

Lauren Steury



by the author
3D stl.digital image. 2014.

iCyborga: Thoughts From a Digital Double

My project is like something out of a twisted feminist sci-fi dream. I became interested in the idea of a “digital double”, our virtual identity clones that we create through social media networking. Do digital doubles accurately represent their makers? Are our virtual identities inaccurate or just refined, highly edited version of the people we wish we were? Could I made my virtual self come to life in the physical world? How will new technologies change the conversation on body representation in the 21st century? These were my initial questions in exploring self-portraiture through 3D printing. As I wrote in my 2nd iteration:

“The web has made self-representation possible through intangible, nonphysical objects while still allowing for the same implied meaning of such objects. It is no secret that these new modes of expression are highly edited and sculpted, so the illusion of creation is unveiled. With the heightened awareness that these identities are partial truth, partial fantasy, we tend to take this personal information at face value and more or less accept it as both truth and construct whether it be a comment on life experience, physical appearance, gender, or personality.

These emerging theories on identity creation and how technology complicates said creation are

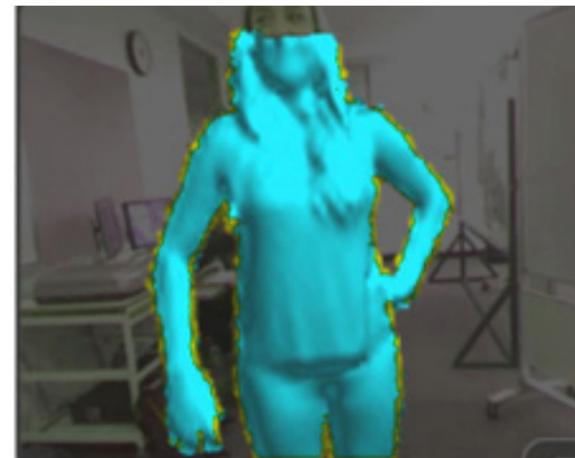


central to cyberfeminist theory which is where my work as an artist emerges from. In working with 3D printing I can't avoid the meta-symbolism of construction, and reproduction. The (dis)connection between (wo)man and machine and how the boundaries between them become blurred, is at the heart of my 3D printing and film work.”

My vision for this project was set from the initial iteration: I wanted to use film as a medium of both technology and representation to bring my cyborg to life.

“Hegemony shows himself even in machines, therefore feminism will respond through radicalizing the discussion of the cyborg. When the personal is political, how do we maintain our sense of self, agency, and power, when our bodies themselves can be scanned, transformed, manipulated even outside of our own control? I will make a film that continues this question of a machine passing (and intentionally failing) to show the irony and humor in the (wo)man/machine relationship... The cyborg, and therefore my use of the cyborg in film, as a symbol of dualism and unity,

Lauren Steury
Product Portrait 1. Digital Photograph. 2014.



Lauren Steury, John Grecio
Untitled. screen shot from 3D scan. 2014.



Lauren Steury
Untitled. Black and white photograph on 120mm film. 2014.

boundless, past/present/future, is the perfect tool to explore the expression of identity and the future of feminism. My film is taking the self-portrait, the selfie, copy culture and identity in relation to feminism and technology, to the next level.”

I used a 3D scanner and software to capture my body into a 3D image. I used the scan to create my cyborg, but I wanted to explore other ways of ‘capturing’ my image. To expand on this I turned to photography. I made various self-portraits using “low-tech” black and white 120mm film that I hand processed and printed. I explored different ways of moving like a machine, in front of the camera, and captured myself from 8 angles to create a 360 dimensional view of my body. I compared this to 360 views of “women” that I found online. The representations of virtual 3D woman on the web were incongruent with how I see myself and other woman so I decided to make my own moving GIF in my 3rd iteration which focused on visual representation. I also collaged image of human, nature, and machine to represent themes of The Cyborg Manifesto by Donna Haraway that was central to my work.

My cyborg came into form in front of my camera lens. I documented her ‘birth’ and was enthralled

with similarities and differences in this strange plastic version of myself. I noted this in my 4th iteration: “My 3D ‘replica’ is 154mm (6 inches) tall, 69mm wide, and 66mm deep. My RL body is 1,676.4mm tall. ‘She’ is made of 33g of plastic filament compared to my 56699g of ‘natural’ filament. It took ‘her’ 6 hours to print, whereas my mother was in labor with me for 12.”

I took this plastic miniature self and made what I consider to be the final iteration of my cyborg project. I created a film where my cyborg had the agency to move, feel, and question. To best understand this project, you must use imagination. One must temporarily accept illusion of life that a camera allows, in order to hear ‘her’ experience of being a virtual identity in a 3D plastic body. “Am I any less a person than you?” she asks. She references loneliness, comfort, and cross species relationship, among other things in her two and a half minutes of life.

Ultimately this project allowed me to explore the use of technology to modify physical and nonphysical human form and to dictate the process of objectification on my own terms, and cross pollenate technology, feminism, fetishism, utopianism, and body politics.



human + robot + film



Lauren Steury
 Film still from iCyborga video. 2014.

Initially I wanted her to fail. I imagined the technology would be inadequate in the physical world, and render her meaningless and void. In the film she asks “am I any less a person than you?” She is both extension and separation of me, a conceptual doppelganger who questions her own existence and purpose, like any human, like any cyborg. She is an indicator of life, but lacks human indexicality. She is a symbolic mark of virtuality on physicality. Bounded in form and boundless in semiotic potential, as we all are. My desire for her inadequacy transformed into a relationship between form and meaning, which was influenced by Malafouris’ Engagement Theory.

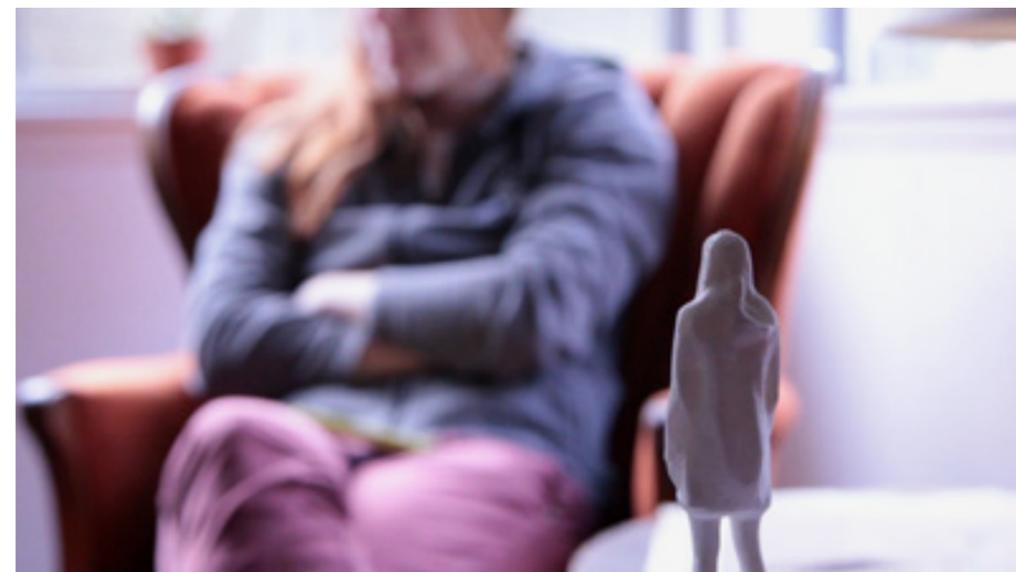
I realized, in making the film, that she is not purely an extension of myself, my creation takes on separate meaning, projected meaning. She represents human and machine, and therefore has attributes and thoughts that are uniquely hers that, when juxtaposed with the ‘real world’ seem to mock humanity. The questioning of her capacity to “pass” is settled in the conclusion of the film, where her voice becomes a distorted, layered, malfunctioning knot of sound with a clip of her falling (an accident while filming) references the illusion of life given through film and editing. “What the fuck?” she asks finally... a question entirely human, in all its vulgarity and culture layeredness.



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 Film still from iCyborga video. 2014.



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"Death was used to drawing stares even before he became a cyborg with a beautiful woman beside him, but this was different" (Doctorow, 339).

"We create technology and in turn it creates us." -Sarah Williams

Speaking of creation, cyborgs, and stares... I wanted to make my cyborg have movable limbs to bring more life to 'her' movements. John and I designed a socket attachments that would allow the arms and legs to move. We also found an already proven, similar model on tinkercad. We pulled the arms and legs off of my virtual body which was creepy and fascinating. As we imagine more fantastic realities with technology, technology advances in the body both medically and aesthetically.



During participant observation, I often left my watch post, to 'tinker' and collaborate on design projects. I tinkered with my inanimate body on 3D design tools, I became a specter amputee, a disattached leg, a downloaded socket that never printed. This resonated with my inquiry about how technology is changing our experience and conversation about body politics. At this level, I had hyper-control over the virtual-physical dimension but lacked any control over the context and perception once was in the webosphere.