



InterPARES 2 Project

International Research on Permanent Authentic Records in Electronic Systems

Characterization of Case Study Validated

Case Study 02: Performance Artist Stelarc

Heather Daly, UBC
with input from Geneviève Sheppard and Luciana Duranti

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Relevance of the Case Study to InterPARES 2

The case study examines the performance art of Stelarc, an Australian performance artist “who combines robotics and technology with the human form.”¹ The purpose of this case study is to investigate the experiential, interactive and dynamic results of collaborations which occur in fragile environments where there is some question as to where record creation begins and ends.² To reach his artistic objectives, Stelarc collaborates with a number of specialists in different fields such as engineering, computer programming and biology. The collaborative nature of the activities leading to records creation allows an examination of how a network of influences can impact upon record creation. The relevance of the case study is therefore to enable InterPARES to meet its goals in relation to the study of artistic activities that are conducted using experiential, interactive and dynamic computer technology.

Information about the Creator

The creator in this case is a private individual who has been active in performance art since 1968. The creator lives and works in Australia. He is subject to Australian legislation, such as copyright law. He is also subject to the terms of the contracts into which enters. Funding for the activities of the creator is received mostly from grants. The mandate of the creator is to, ‘show the body as obsolete and continually one with technology.’ Stelarc’s underlying philosophy is that the body is an obsolete entity with no individual identity. He argues the body derives its intelligence from interrelations between human and biological systems and environmental conditions. Ultimately, Stelarc argues the body requires the assistance of technology. Therefore, in his performance art, Stelarc’s mission is to “utilize the body as a primary performance tool, drawing on and integrating cognitive science, robotics, dance, sound,

¹ Case Study 02 Final Report, p. 1.

² Case Study 02 Proposal.

medical visualization tools, minimally invasive surgical techniques, and the Web.”³ The functions of the creator are the creation and administration of performance art. Stelarc’s activities may be categorized into three main stages including conception, development and documenting/testing. These stages of activity encompass a number of activities such as applying for funds, creating sketches, developing instructions for performances, prototype building, managing a performance and evaluating a performance. In terms of governance, the creator is in control of artistic concepts and performances. Each individual performance is realized through a collaboration of partners that is assembled by the creator. The work of the partners is constrained by relevant laws, especially copyright. The work of the partners is also constrained by relevant norms, such as those related to construction, medicine, programming, simulation, electronics, choreography, robotics, and direction. The creator has received some honours, such as honorary degrees, as a result of his work.

Information about the Administration/Management Function

The creator, as an individual, administers his own activities. Documents produced as a result of administrative functions include applications for grants, correspondence, contracts, sketches, notes on performances and demonstrations and films of prototype performances. Stelarc uses his Website as a recordkeeping system. He has implemented a basic classification system in which entities are identified by project title, event series and biographical content. Selected records retained by the creator are appraised, digitized, and uploaded to the creator’s Web site, which is used as a repository for the fonds. The Webmaster also keeps hard copies of these records. Pictures of earlier performances that can no longer be performed are also posted on the Web site. These earlier performances may not be performed because the technology is obsolete and the use of newer technology would substantially alter the original performance. The partners collaborating with Stelarc are subject to a range of policies, procedures and standards that impact on the work that is conducted. Stelarc imposes his own policies, procedures and standards to maintain the integrity of his work.

Information about the Digital Entity Being Studied

The digital entities for the purpose of the study are the records that the artist has selected and placed on his Web site, <http://www.stelarc.va.com.au/>. These include: diagrams, sound files, still images, video files, Virtual Reality Modeling (VRML), Quick Time VR and Shockwave files. Also examined were the Third Hand, an electronic device appended to the right hand that is capable of independent motion and is activated by the EMG (electromyogram) signals of the abdomen and leg muscles, and the Hexapod/Muscle Machine, a six legged robot and performance project combining performance art, dance and sound. The digital entities are related to the administrative function, and to the performance function, as the records are organized in accordance with performance and publicity needs. The Website also allows for the submission of comments from those viewing the site. Copyright law applies to the Web site, but the creator has made no attempt to restrict the downloading of images or video. In terms of preservation, the Web site files are backed up onto CDROMs which are in the custody of the Webmaster. “Hard copies” of the Web site files may also be kept by the Webmaster. Some performance-related

³ Case Study 02 Final Report, p. 4.

records are already unavailable due to technological obsolescence. In addition to maintaining the Web site, the Webmaster controls the content of the Web site in collaboration with Stelarc. The Web site is currently an html and Java script document which contains gif images and animation, jpg images, wav sound files and ShockWave and RealSpace Viewer Xtra plug-ins for video and audio files. There are also email messages posted on the “comments” page which have been converted into html. Records are digitized, edited, formatted, and then posted. The Web site is hosted by VirtualArtists, a commercial company.