



# InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

## Diplomatic Analysis

### Case Study 02: Performance Artist Stelarc

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## INTRODUCTION

The case study examines the documentation of the performance art of Stelarc, an Australian Performance Artist, who collaborates with specialists from a variety of scientific and technological fields to combine robotics and technology with the human form. The case study considers records the artist has ‘archived’ on his own public Web site. Stelarc states, “whereas before I kept sketchbooks and notes, what I keep now is a Web site, and my Web site is in a sense a collection of what I think are interesting documentations: records, notes.”<sup>1</sup> The Web site was created in 1994, in collaboration with Gary Zebington, who is the site’s Webmaster and the only person with access to upgrade, update, and alter the site. This analysis will specifically examine the entities produced during the creation of the Muscle Machine Project which are found on Stelarc’s Web site.<sup>2</sup>

The purpose of the diplomatic analysis is to assess the status of the identified digital entities as records. Once the status of the digital entities has been determined, preservation strategies may be proposed by Domain 3.

## IDENTIFICATION OF RECORD(S)

A record, as defined by the InterPARES glossary, is a document made or received and set aside in the course of a practical activity. A record must also possess all of the following five components, as established by InterPARES 1 research conclusions: fixed content and form, embedded action, archival bond, persons and contexts. The application of the definition of a record to the creator’s digital entities is therefore analyzed according to the following parameters:

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<sup>1</sup> Case Study 02 Final Report, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/>.

**1. To be identified as a record, the digital entity must possess fixed content and form,<sup>3</sup> and be affixed to a stable medium (or physical carrier).**

After the Webmaster has put content such as pictures and text on the Web site, the content and form are fixed to the commercial server providing hosting services.<sup>4</sup>

**2. A record must also participate in an action, defined as the conscious exercise of will by an officer of the creator or by an external person, aimed to create, maintain, modify or extinguish situations. A record results as an unintended by-product or product of the action.**

The entities participate in the creation of the Muscle Machine Project, and as a result they are by-products of this action.<sup>5</sup>

**3. A record must possess an archival bond, which is the relationship that links each record to the previous and subsequent record of the same action and, incrementally, to all the records which participate in the same activity. The archival bond is originary (i.e., it comes into existence when a record is made or received and set aside), necessary (i.e., it exists for every record), and determined (i.e., it is characterized by the purpose of the record).**

The record is bound to other records created during the creation of the Muscle Machine Project. These records included performance videos, technical drawings, lectures, visual documents of final performance, performance photos, and sketchbook. This bond also exists between all of the records stored on Stelarc's Web site as they all participate in the activity of maintaining these records.

**4. Record creation must involve at least three persons, whether or not they explicitly appear in the record itself. These persons are the author, addressee and writer; in the electronic environment, one must also take into account two additional necessary persons: the creator and the originator.**

- The record's **author** is the physical or juridical person having the authority and capacity to issue the record or in whose name or by whose command the record has been issued.

Stelarc is the author of all documents on the site as they are uploaded and can be modified according to his selection.

- The **addressee** the physical or juridical person(s) to whom the record is directed or for whom the record is intended.

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<sup>3</sup> The InterPARES1 Authenticity Task Force has defined fixed form as the following: 1) binary content of the record, including indicators of documentary form, must be stored in a manner that ensures it remains complete and unaltered, and 2) technology must be maintained and procedures defined and enforced to ensure that the content is presented or rendered with the same documentary form it had when set aside. (See ATF Research Methodology Statement, available at: [http://www.interpares.org/documents/interpares\\_ResearchMethodologyStatement.pdf](http://www.interpares.org/documents/interpares_ResearchMethodologyStatement.pdf)).

<sup>4</sup> At the time a person visits the Web site, the content and form are fixed; however, updates to the Web site can be made.

<sup>5</sup> See the "Create Muscle Machine Project" model for a more detailed view of this activity and the records produced.

Stelarc and the general public are the addressees of the record. For Stelarc, the site functions both as a means to serve his own memory and as a reference tool. The site also serves the public as an outreach tool by showcasing Stelarc's performances.

- The **writer** is the physical or juridical person having the authority and capacity to articulate the content of the record.

Stelarc is the writer as he is responsible for the tenor and articulation of the writing.<sup>6</sup>

- The **creator** is the person in whose fonds the record exists.

Stelarc is the creator of the record.

- The **originator** is the person to whom the Internet account issuing or the server holding the record belongs.

The originator is the commercial company hosting the Web site, VirtualArtists.com.

**5. Finally, a record must possess an identifiable context, defined as the framework in which the action in which the record participates takes place. The types of context include juridical-administrative, provenancial, procedural, documentary, and technological.**

- The **juridical-administrative context** is the legal and organizational system in which the creating body belongs.

Stelarc complies with granting agency requirements and Intellectual Property and Copyright laws, but he does not feel that these impose heavily on the creation of his Web site.

- The **provenancial context** refers to the creating body, its mandate, structure and functions.

The creator is Stelarc and the records reside in his fonds.

- The **procedural context** comprises the business procedure in the course of which the record is created.

The creator's "Create Muscle Machine Project" activities can be broken down in six constitutive **procedural phases** as follows:<sup>7</sup>

- a. **Initiative:** the introductory phase of any procedure is "constituted by those acts, written and/or oral, which start the mechanism of the procedure."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> The various specialists from scientific and technological fields, such as engineering, computer programming and technology, biology, that Stelarc collaborates with are also authors of the records produced during the creation of Stelarc's art works, and maintain records separately, although Stelarc has access to them.

<sup>7</sup> The phases of procedure as dictated by Diplomatic Analysis; see Luciana Duranti, *Diplomatics: New Uses for an Old Science* (Lanham, Maryland and London: The Scarecrow Press in association with the Society of American Archivists and the Association of Canadian Archivists, 1998), 115.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

In the “Create Muscle Machine Project,” the initiative occurs when Stelarc conceives the project, creating a proposal based on an artistic idea.

- b. **Inquiry:** this preliminary phase “is constituted by the collection of the elements necessary to evaluate the situation.”<sup>9</sup>

The inquiry occurs when Stelarc collects information about potential collaborators.

- c. **Consultation:** this phase is “constituted by the collection of opinions and advice after all the relevant data has been assembled.”<sup>10</sup>

In the consultation phase, the financial, technological, spatial and human resources are determined in order to produce the work.

- d. **Deliberation:** this phase is “constituted by the final decision-making.”<sup>11</sup>

In the phase, Stelarc decides on final product which is detailed in a proposal submitted to his collaborators.

- e. **Deliberation control:** this phase is “constituted by the control exercised by a physical or juridical person different from the author of the document embodying the transaction, on the substance of the deliberations and/or on its forms.”<sup>12</sup>

Deliberation control occurs when Stelarc receives feedback on his proposal from his collaborators.

- f. **Execution:** “the documents created in this phase are the originals of those embodying the transactions.”<sup>13</sup> In other words, the execution phase results in the issuing of the first record capable of producing the consequences intended by its author.

The execution occurs when the project is developed according to plan.

- The **documentary context** is defined as the archival fonds to which a record belongs and its internal structure.

Stelarc uses the Web site as a means of accessing and preserving his documents. While there is no formal filing practice employed by Stelarc on the site, the records are grouped together and some organization is employed, for example by the title of the project.

- The **technological context** is defined as the characteristics of the technological components of an electronic computing system in which records are created.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 116.

The technology created for performances is maintained by the institution that built it, and the projects are constrained by the state and limitations of current technology. While Stelarc chooses the documents to be uploaded, the Web site is modified by the Webmaster only.

## CONCLUSIONS

According to the above analysis, the entities on Stelarc's Web site fulfill all of the InterPARES 1 record requirements, as seen in points one to five.

The record to be preserved is Stelarc's Web site and the elements such as photographs and text on it.<sup>14</sup> Although it might be argued that the individual photographs, etc., should be the focus of preservation, the Web site is providing context.

Based on the above analysis our recommendations for preservation include the following:

1. To establish formal policy and standardized procedures with respect to the technological obsolescence:
  - a. The preserver needs to be aware of any technological changes.
  - b. Prepare for necessary conversion or migration.
2. To preserve records on other media, not solely on the Web site.
3. To track modifications made by the Webmaster to the Web site.

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<sup>14</sup> This case study is specifically concerned with the entities on Stelarc's website; however, other records were produced during the creation of his art works which should also be preserved, for example, those held by the scientists and technologists with whom Stelarc collaborated.