Bodily Extensions and Performance: Editors' Introduction

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In contemporary technological society, bodily extension has become a regular occurrence for many people. Extensions can attach to or connect with human bodies to adjust, change, or augment them in physical or virtual spaces, including artificial limbs, contact lenses, and digital avatars. They can be as hi-tech as a surgeon manipulating a device to operate remotely on a patient in another country, as media-present as a Paralympian athlete with running blades, or as everyday as a blind person using a stick. We might use extensions ourselves or witness others using them in workplaces, social environments, at home, and in the media. They may be perceived as enabling tools by some, replacing or augmenting body parts, capacities or abilities, perhaps leading to superhuman feats (Thompson 2012). However, others may see them as disabling restrictions, with their use enforced by social or cultural expectations about what a body should be (Betcher 2001). Inevitably, extensions are incorporated into body images and implicated in social identities (Serlin 2004). This Special Issue on 'Bodily Extensions and Performance' raises critical questions about the nature of extended bodies and body-technology practices. The six essays concerned with the lived experiences of such bodies, highlighting processes of incorporation and hybridity (Donnarumma), influence and exchange (O'Brien), blurring and entanglement (Wilson), shifting identities (Riszko), destabilisation and metamorphosis (Stępień) and defamiliarisation of the everyday (Sobchack).

The increasingly complex blending of bodies and technologies has corresponded with a rise in the intellectual popularity of the cultural theories of posthumanism and new materialism. These philosophies offer direct monist challenges to the dualist tendencies of humanist perspectives, denying priority of mind over matter, and of flesh over other forms of material (Braidotti 2013, Dolphijn & Tuin 2012). 'Bodily Extensions and Performance' was an intentionally provocative choice of title for this issue, given that 'bodily extension' implies the centrality of a body to be extended, and at least one of our authors has responded by rejecting this conceptualisation. Yet we argue that neither monist nor dualist perspectives are able to appreciate experiences of bodily extension. In theories and practices of performance, bodies are well recognised as sites of knowledge. The importance of sensory perception, including the internal senses of proprioception and kinaesthesia, is understood in relation to the specific communication of affect and empathy (Reynolds & Reason 2012, Massumi 2002). If we are to understand what it means to live as flesh-technology entities, and to grasp the sensory and ethical implications thereof, performance is an important disciplinary arena in which to debate questions of bodily experience.

The articles in this Special Issue address the coming together of flesh and other materials, acknowledging processes of assembly and the influence of interfaces in the fluid becoming of embodied extended beings. Bodies are accustomed to extending their internal sensory fields to include other materials, with the blind person's stick as a prime example. Kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses can be pushed out into those extensions with surprising alacrity (Sobchack 2010, p.60),

so that even a rubber hand with little visual veracity may be incorporated into one's bodily sensory field in a short space of time (Tsakiris & Haggard 2005). Bodies develop movement memories that include extensions to the extent that an amputee can forget that walking is not possible without an artificial leg (Murray & Forshaw 2012). Lived experiences of multi-material bodies demonstrate a less clean distinction than the polarity of some monist and dualist philosophies might suggest. They are closer to DeLanda's definition of assemblage (2016), in which the relative autonomy of the parts is respected. The assemblage and the parts exist simultaneously on the ontological plane – their properties emerge from and are contingent upon their relationship with each other. The emergent properties and capacities of the whole are different from (not more or less than) the sum of the parts. Our six contributors each explore the autonomy of the parts and the ontology of the whole, in contexts of performance, installation art, music, live art, fashion and everyday life. Some address processes of becoming by which the extended body comes into existence, and all acknowledge, tacitly or explicitly, points of porosity and/or friction at the interfaces between parts.

In the first article, Marco Donnarumma responds to our Special Issue provocation by rejecting the idea of bodily extension altogether, and instead embracing "bodily incorporation", which he defines as being the inhabitation of hybrid, co-dependent forms of human-machine embodiment. Sidestepping the cyborg as an "ambiguously popularised and drastically softened" figure, Donnarumma focuses on hybrid bodies and technologies in performance art, drawing upon examples including his own experiences as a performer. He

describes processes of psychic attunement or entrainment between body and technology that support hybridisation and prevent "artificial separations of the technological body from its lived experience". This shifts the focus of attention, he argues, "from result to process, from separateness to relationality, from integrity to hybridity", making the dichotomy of body/extension "undefendable". His analysis of performing in his own work, *Corpus Nil*, illustrates and extends his proposal for alternative forms of embodiment that incorporate bodies and technologies both willingly and unconsciously through automaticity. When performing, he explains, he becomes a technological body that is mutable, relational and hybrid.

The second article takes a different approach, actively separating bodies and technologies in order to explore productive interactions between them. Employing Don Ihde's theory of human-technology relationships and his ideas on how technology both amplifies and reduces a body's potentiality, Daniel O'Brien examines experiences of participation in interactive art installations. He considers the examples of *Legible City* (1988) and *Scenario* (2011), both of which require the user's bodily motion for the artwork to be constituted. For O'Brien, the nature of bodily extension via technological devices in these examples is a process of co-evolution. Unique experiences are created by and for each user via the interface between his/her body and the installation's technology. He uses Ihde's human-technology relationships to demonstrate how this can be seen as a process of deep exchange and mutual influence. The technology both extends and limits the user's body and his or her potential actions, and the user negotiates ways of moving and being that accommodate those extensions and

limitations. Their resulting relationships produce creative outcomes within the content of the artwork.

Samuel Wilson's article takes our Special Issue's theme into music, proposing that "music and musical practices both extend bodies and permeate them". He describes a long-standing modernist approach to the body in musical composition, and proposes a contemporary posthuman perspective that recognizes the three-way relationship between instrument, player and sound as a "human-non-human entanglement". There are parallels between Wilson's discussion of player-instrument relationships and Donnarumma's explanation of jazz musicians' techniques, with both acknowledging the creative value of the skilled performer being taken outside his or her comfort zone in different ways. Wilson uses Ferneyhough's seminal *Time and Motion Study* cycle to show how complex scoring for voice, instrument and electronic equipment entangles the human performer as an object with other objects, rather than demonstrating virtuoso mastery over the objects. He updates a previous analysis of the performer as cyborg in this work, referencing the materiality of the augmented voice. Wilson concludes that the scoring of the body alongside other objects (analogue and electronic) "gives rise to unpredictable interactions and interferences of one component by its others". Distinctions between instrument, player and sound become blurred in the practice of making music.

Like Wilson, Leila Riszko is concerned with technological augmentation of the voice. However, her emphasis is on the effect of vocal extension upon identity, and the location of the voice in relation to the body. Her article focuses

particularly on the work of boychild, a queer, black, trans artist who employs a sci-fi aesthetic in lip-synched performances. Riszko argues that boychild uses posthuman performance strategies to communicate meaning through combinations of body, voice and technology. The use of technologically enhanced audio and lip-synching places the voices of others within boychild's body, extending it and creating hybrid identities that may be human, avatar or animalistic in nature. Riszko explores the voice as both embodied and external to the body, through ventriloquism, lip-synching and other vocal practices. She considers the voice as both immaterial and material through Dolar's 'acousmatic' (or un-bodied) voice, Žižek's voice-as-object and Connor's 'vocalic body'. She proposes that boychild's technologically extended, constantly shifting body and voice work against fixed categories and resist dominant normative body politics because of their fluidity and ambiguity as both separate and whole.

In the penultimate article, Justyna Stępień addresses fashion technologies as bodily extensions in the work of Alexander McQueen. She explains how McQueen departs from mainstream fashion to design clothes that subvert and alter bodies in ways that are closer to art installations than consumer products. Stępień's analysis of the destabilisation of "normative conventions of beauty" in McQueen's work reflects the body politics that Riszko identifies in boychild's performances. This includes McQueen's portrayal of "the technical transformation of disability" in the form of double-amputee Paralympic champion Aimee Mullins on the front cover of *Dazed and Confused* magazine. Stępień argues that McQueen's work represents the metamorphosis of embodied form, incorporating human, animal and technical materials as interconnecting

entities. Like Riszko, she sees such posthuman embodiment as resisting fixity, constantly engaged in processes of unfolding and becoming as material assemblages.

The final article by Vivian Sobchack brings a different kind of register to this Special Issue, examining experiences of bodily extension through everyday and virtuosic movement. Sobchack discusses embodied form and motion for people who are "differently-abled", drawing upon her perspectives as media theorist and cultural critic and as a person who uses an artificial leg following an amputation. Her argument weaves together phenomenological description and interpretation to explore how daily activities become defamiliarised as a body's material form changes. She describes her own technological extensions of limbs, crutches and canes, and their impacts upon the choreography of moving in and through the world. Her article explains how it feels to be an assemblage of flesh and technology that is unfixed, malleable, and how it affects interactions with environments and with others. Body and limb exist as both separate and merged, bounded and blurred, with time, practice, skill and pain playing prominent roles in everyday processes of becoming.

As we explained earlier, it is the nature of assemblages that the component parts retain their relative autonomy alongside the identity and properties of the whole, and so it is with this Special Issue. Each essay addresses a specific theme in a particular context, but as a collection they testify to the complexity of the lived experience of bodily extension. Many draw upon posthumanist and/or new materialist theories to indicate the equivalence of flesh and technology, particularly when discussing the witnessing of body-technology assemblages.

However, all of them also acknowledge the processes and interfaces involved in becoming and experiencing such assemblages, in terms that reveal layering and fragility at individual and cultural levels. Inevitably all of the authors return at some point to narrate from the perspective of the human body component, since the sensory field of that body is critical to the process of interfacing with technological parts. This Special Issue proposes that experience should not be overlooked in the study of flesh-technology blending and merging, but that such experiences are a key part of understanding how these processes occur. We propose that new concepts of what it means to be a person in a technological age are needed – a flexible approach that recognises the fluid nature of contemporary lived bodies, which might include a variety of extensions at different times, with different qualities, capacities and abilities. We need to learn to live as assemblages and to recognise the implications individually, socially and culturally. We offer this Special Issue as a catalyst for further research in this area.

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