

## **Plásmata: Bodies, Dreams, and Data Curatorial Text**

We experience, perceive, move, think, feel and explore the world with and through our bodies. Every cell, organ, tissue and all components that make up our body and complex human organism allow us to exist and survive; to live, breathe, eat, love, create, act, express ourselves, protest. Through our bodies we navigate life, we desire, grow and change, we make an impression on the world. But we can also be judged, culturally identified, stereotyped or categorised as we are exposed to the world with our bodies.

In a post-technological age, and at a time when technology is not only commonplace in society, but it also imbues our bodies, it is impossible to imagine our worlds without interventions or systems that have been fulfilling desires of human improvement, enhancement, advancement and innovation. Technology has been changing the way we behave, work, live, interact, and love. It has changed the way we regard ourselves and how we are being perceived by others. And in an age of ubiquitous connectivity, with physical and virtual worlds merging at a fast rate - with the average person now spending more than one-third of their life online - it is clear we are already creating a society where our lives are completely enwrapped by technology. Through technologies and technological interfaces we desire and imagine ways to become something else, to change our human condition, extend and augment our bodies, escape them or maybe escape our mortality.

At the same time, we are seeing the problematics of technological systems and their impact on the body and human condition; from how we measure our bodies against societal expectations presented through digital worlds, advertising and social platforms to how social media influence and affect our body image. Our bodies are policed and surveilled through technologies invading our spaces, while we also see the impact of dependency, body commodification, and narcissism. And of course through technologies we have been reproducing bias and injustice, as well as enabling harassment, hate and disinformation. Our bodies are objectified, measured, monitored, analysed, categorised, quantified, manipulated, disrespected; they can be places of abuse, violence and assault.

We are creating technologies and construct worlds, where certain bodies are valued more than others and where bodies are absent, such as black, trans, female, queer, disabled, where workers' bodies are hidden, or bodies are defined through binaries. We have been constructing technological processes through which gender, race, body, disability, or class stereotypes are intensified and amplified. Our worlds, physical and virtual, are being built about and for consumption, commercial interest and social control. Being immersed in and surrounded by algorithms that are encoded with binary and heteronormative bias, we create narrow, tyrannical worlds, leaving many of us outside. We have been creating technologies, while technologies have been creating us.

At a time when companies like FB and Microsoft are rushing to sell us wild ideas about what a metaverse can be, we have already embraced a merging of physical worlds with mixed reality, augmented reality, and virtual reality - including online games platforms and blockchain powered virtual worlds. These are worlds that could seem without boundaries for what one wants to be or do, but are mainly driven by commercial interests and markets. Are these hybrid worlds here to change or replace physical reality as we

know it, or are these instances of short-lived pleasure and gratification, whilst creating new dystopian worlds? Either way, it's clear that these spaces translate to digital economies - one can buy, sell and create products but also personas and lifestyles including apparel, cars, houses etc.

Ironically, in Neal Stephenson's *Snow Crash* (1992), where the Metaverse first appears as a virtual world, it is a dystopian space where people can escape from an equally dystopian but unbearable real world run by big corporations; what we are ending up with today is a metaverse funded and run by these very companies. The metaverse, pretty much as fast transportation underground tunnels, ocean pods, space travel or inhabiting Mars, is serving the fulfilment of fantasies and escape worlds for the powerful and rich. It is also a way for creating new models of financialisation and more opportunities for exploitation and extraction from people and the planet.

If we are already experiencing worlds beyond the borders of the physical space, can we possibly reimagine, shape and inhabit hybrid, synthetic spaces in ways that go beyond consumerism, exploitation and financialisation, but instead focus on co-existence and compassion? Worlds that create possibilities and open up a multitude of perspectives, interconnectedness, and new ways of expression. Can augmented and virtual spaces take us "back to earth" rather than becoming fantasy spaces to avoid or escape it?

"Why should our bodies end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?" Donna Haraway in her seminal 1990 work, *A Cyborg Manifesto*, explores her idea of a "cyborg world" about "lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of their joint kinship between animals and machines, not afraid of permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints." And she continues, "Single vision produces worse illusions than double vision or many-headed monsters. Cyborg unities are monstrous and illegitimate; in our present political circumstances, we could hardly hope for more potent myths for resistance and recoupling."

These posthuman imaginaries, hybrid forms of human, animal, plant, bacteria and other species, fluid and flexible identities help us think beyond hierarchies and dichotomies, as in humans being better or different from animals, men being superior to women or humans opposed to machines. They help us envision post-anthropocentric perspectives that enable kinship, equity and relationships across all forms of life, a collective and interconnected body.

"A world parallel to our own though overlapping. We call it "Nature"; only reluctantly admitting ourselves to be "Nature" too." Denise Levertov's beautiful poem *Sojourns in the Parallel World* reminds us of what happens if we leave behind our resistance to think of ourselves as part of nature.

In a series of curated journeys unfolding through Pedion tou Areos - Athens' largest public park - Plásmata presents work by a group of international artists exploring themes and ideas around bodies after technology, constructed worlds, identities and boundaries, but also imagining new territories, connections and places of co-existence.

Plásmata (Greek for creatures), derived from πλάσσω (*plasso*), which means to form, mould (*plastikos*), are created, invented, they are animate beings, fantastical or real. In *Frankenstein: Annotated for Scientists, Engineers, and Creators of All Kinds*, (2017) the editors identify Mary Shelley's Victor's creation as "the creature", allowing readers to decide whether the denominations *daemon* and *monster*, which are used frequently in the text, are appropriate. In the same preface, they remind us that "the way we now use the word *creature* ignores a richer etymology. Today, we refer to birds and bees as creatures. Living things are creatures by virtue of their living-ness. When we call something a creature today, we rarely think in terms of something that has been created, and thus we erase the idea of a creator behind the creature. We have likewise lost the social connotation of the term *creature*, for creatures are made not just biologically (or magically) but also socially."

The "plásmata" one encounters in the artworks in Pedion tou Areos reveal to us a view of the human experience as a blending of material and immaterial, organic and machinic, a merge of human and nonhuman, social and physical.

"Not all of us can say, with any degree of certainty, that we have always been human, or that we are only that. Some of us are not even considered fully human now, let alone at previous moments of Western social, political and scientific history."

Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (2013)

Irini Mirena Papadimitriou  
Creative Director, [FutureEverything](#)

### **Participating artists**

Morehshin Allahyari / The Alternative Limb Project / Refik Anadol / Frederik Heyman / Ekene Ijeoma / Keiken x Clifford Sage / Kimchi and Chips / LaTurbo Avedon / Marshmallow Laser Feast / Eva & Franco Mattes / Christian Mio Loclair / Matthew Niederhauser, Elie Zananiri, John Fitzgerald / NOWNESS / Tony Oursler / Maria Papadimitriou / Eva Papamargariti / Annie Saunders, Andrew Schneider, Emma O'Halloran, OpenEndedGroup / SHOWStudio / SpY / SUPERFLEX / Dries Verhoeven / Cecilie Waagner Falkenstrøm / Saya Woolfalk / Liam Young

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