually, one of the girls he had worked on asked me to redo a piece he had done on her.

I ended up doing a few pieces on her, simple line work and geometric stuff. For a long time that was all I did. I couldn't have asked for a better person to try new techniques on. She was very open and took the process like a champ. I tried different blades on her, found what worked best, and slowly started doing more intricate pieces. For the first couple years, all I did was single line work — no removal, and mostly geometric shapes. I constantly checked portfolios of artists I respected, and I still do. People like Ron Garza, Blair, Steve Haworth, and Lukas Zpira. Later I learned about Ryan Ouellete, Brian Decker, Wayde Dunn, Jessie Villemaire, Dave Gillstrap, and so on. These guys were doing amazing work, and some of us were learning around the same time so we were all growing together. I asked questions about blade types, about aftercare; I asked anything I could think of. Shawn Porter started the Scarification Forum and I asked if I could participate. This was a great place to get info and share photos, and get critiqued. I was invited to work at Scar Wars I [scarwars.net] in Philly, and unfortunately I had to back out because I had just started massage school, but I didn't pass up the opportunity to go to Scar Wars II in LA. I did a few pieces there, including a collaboration with Brian Decker. It was great watching everyone work, and I learned a lot. I did quite a few pieces at this year's Scar Wars III in Philly, including another collaboration with Brian, and I got to work alongside Wayde.

Something I was really surprised about at this past Scar Wars III in Philly was the lack of learning artists in attendance. There are so many people in the Scarification Learning forum, and there are even more people offering scarification that have a long way to go. I can't stress enough how much knowledge there is to be gained at an event like that. It's an opportunity to watch the best of the best work, and pick their brains. It's an unbelievable opportunity, and I think it is really foolish to miss it. It goes back to what I was saying about some of the new piercers. It seems like the easier the information is to get, the less people want to take advantage of it!



What types of scarification do you do?

I do strike and cautery branding, as well as single line cutting, removal, and just started with some of the cross hatch shading technique. That is something I'm still experimenting with. I do far more scarification by cutting than I do by branding though.

I know you have Architecture experience, but what's your artistic background and what is your design process?

I've been drawing for as long as I can remember. In high school I spent a lot of time in the art room, even though I wasn't enrolled in art classes. One of the instructors was even con-

vinced I was one of his students. I started taking design classes my junior year in high school, and then enrolled in Architecture courses in college, so most of my formal training has been more in design than art. I've always been surrounded by artists though. Growing up, my uncle who was an amazing artist. He did a lot of pen and ink, and some three dimensional sculptures. I spent a lot of time with him and tried to emulate his work. Once in high school, most of my friends were art majors, which is why I spent so much time in the art room. And of course for the last ten years, I've been working side by side with different tattoo artists.

My process for coming up with design for scarification is very similar to a tattoo artist. I do a consultation with the client, take some notes, and talk size and placement. Then I use all sorts of reference material and do some sketches. I always try to keep placement and body movement in mind, so I can place the piece so that it works and flows with the body. Sometimes, I'll have one of the tattoo artists give me a hand with a design, and we all kind of work together.

Is your scarification clientèle at all different from your piercing clientèle? Is it something you offer commercially?

The clientèle really isn't any different. Most of the people I have done scarification on were originally my piercing clients. I do far more scarification on woman than I do on men, but that's true of piercing as well. For a long time I just offered it to people I knew, but now I offer it commercially. It's not a huge percentage of my income, and in fact, If I stopped doing scarification all together it wouldn't really affect my yearly income. More and more people are asking about it, so hopefully that will change.

What does the future hold for scarification in your opinion?

I don't think it'll ever be common enough for me to do it exclusively, at least not during my career, but I do think it'll become more common. In the past it was mainly just people who worked in the industry, or who were pretty close to someone in the industry that got scarification done. At this point I've worked on a very wide range of clients. I did a branding on a guy's shoulder who was in his mid thirties and who drove from Connecticut to get it done. He was very conservative looking guy, and his only real concern was if it would affect his golf swing. I've worked on a girl who had some existing scars she wasn't happy with, and wanted to make it a more positive thing. I've worked on people who weren't comfortable getting tattoos because the thought of a foreign substance being put in their skin made them uncomfortable. Scarification has come a long way since I started doing it. The work being done now has so much more detail in it than it did back then. Especially now with the new shading technique pioneered by Dave Gilstrap, which Wayde Dunn has really ran with as well. It's making scarification more appealing to a wider range of people.

Thanks for taking to us about all this!

“Got Your Nose!”

It's somewhat appropriate that the last article I'd publish for BME was an April Fools article, since part of the reason that I'd gotten into the take-over mess was being too trusting, and part of the reason I'd survived it was having a sense of humor. This wasn't my strongest article — I think I'd set the bar too high with “Love at First Bite” — but it was fun to do, and was followed up a few months later by “Cain” from Venezuela getting a radical nose restructuring that reminded me of this article.

Twice I've been told by practitioners that they've been asked to do a nose amputation, and twice they've told me that they refused. Third time's the charm, as I finally met “Witz Sinariz”, who managed to find a practitioner to go through with it. While he wears an artificial nose in his day to day life, he agreed to “out” himself here. Seeing it, it doesn't even look real, and is quite difficult for my brain to even parse, but Witz swears that to him it looks completely natural.



Why did you want your nose removed?

I don't know, ever since I was a kid I imagined it. I don't know if they have anything to do with it, because it's the chicken and the egg, you know, but two things stand out. First, I remember watching Sesame Street episodes when I was very young, where Bert and Ernie would take their noses off, and it just really stuck with me, and I wished I could play that game... That, and my uncle always played “got your nose” with me and it was something I really remember fondly.

What made you actually want to amputate it for real?

There was never any question of wanting it for real. I just didn't know if it was possible, and if it might wreck my life because of others' reactions... But I read a lot of the interviews with digit and limb amputees on BME and other places, and the thing that struck me was that no one ever questioned them, because no one ever assumed it was on purpose. I realized that if I did this, I'd “get away with it”.

What was the process of finding a practitioner willing to do it?

I tried doctors and plastic surgeons — no luck. I thought about doing it myself with some sort of “accident”, but I thought I'd be left a terrible scar, or worse, doctors would try and rebuild it, leaving me with a deformed nose rather than a flat face. I contacted practitioner after practitioner, and eventually found one willing to do the procedure after asking him for it for almost two years.

What was the procedure?

After freezing the area, “H” made an incision down the middle of my nose, and peeled it open to each side. The cartilage was almost completely removed, and he chiseled away the bone in the bridge of my nose to reduce the bump. A hyfrecator was used to cauterize the bleeders, and the tissue was pulled back over the wound, excess was removed, and sutured.

How was healing?

No problem at all. I'm very healthy. It took about two weeks for the initial healing, and a month more before it was totally healed.

What did you tell your friends and family? Your doctor?

I don't have a doctor, and my immediate family is deceased. I am very work focussed, and most of the people I know are co-workers. I just told them I didn't want to talk about it and left it at that. They didn't push me. I suppose now that the cat's out of the bag, they could find out. Maybe I'll try and figure out how to tell them before you put this online, but more likely I'll just deny it... Really, who'd believe it?

I hope you don't mind me asking, but did you seek counselling or therapy in advance to make sure that you weren't "crazy"?

Why would I do that? I understand that this might seem strange to others, but it doesn't to me, and it feels very natural and normal. I don't feel like I have to explain myself to anyone else. I'm happy and successful — so what if I'm different than you. Why would I want to put myself through having to explain myself to some therapist that's not going to understand me anyway?

What made you decide to close your nose completely? Is it a problem not having nostrils?

I didn't want it to look like I had a messed up nose — I wanted to have no nose. I wouldn't have done it if I'd have been left with a hole. It's not a problem — sort of like having a plugged up nose all the time. If I get a cold, I just spit it out and sort of "hork it up" instead of blowing my nose.

Are you happy with how it turned out?

I wish the scar was less visible — I really want to have a perfectly flat face that makes it look like I was born that way — but other than that I'm ecstatic. With time I expect the redness in the scar to go away.

Do you have any other body modifications?

I have a few tattoos, and stretched ear piercings, but nothing major other than this. But I don't really see this as a "body modification" in the same way... I just felt like this was right.

Do you mind me asking what you do for a living, and how this has affected your day to day life?

I work as a graphic designer and make a good living from it. To be honest, this doesn't affect me at all. I wear an artificial nose when I need to, and I love being able to take it on and off, and it lets me decide who I want to reveal it to. But even people who notice that I have no nose would never believe I chose to do it — like I said, in terms of how others treat me, it hasn't changed anything.

Thanks for talking to us. Any advice for others who want to make radical changes to their bodies?

Don't take life too seriously.

Thank you to everyone who made this book possible. This adventure has been nothing if not a group of friends chatting about their shared passions.

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