

# Androids, Replicants and Chimeras: Alternate Embodiments / Uncanny Agencies

Stelarc

School of Design and Art, Curtin University of Technology  
Perth, Western Australia  
stelarc@curtin.edu.au

## KEYNOTE ABSTRACT

What it means to be human is perhaps not to remain human at all. To become other is an irresistible urge. What a body is and how a body performs is a historical, cultural and technological construct but because it is also in the realm of contingency it is also highly contestable. It is a time of alternate anatomical architectures. Of hyper-human constructs that are a hybridization of biology, technology and virtuality.

Technology is attached and is inserted, as flesh is extracted and circulated. Body parts are exchanged. Hearts and hands are relocated and reanimated. A face on one body stitched to the skull of another, becomes a third face resembling neither. Your face, appropriated and animated by an alternate nervous system becomes the affect of the other. A body with implants is a body that can be hacked, re-wired and re-purposed. There are few reasons to perpetuate the body as it is – surviving in a slim spectrum of light, radiation and gravity, not very robust and with a limited longevity. Prosthetic Flesh becomes Fractal Flesh and Phantom Flesh.

It is necessary to shift from seeing the body as a site for the psyche to the body as a structure. Not as an object of desire but as an object to redesign. There is a need not only to expose but to simultaneously extend the body's interaction and task envelope. The body now performs remotely, involuntarily and with profound indifference, absent to its own agency. An indifference that allows something other to occur, that allows an unfolding- in its own time and with its own rhythm. The body becomes physically split with an extruded sense of self. A radical emptiness permeates the human horizon, but it is an emptiness generated not by a lack but rather through an excess of expectation.

Liminal spaces proliferate and generate the uncanny, the ambivalent and the uncertain. The anxious body becomes a floating signifier, becoming whatever it wants to become – in a multiplicity of forms and functions. Bodies are split and distributed. The problem is no longer possessing a split personality, but rather of having split physicality. In our Platonic, Cartesian and Freudian pasts these might have been considered pathological and in our Foucauldian present we focus on inscription and control of the body. But in the terrain of cyber complexity that we now inhabit the inadequacy and the obsolescence of the ego-agent driven biological body cannot be more apparent. A transition from psycho-body to cyber system becomes necessary to function effectively and intuitively in remote spaces, speeded-up situations and complex technological terrains of information overload. Can a body cope with experiences of extreme absence and alien action without becoming overcome by outmoded metaphysical fears and obsessions of individuality and free will? Embodiment, identity and agency need to be interrogated and algorithms of aliveness and affect need to be re-formulated.

## Author Keywords

Alternate anatomies; agency; androids; replicants; chimeras

## ACM Classification Keywords

H.5.m. Information interfaces and presentation: Misc.

## BIO

Stelarc explores alternate anatomical architectures. He is an artist whose projects incorporate prosthetics, robotics, biotechnology, medical imaging and the internet. He has performed with a Third Hand, a Stomach Sculpture, Exoskeleton and a Prosthetic Head. Fractal Flesh, Ping Body and Parasite are internet performances that explore remote and involuntary choreography. He is surgically constructing and stem-cell growing an ear on his arm that will be internet enabled. In 1996 he was made an Honorary Professor of Art and Robotics at Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh and in 2002 was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws by Monash University, Melbourne. In 2010 was awarded the Ars Electronica Hybrid Arts Prize. In 2014 he initiated the Alternate Anatomies Lab. In 2015 he received the Australia Council's Emerging and Experimental Arts Award. Stelarc is currently a Distinguished Research Fellow, School of Design and Art (SODA) at Curtin University. His artwork is represented by the Scott Livesey Galleries, Melbourne.

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DIS 2016, June 04-08, 2016, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

ACM 978-1-4503-4031-1/16/06.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1145/2901790.2915255>