Thomas James

Fine Arts
United States

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Professional Experience and Curriculum Vitae
Thomas James develops smart visual concepts for magazines, newspapers, books, album covers, and apparel, some of which have been recognized by the Society of Illustrators and American Illustration. He is also the Editor and Art Director of Illustration Age, as well as a board member of the ICON Illustration Conference. When he's not obsessing over Illustration, he enjoys life with his beautiful wife, his twin daughters, his best friend down the street, and strong coffee.

Previous Clientele
The Los Angeles Times / The Globe and Mail / Westchester Magazine / 914 / The Capitol / McSweeney's Grantland / The Portland Mercury / New York Spirit / Seven Days / Chicago Reader / City Hall News / City and State / Terra Magazine / Nashville City Paper / The Nashville Scene / Milwaukee Magazine / Eugene Weekly / Maui Time / Momentum Magazine / Common Ground Magazine / Oil and Gas Investor Magazine / Plowshare Media / JME Creative / Conquest Graphics / Struggle On Music / CAPITAL Brand Apparel / Big Kid Foods

Awards and Accolades
Please kindly get in touch for more information.

Awards and Accolades
Society of Illustrators 54 / American Illustration 30 / The Daily Heller / HOW Magazine / Imprint / Graphic Artists Guild / Lost at E Minor / Stumptown Comics Fest / Illustration Mundo / PSD Tuts +

"What makes Thomas James such a singular talent — and such an important contributor to our pages — is his ability to find the perfect visual imagery to explain complicated concepts. We don't call on Thomas for the simple stories; we call him to illustrate stories about political forces, power structures and emerging issues. And every time, he finds the perfect visual metaphor for ideas that take half a page of text to explain in words. He's fast and talented and technically sharp at his craft, but what sets Thomas apart is his mind. Our pages are richer for having him in them." - Adam Lisberg, Art Director of The Capitol

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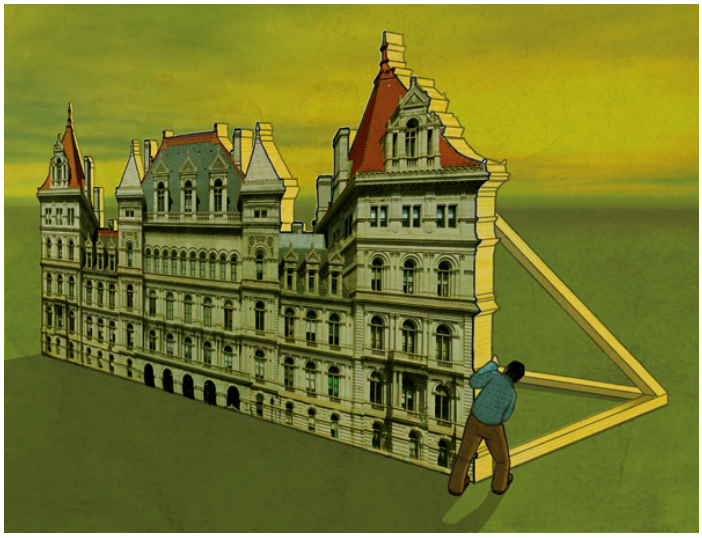

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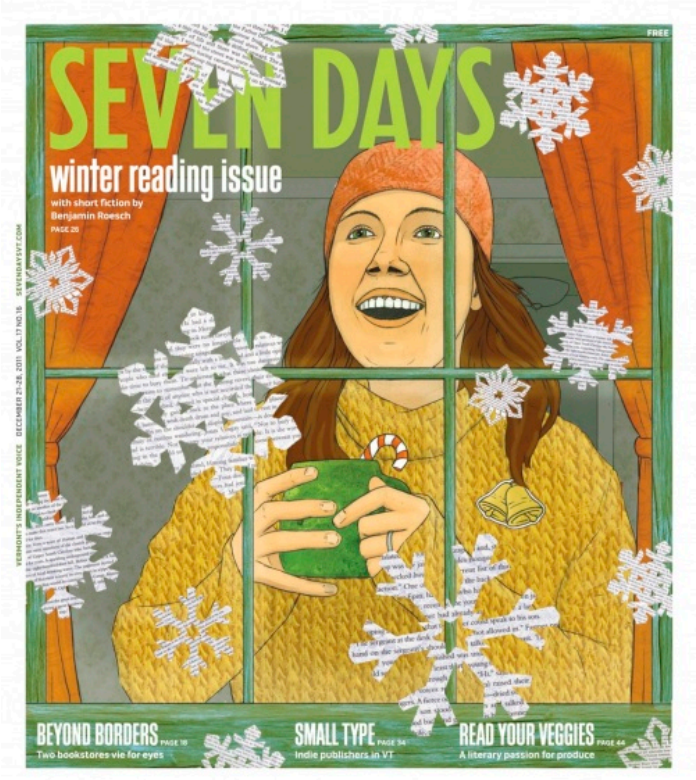

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i, Cyborg

"Cyborg Anthropologist" Amber Case Attempts to Bring Our Digital Life and Reality Together at Last by Matt Stangel

I FINISH MY CIGARETTE on the cyborg's doorstep.

Moments before, I was exchanging texts with Amber Case about my progress to this Southeast Portland apartment, the #14 bus hiccupping through its stops. "If you have an iPhone, download Geoloqi and I'll be able to watch you approach," wrote Case.

By day, Case is a user experience designer for Vertigo Software, where she builds interfaces for smartphone apps, servicing the likes of NBC and other world-strong outfits. By night, Case is a "cyborg anthropologist," studying "how humans and non-human objects interact with each other, and how that changes culture"—putting those observations to good use with apps like Geoloqi.

It's a field of study that was first recognized in 1960 by the American Anthropological Association—and now the 24-year-old Case works under its umbrella. Her cyborg anthropologist musings recently hit the stage of TED Talks in a lecture titled, "We Are All Cyborgs Now." (TED is a video series documenting presentations given by innovators from various fields—featuring speakers with "ideas worth spreading.")

I fieldstrip my smoke and rap a short knock on the door. Aaron Parecki, a local programmer who collaborates with Case, answers and invites me in. Case follows behind, offering a warm, professional handshake—as well-mannered cyborgs do. I'm offered a seat at a dining room table that overlooks a panorama of computer monitors (the Geoloqi command center—tracking the geolocational data of a worldwide network of users). Case sits across from me and warms up for our interview with a few parlor tricks—using her iPhone to turn the lights off and on again; triggering an artificial voice that says, "Hey, Matt."

"You can make your house talk?" I ask, laughing.

"Yes," says the house, Case chuckling behind her phone. While these are fun tricks, they aren't what makes a cyborg under Case's accepted definition.

Cyborganthropology.com, Case's website dedicated to the subject, identifies three categories of human-machine combo: "cybernetic organism"; "hybrid of machine and organism"; and "creature of both fiction and lived social reality."

Case believes it's the increasingly mobile internet and its ability to act as an extension of the brain—to store and share unique information with increasing automation and independence—that's turning more and more people cyborg. As Case says, she's not talking about *Terminator*, she's talking about the Facebook wall and the Twitter stream; how these technologies give us the ability to create an external version of our personalities with which others can interact in our physical absence.

She borrows the term "second self," originally coined by sociologist Sherry Turkle, to describe this unique digital existence.

"When people first went online, they had avatars and fake names and silly pictures and would play around with... multiple identities and it wasn't a big deal," explains Case. "It was fun, it was play. Now, people's identities are tied. You sign up to Facebook with your real name."

Not only does the modern internet user create a second self that's more closely related to the person behind the machine, but their relationships with their computing devices are becoming more intimate. An integral aspect of Case's cyborg studies is to track these changes.

"The idea of cyborg anthropology is looking at what's happening now, and what's becoming normal," says Case. "This," holding up her iPhone, "10 years ago, was not normal."

"But since people just kind of meld into it and it just becomes a part of life, people don't stop and say...." Case does a robot voice, "I am using a device in my pocket, but I have to charge it every night and when it cries I have to pick it up and I have to soothe it back to sleep and I have to make sure that it's well protected and I have to buy it new accessories.' It's like this little non-human ally in your pocket. You have to treat it correctly. So it's very human."

Though things weren't always this way. Case says that the first computer-based cyborg was an engineer named Steve Mann who designed the original wearable computer back in the 1980s. It was a chunky, 80-pound thing, and he built and coded the entire system himself (which even included a makeshift version of WiFi). And it was a time when bridging the gap between person and computing environment was seen very differently.

"In the beginning, people were like, 'Virtual reality has to be three dimensions,'" says Case, "and it's funny because when you think about it... you don't need three dimensions—your brain can fill in the rest."

While this explains why the virtual reality of social networks works so well, it also explains why our digital interactions can feel as real as physical ones. This can be great in positive situations, but horrible in negative ones, when "your brain really feels hurt because the symbolic equivalent is getting attacked."

She hands me a beer and we settle in for a two-hour conversation during which I start to grasp just how commonplace Case's cyborg really is.

Cyborg Anthropology:

The field of study examining the relationship between human and non human objects.

HERE, with computer monitors scrolling through constant data and the house chattering away, Case's ability to take the theoretical framework of cyborg anthropology and put it against real-world functionality is evident. Geoloqi is the perfect example of this ability.

What is Geoloqi? It's a smartphone app for real-time location sharing—currently available for iPhone, with an Android version to be released in the coming weeks. Think Foursquare—minus all the "mayor of" and "checking in" stuff—for times when you don't want your entire social network to see where you are. Just as Case described the adolescent period of online avatars—when everyone was experimenting with identities—we're seeing something very similar with location-sharing tools. Opening up your location to the world makes you vulnerable, but when you're wearing the avatar of a fictional mayor, it dampens the perceived risk. It becomes part of a game. Problem is, some people look past the avatars and want location-sharing functionality without all the fiction. Location sharing on their own terms.

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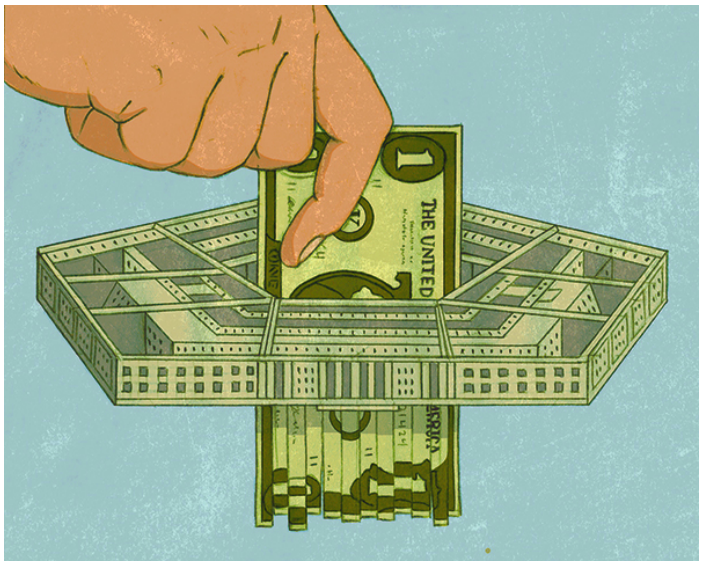

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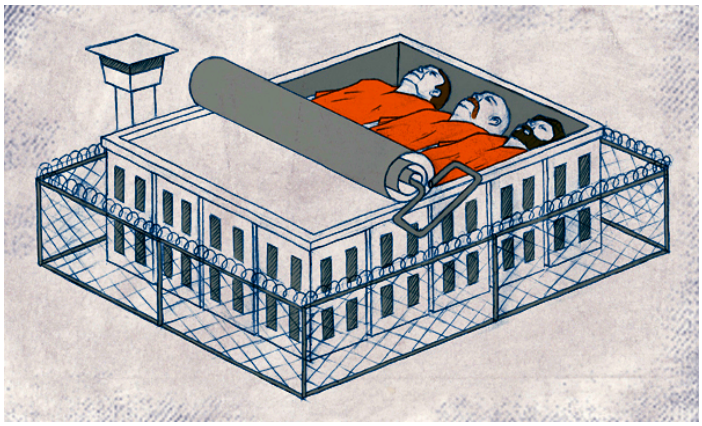

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