As technology progresses, the rift between organic and mechanic is increasingly made more obscure. This leads one to then ask whether the corporeal body is perhaps out-dated. Is the human corporeal body “obsolete”? An artistic framework provides a site for abstraction and consideration, allowing for the exploration of these questions.

Artists and culture producers now not only work with the visual, but also the biological, and the mechanical, effectively exploring the obsolescence of the corporeal body.

Corporeal obsolescence is in itself a contentious idea. It is then the place of art to provide a framework for public debate. When discussing transhumanist ideas in an artistic context, one must realise that these artists have transcended the role of cultural producer and have extended themselves into the scientific roles they wish to question. Artists such as Stelarc and Eduardo Kac not only represent scientific advancement in their art, but also undertake new forms of research, creating the very advancements they previously commented upon.

A key practitioner in posthumanist art is the Australian performance artist, Stelarc. Stelarc’s work deals heavily with “the obsolete body”. The artist does not however suggest that the body is obsolete in the sense that it can be discarded entirely. He instead suggests that humans as a species have created a new technological environment in which we cannot operate effectively as living organisms. The body is obsolete in the sense that it is no longer compatible with its surroundings. We have reached an

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evolutionary endpoint where the next logical stage of adaptation is for the organic to assimilate the mechanic.

In *Prosthetics, Robotics and Remote Existence: Postevolutionary Strategies* it is no longer a matter of perpetuating the human species by *reproduction*, but of individual by *redesigning*. What is significant is no longer *male-female machine interface*. THE BODY IS OBSOLETE.

This statement does not mean the body is entirely obsolete, rather, that the corporeal body as an entirely organic form is limited in its potential. Stelarc’s work is concerned with the boundaries and possibilities of the human body.

This statement suggests that artificial augmentation of the organic life form is necessary to realise the organism’s *human subject are constructed rather than given.*

Dictates that the notion of postevolution is one of choice. Stelarc’s work can then be viewed linearly in his engagement with corporeal potential. The artist’s earlier performance work, as demonstrated in the artist’s body suspended from hooks through flesh, surrounded by suspended rocks and tree branches. These early performances work to first highlight the fragility of human flesh and forms through the abject stretching and tearing of skin through suspension. Surrounded by natural materials then, demonstrates the human being’s origin realised, the second layer of performance is made apparent in the artist’s management of pain and bodily reflexes. Pain is controlled, and the body is pushed to its limits within its natural environment. Following this are performances such as *Stretched Skin/Third Hand.*

Favour of electrodes and a third robotic arm. The body is now not only being pushed to its physical limits through suspension, but the body has assimilated mechanical components. The body has evolved artificially, and has incorporated the technological terrain into its very being. These performances work to problematize the body as a functional construct, prompting a need for necessary human-machine incorporation.

The postevolutionary choice is made apparent, as Stelarc brings to light corporeal obsolescence in the sense that the human organism can no longer function in the environment it has created for itself.

As obsolescence has now been established as incompatibility with the manufactured environment, this essay will now discuss further postevolutionary strategies in the form of tissue art, transgenics and elective corporeal augmentation.

Elaborating further upon a point raised in the
postevolutionary strategy—as shown previously in Stelarc’s work. Prosthetic use builds upon growing technologies in the field of biomimetics, or biological mimicry. External mechanical elements are now being developed to either enhance or replace existing biological functions. Such as Stelarc’s Third Arm or Exoskeleton demonstrate bodily amplification at a superficial level, full prosthetic augmentation can be seen in his collaboration with The Tissue Culture and Art Project (TC & A), Semi-Living Extra Ear ¼ Scale. In this project, a ¼ scale replica of Stelarc’s ear is grown externally using human cells. This prosthesis is not so much a sign of loss, as much as it is a signifier of excess. Its purpose is not to replace a lost organ—it has been developed as a supplementary addition to the body’s normal function. This prosthesis demonstrates corporeal obsolescence through excess. Furthermore, this work comes back to ideas of moving beyond traditional reproduction. Living tissue has been cultivated outside the body and grown to resemble a human body part. This semi-living artefact destabilises the unified body, as reproduction no longer needs to occur within or as part of the corporeal body.

This leads on to tissue art and transgenic art. Similarly to the use of living tissue as a means of artistic expression. The work of TC & A creates a site for reflection in the public sphere, considering bioethics. Guatemalan worry dolls inside a bioreactor, placed alongside a computer to which people are encouraged to write their worries to the Dolls. This work further destabilises the notion of a unified corporeal body, calling into question its obsolescence whilst also providing a voicing station for contemporary anxiety, especially pertaining to the deconstruction and negation of the human form.

Transgenic art serves as a final means of transcending the physical body. The work of Eduardo Kac works closely with genetic material itself, manipulating it beyond what is natural. In of the Enigma, Kac has genetically-engineered a new life form, a hybrid between his own DNA and a Petunia flower. Where Stelarc’s work aims to negate the body’s purpose in a contemporary environment, Kac takes a different postevolutionary approach. Instead, Kac injects himself into his natural surroundings, incorporating human elements within its surrounding environment. Instead of developing mechanical means to work against the terrain, Kac has instead forced the environment to assimilate human forms. Prosthetics, tissue art and transgenic practices have been shown to acknowledge corporeal obsolescence, whilst also challenging it.

Initially the body may have appeared obsolete however, it has been shown that it is not. One must ask whether the body is really obsolete, and whether we as a species have in fact reached an evolutionary endpoint. It is actual and understands reality and the terrain it is at the centre of our relation to the world and experience space”.10
Patricia Piccinini’s work holds an ambivalent attitude towards postevolutionary strategies. She states that it is no longer relevant to oppose the artificial to the natural as through which the cutting edge of technology most regularly passes.” dependence between natural and artificial, meaning Piccinini does not proclaim the obsolescence so that technology is just becoming increasing presented with what appears to be an artificial however are as artificial as the next.

The notion of an obsolete body has led artists to question, and effectively problematize the corporeal form. Our push for a utopian body has led to the desire for augmentation and experimentation. The body is not necessarily obsolete, it is just a matter of its limits being pushed, tested, and redefined.

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