



InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Overview

Case Study 02: Performance Artist Stelarc

Peter Gagné, Université Laval

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The Creator Context / Activity

Creator: Stelios Arcadiou, a.k.a. Stelarc

Creator type: Artistic focus / private sphere (private individual)

Juridical context: Pertinent legislation includes laws relating to copyright, patents and intellectual property, as well as laws related to contracts. The copyrights of the programs, codes and technology designs belong to the institutions that designed and built the technology, while the copyright on the interaction of body and technology, as shown in the pictures and videos of the performance, belongs to Stelarc.

Since a scientific team works on each performance, normative requirements related to the given disciplines affect the creation. The institutions collaborating with Stelarc are each bound by particular legal constraints, more so than Stelarc himself.

Activity: The creation and administration of performance art in which the performer (Stelarc) seeks to utilize his body as a primary performance tool, drawing on and integrating cognitive science, robotics, dance, sound, medical visualization tools, minimally invasive surgical techniques and the World Wide Web. The performances assimilate technology with the human body, using the body and its functions – such as pulse and muscle tension – as mechanisms for movement and sound.

Specific activities that were studied include “(1) the various performance creation and development processes associated with each project and performance, (2) the processes associated with documenting performances, and (3) the documentation conversion and management processes involved in providing access to the performance documentation on the artist’s Web site” (FR 6)

Nature of Partnership

Stelarc collaborates with institutions and specialists in a variety of scientific and technological fields to create and carry out his performances. These collaborators are responsible for the

technological aspects of the performance and are subject to a range of policies, procedures and standards that impact on the work that is conducted.

The creator receives funding from his positions as Artist in Residence and Research Fellow at various institutions, in addition to major grants, including The Myer Foundation, Australia; The Visual Arts / Craft Board, Australia Council; The Wellcome Trust, UK and The Arts and Humanities Research Board, UK.

Bureaucratic/Organizational Structure

The creator, as an individual, administers his own activities. He governs the concept and performance and assembles a temporary group to see both come to life.

Digital Entities Studied

The overall digital entity is a Web site¹ with interactive space for a “recordkeeping” system for the performer. Specific digital entities studied are the records that the artist has selected and placed on his Web site. These include diagrams, sound files, still images, video, Virtual Reality Modeling Language (VRML) files, Quick Time VR and Shockwave files.

Documentary Practices Observed

Records Creation and Maintenance

Stelarc imposes his own policies, **procedures** and standards to maintain the integrity of his work.

While the Web site is mostly used as a records-keeping system for the creator’s documents, it is also used in document **creation**, since it allows the submission of viewer comments. These comments are posted on the “Comments” page of the site after being converted into HTML by the Webmaster, who edits the e-mail comments left by Web site visitors “as he sees fit (the artist has no say in which comments are to be posted).” (FR 12)

Stelarc has a **classification** system in which digital entities are **identified** by project title, event series and biographical content. “Stelarc has no recognized system of **organization** from an archival point of view with regard to his artifacts.” (FR 9) His *ad hoc* organization tends to resemble his business (creation) practices. “The schema for organizing is the mapping of the developmental process as a whole.” (FR 13) Records are organized in chronological sequence, in accordance with performance and publicity needs. As far as **aggregation** is concerned, records are grouped with related entities. Links are made to other records and collaborators’ Web sites.

With regards to **changing** the creator’s documents, Webmaster Gary Zebington is the only person with access to upgrade, update and alter the site and the documents uploaded to it. “The artist authorizes his Webmaster to make or alter records on the Web site as needed; this is done approximately every 6 months.” (FR 12) However, no record is kept of the specific changes or updates made to the site.

¹ See <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/>.

Recordkeeping and Preservation

The Web site serves as a record keeping **system** for the creator's records, including contracts, correspondence, videos and images. This is a shift from a traditional system for the creator, who used to maintain sketchbooks and notes. He believes that "in a sense...the Web site becomes a kind of public archive," (FR 9) but that it is most useful for him in the sense that he does not have to store and transport paper documentation and can have access to all important documentation from anywhere.

The site is database-driven, hosted by a commercial company and maintained by a Webmaster (other than Stelarc). As far as preservation **procedures** are concerned, certain records are selected by the creator and are appraised, digitized and uploaded to his Web site, which is used as a repository for the fonds. As such, it can be said that the **capture** of records into the system is manual and subjective. Although the Webmaster converts entities from their original form into useable files for the Web site, he also maintains hard copies of original records. The Webmaster also makes and retains a **backup** copy of all records uploaded to the Web site on CD-ROM.

Stelarc himself is responsible for the **preservation** of records remaining with him. However, he does not preserve records related to the construction of technological devices (including all data produced by technologies that may be swallowed by him during performances). These records remain part of the archives of the institution building the technology, although Stelarc claims to provide links from his Web site to these institutions.

The creator has a **preservation philosophy** that is difficult to integrate with accepted archival principles. He believes that "the primary record exists in his own body as much as it does in the computing systems and/or electronic networks through which he performs or disseminates those performances." (FR 1) Viewed from this angle, all records that he creates are therefore ephemeral and incapable of being preserved. This notion is in keeping with artistic movements such as the Dadaists, Futurists and the *Avant Garde*, although "maintaining records of this type of work over time have not been the primary concern of the artist's creating them." (FR 4)

There are no controls on **access** to the documents on the Web site. The process of accessing and downloading documents does not require any passwords or other verification. The documents can be printed directly off of the Web site from anywhere by anyone.

Some records are already unavailable due to technological **obsolescence**. In response to this problem, pictures of earlier performances (which can no longer be performed because the technology is obsolete and the use of newer technology would substantially alter the performance) are posted on the Web site.

Accuracy, Authenticity and Reliability

In the original case study proposal, "it was anticipated that a model or prototype of an experiential, interactive and dynamic performance installation system could be created to help examine one or more levels of Stelarc's composite system of record generation. While this proved to be infeasible, it is believed that such an approach is likely the most effective means of accurately determining the reliability, accuracy and authenticity of the artistic record within new digital environments that are experiential, interactive and dynamic." (FR 3)

Accuracy

Not addressed in the available documentation.

Authenticity

It appears that the creator equates authority with authenticity. “The artist/creator believes that the authenticity of the digital entities is assured primarily because of his own unique position at the centre of the entire process and the unique nature of the performance events. The documentation on his Web site and the linking of this documentation to the other sites that have permission to display the information assures some degree of control and hence authenticity.” (FR 11)

All performance materials are copyrighted by the artist unless specifically stated by the research organization or the funding body. Copyright law also applies to the Web site, but the creator has made no attempt to restrict the downloading of images or video. This situation may result in the altering of the original entities and thus questionable authenticity of downloaded copies.

Reliability

Not addressed in the available documentation.