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Artist becomes a parasite

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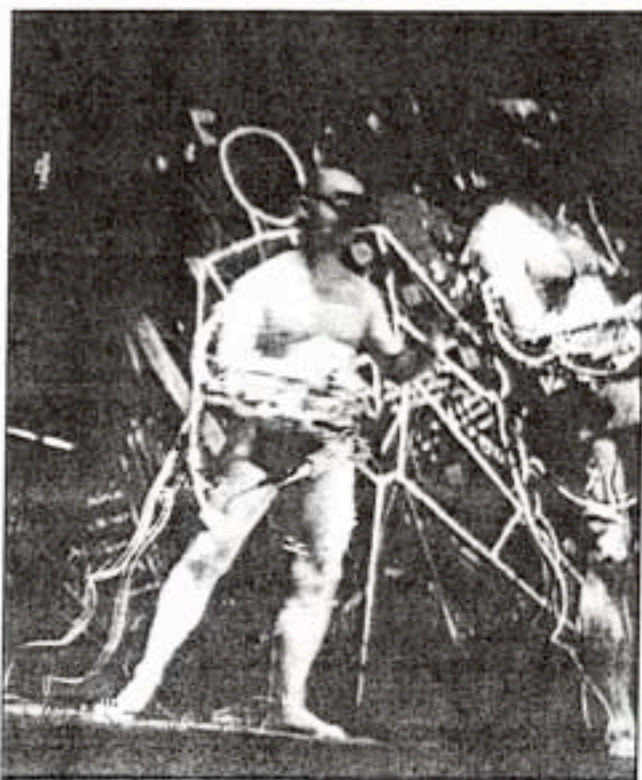
Visitors at the Wood Street Galleries on Saturday night watched a human body become a parasite to the Internet. Considering CMU, that's not such a strange concept. But on Saturday night, the body was not a student with his eyes glued to a computer screen, motionless except for tapping fingers.

That body was Stelarc, an Australian performance artist who is currently working as a Research Fellow in the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at CMU. Stelarc uses medical, robot, and virtual reality systems to explore, extend, and enhance the body's performance parameters.

Upon entering the gallery, we all saw it: a middle-aged pallid body in a black room, lit from above by an aqua lamp and photographers' lights, and covered with wires and sensors. The eyes were blocked from our view by virtual reality viewers, and the body was rendered faceless. The right arm of the body was weighed down by a prosthetic hand which rotated while the real hand with which it shared the right arm tapped its fingers together.

A little boy beside me asked, "Is that man sick?" I wondered the same thing, and as I looked at this "body," I felt sorry for it; it looked so... restrained. But once the performance began my pity, was quickly replaced by "What !??" The body wiggled the fingers on its left

hand and industrial noise burst into the air hushing the audience. The noise was quickly augmented by rhythmic electronic sounds reminiscent of techno-trance music. Samples from classical, dance, and new age music filtered into the air. Then the prosthetic hand began to rotate and a mechanical whir added itself to the sounds in the air.



Anthony Chao/Tartan Photo Editor

Stelarc moved to the flow of Internet activity.

Aside from the wiggling fingers, the body had been motionless. Then, suddenly, the right arm swung up above the head and the wrist of the real hand bent down while the left arm swung out towards the audience. The left knee jerked

into the air and the leg rotated wildly, occasionally kicking out. The body's shoulders twitched and rotated. The leg went down and the hips dipped. The arms swung around and then the left arm hung above the sweating head while the right arm hovered in front of the body's torso and the prosthetic hand rotated. Then the body stood still, its

posture showing its anticipation for the next stimulus. After a few seconds the motion started up again.

Images triggered by the sensors on the body were projected onto a large screen. Virtual bodies rotated in response to the real body's motion. Then a real-time video of the body as seen from above appeared on the screen to be quickly replaced by an image of the body from the audience's point of view and then back to an image of the rotating virtual body.

The performance, entitled "Parasite: Event for Invaded and Involuntary Body" indicated just how far a human body can be augmented by technology, and Stelarc has published some interesting thoughts about how and why technology should be used to help human bodies reach an ideal state which can be found on the Internet at <http://www.merlin.com.au/stelarc>.

In this performance, Stelarc seems to have a vision of a human body feeding itself on the activity of the Internet, but after seeing the body controlled and constrained by itself and by the input from the Internet, I get the feeling that the parasite is really technology.