Illustration by Natalie Chiovitti (@artbynat)
The waiting room was tightly filled with strangers, their bustling minds filled entirely with thoughts of the numerous places they had to rush to next. Nobody knew each other, but they all possessed nearly identical characteristics, both in body and apparel. They demanded themselves to follow all the latest trends, in fear of being called Original. Their flashy outfits and body modifications created a stark contrast against the blinding, spotless white walls that cornered us all. There wasn’t much chitchat to be had, so the sound of the radio became the dominant performer of the room. Even that was drowned out by the ever-present hum of hundreds of cars and hover-buses that sped around the city streets just outside. Speed and short travel times were the things in highest demand. More stops meant more business, and business was the goal of the day. Profit meant power, and power meant profit.

“That looks absolutely splendid, Mr. Lemitz,” the surgeon enthusiastically assured me, letting the end of each word stretch out, paired with wide eyes and raised brows. Every little movement and expression she threw my way was without fault, as if I was watching a master-performer on stage. She made me
feel like her only care at this moment was my experience with her, and if I didn’t know better, I might actually have believe it.

“How does it feel? Like nothing changed?” She smiled with anticipation.

“Feels... yeah. Feels great.” This time it was my turn to disperse fake pleasantries, complete with the façade of a grin.

“That’s fabulous, sir. Absolutely fabulous! Now how will the procedure be paid for today?”

Profit meant power, power meant profit.

“I’ll be using my Global Credit, I believe my card is on file.” With this, she led me briskly to the waiting room, where she brought up my information and settled the transaction.

I looked around at all the faces gathered anxiously in the large waiting room, the fluorescent light bouncing off the eggshell walls, displaying the immaculate detail and work that is put into keeping everything clean and aesthetically pleasing. The majority of the clientele was what I’ve come to expect.

First, you have all the women, both young and far from it, who have ironically come in to appear as the other. Young women come in to receive more developed busts and backsides, while the older ones strive to regain the tight skin they once possessed. You also get the more high-paying customers who seek leg extensions or a decrease in hand size, anything that makes them more feminine and appealing. These surgeries were by no means exclusively feminine; you’ve got the men who want to increase their arm size, leg size, along with the size of other things. What’s sad is that by the time these individuals come out, they will no longer be that. They will lose their individuality. Most of the time, they come out as a blur of all those before and after them.

Most of my friends are becoming increasingly more fabricated, or “masterpieced,” as the media would like to pleasantly paint it. They are all entwined through the major companies. In a world of growing corporations, the media has no stronger tactic than to throw around their cash and support these technology groups behind the scenes, ensuring they get the first
CONSTRUCTING THE BODY; DESTROYING THE SOUL

reveals on the innovative new models. Intergalactic Information™ News would never report on the countless stories of the home-versions of the Apollo 100’s and their numerous crashes. They couldn’t afford to decrease their profit from their stocks.

The woman turned the identification scanner towards me to process my payment. I first put my finger on the scanner, waiting for the beep.

“As you know, since this is a rather luxury-priced procedure, we require further internal identification,” she said, upon hearing the beep a moment later.

“Yes, of course. No worries.”

The woman reached across the desk and grabbed the hose-like device on the wall next to the reception area, taking the cap off of the nose of the tube to revealing a small, sharp tip. As she reached for me, a quick glance at her arm revealed she had her own alterations, resulting in the typical smooth, markless skin, giving it a plastic-like quality. Gingerly, she brought the tip to the center of my palm, pushing down until it made a loud and quick whoosh, followed by a brief stream of my blood shooting up through the translucent tube into wherever biological identification is processed. This process also resulted in a similar succession of confirmation beeps.

“Excellent! You’re all set. Enjoy the new you,” she said with a smile that feigned pleasure, but eyes that couldn’t care whether I enjoyed it or not. She was just satisfied that their pockets were a little more full.

With a simple nod and wave, I headed out to the street, embraced once again by the consistent tidal wave of rushing pedestrians. Faces passed by me in a blur, people pushing and shoving with no sense of concern or grace. I hurried to get to Musk Street where I’d be safe from the chaos. This district was very popular amongst the majority of the population, whether it was those like me who travelled for bodily enhancements, or those who sought out the more seedy sections, where fake and real bodies were indistinguishable in the act of desires.
An individual did not often pass by recognizable faces in these areas, because of both the hectic rush of flowing people and the fact that people's faces started to change on a bi-weekly basis. Noses shifted, eyes darkened or lightened, and hair growth and colour was no longer a constant prescribed to us by our genes. Society is, and has been for the recent years, in a state of neverending upheaval and innovation.

The street was plastered with vibrant digital billboards, flashing hundreds of different companies and brands every minute. Ever since the revolutionary discoveries in the year 2522, engineers and psychologists pioneered a new process of information communication that ensured onlookers had the image burned into the front of their memory, even if they saw it for less than a tenth of a second. For this reason, one billboard can be bought out and display millions of brands every day, gaining a good portion of cash from each one. As an added bonus, the highest bidding company gets the honour of being "Brand of the 15," awarding them with a whole fifteen seconds of uninterrupted showcase. Alongside the visual advertisements, each speaker placed along the buildings blasted the newest music of the day, cutting each song off after ten seconds to avoid people bypassing the costs of paying for the songs and recording them illegally. Everything now was behind a paywall.

Having finally escaped the rough embrace of the commuting business class, I took a left onto Musk Drive, one of the few designated residential sectors left in town. I used this chance to test out the costly results of today's procedure. Slowly and meticulously, I flexed each finger. I felt each minute movement, but not like before.

"Well, look who I have the pleasure of stumbling across! Darrel Lemitz, himself," the figure's voice from in front of me announced. I looked up to see who it was. "How goes it, big guy?"

I expected to be greeted with a face I knew, but instead was met with a stranger, at least at first sight. Slowly, I began
to mentally focus on the features that were new to me and uncovered features that I recognized. It wasn’t my first time trying to rediscover a familiar face hidden beneath layers of alterations and replacements.

“Hey, Carlos. It’s going as good as it can be. Same old job, different people. You know how it goes. How’s it going with you?” Carlos Montagna, previous coworker and non-stop chit-chatter. Great. However, this Carlos was now rocking a fuller head of hair, tighter skin, and noticeably bigger arms under his work shirt.

“Heh, don’t I know it. I remember the days when we shared the same workspace. Good times, weren’t they?” I nodded out of courtesy. “I see you got yourself some new additions, eh? I dig it.” Without asking permission, he grabbed my new arm, poking and prodding it, testing the various metallic components.

“Hmm, The X-217 unit. Commendable choice, albeit not top shelf. Looky here.” He rolled up the long sleeves on his work shirt, revealing a pristine, muscular looking forearm. “See, I got myself the X-322. Very great choice. Our brothers on the front lines have the exact same. Best part yet, you can hardly tell there’s tons of technical nonsense working away underneath the pseudo-skin level. Discreet and complete,” he said proudly, punctuating the sentence with the rolling down of his sleeve once more.

“Huh, uh yeah. That’s mighty cool, Carlos,” I grew tired of him constantly repeating his ritual of enhancement displaying and bragging. “Listen, man. I gotta head out. Got a lot of work to do. I’ll catch you around town, alright?”

Without waiting for a response, I patted him on the back, feeling the subtle signs of enhancements present there too. The mechanics of manners and politeness weren’t as prominent in society now, people were always rushing from here to there, not wasting time that could be spent catching up on all the new technology conferences and unveilings.

After a brief few minutes of walking, my mind flowing with thoughts of this new procedure and all those before it, I reached
my house, which laid clustered next to the dozens flanking it. Another fingerprint and I was back in the one place I could feel isolated and independent: home.

I was met with my usual greeting of silence, save for the ever present hum of the Domestic Operating System, aptly referred to as Domsys. Flicking the switch to the left of the door, lights flashed on, revealing the clean but desolate living room. No paintings, no flowers, just the basics. One did not need much in a place they rarely inhabited. Work and the outside world attracted and stole all of a person’s time.

“Greetings, Mister Lemitz. How may I assist today?” The robotic speaker asked from the various speakers in the bare room.

“I’m good, Domsys. Shutdown for the night.”

“Yes. Thank you, Mister Lemitz.” A short series of beeps played, each quieter than the last, until they were inaudible. Silence, once again.

I headed to the cramped washroom that made up one of the three rooms this building had, the other two being the bland living room and the even more disappointing bedroom. Another flick of a switch illuminated the room. Thankfully Domsys stayed quiet.

My eyes first drifted to the thing they have been seeking the whole day; my touched up hair, my wrinkle-free face, my surgically enhanced muscles, and so much more. All fake. I’d like to say it was a shock, but that’s not entirely true. I’ve grown accustomed to how I look now, but the emotional and philosophical meaning finally sunk in. I did not relate to the thing I was looking at. First, it was just my hairline, a simple, inexpensive procedure. Then came the facial structure adjustments. Then the height increase. The leg replacement, one that didn’t limp as the previous one did. Broader shoulders. Permanent teeth bleaching. Electronic eye implants. And finally, today’s addition, a stronger arm, one that my arthritis cannot touch.

I did not know what to think. I thought each procedure was making myself a better “me.” But now I’m not sure. It feels
like I’m throwing away myself to become everyone else. Or more accurately, a replica of the “ideal man” that the media presents—a concept that jumps further away with each leap of technological advancement. One who follows the path of ever changing desire will end up becoming nothing but unoriginal and unfulfilled. Why try to become something that everyone pursues but nobody can achieve? Why did I not just remain who I was?

I was born as an individual different from everyone else, and nobody could take that from me, except myself, evidently. The only Original parts of myself left are my heart and my mind, both of which were subject to the most pain as the parts around them were slowly thrown away and replaced. But even that statement is becoming increasingly more rare. Individuals are forsaking their very own minds and emotions just to fit in and assimilate themselves. It’s a rather cruel act of humour, but one I created and told myself.

I enhanced myself to inferiority.