

**Upgrade. Perspectives on corporeal design.**

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WORKSHOP

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Workshop title: **UPGRADE – Perspectives on Corporeal Design**

Workshop participants: 90 minutes / max 12 participants

Workshop led by: Prof Christoph Zellweger; Senior Research Fellow and Professor of Art & Design at Sheffield Hallam University, UK/ Visiting Professor at the University of Ulster, Belfast, Northern Ireland / Lecturer HSLU / Lecturer ZHdK

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## CONTEXT

In recent decades societies readiness to reach out for invasive procedures and means of challenging the human body appearance and its functioning, has drastically increased (Morandi, 2007). The discussion gained momentum in the beginning of the 90's around the 'Posthuman' exhibition, which explored the implications of genetic engineering, plastic surgery, artificial intelligence, and other forms of body alteration "affecting what it means to be a human being" (Deitch, 1992). The discussion is still omnipresent in a current scenario which some critics like Hal Foster describe as "total design", where the living environment and almost everything, from politics to businesses, „from jeans to genes“ (Foster, 2002) has become a matter of design.

Artists have reflected on and reacted to these uprising issues through "carnal art" (Orlan), "technological enhancement" (Stelarc) and disquieting images of branded bodies through photography (Buetti). The fashion and film industry propagates not only unreachable aesthetic canons for the body but also permanently new visions for it (Avatar). While DIY "body design" continues to be available to anyone through training.

In our collective search for self-realisation and improvement, societies around the globe discuss the pro's and con's of altering, of re-designing body parts through genetic or medical interventions and they further engage in experimenting with new technologies and procedures supported by an expanding industry. In 2010 it is possible to state, that for parts of society the human body has become a luxury item and a commodity to be optimised and aestheticised with the help of surgeons, psychologists and personal advisors. Are these professional communities engaging in Art or Design practices? What qualifies a Corporal Designer?

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## TOPIC

The workshop ***UPGRADE – Perspectives on Corporeal Design*** places the human body at the centre of the discourse. It deals with “visions” and propositions, integrating the role of design fictions as tools to engage in upcoming challenges and promote new thinking.

***Corporeal design*** starts with body shaping and contouring activities or the design of surfaces (Lupton, 2002), in order to investigate the relationship between the body and larger ideological forces. If creating the new is always a political process, then every new construction of the body means its cultural re-imagination (Betterton, 1996), therefore a matter of Design.

The workshop paves the ground for a possible “***corporeal design***” practice and research that assesses such relevant cultural, social and political metamorphosis happening skin deep.

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## OBJECTIVES

The workshop will encourage the development of self-reflective practices. It will not provide answers on these complexities, but will focus on tracing a possible cartography of the topic, and reflect on the attitude and equipment creative stakeholders like designers will need to adopt to be successful in their aim to create viable futures.

The workshop will explore issues of identity, body images and different narratives around the body, responding to factual, fictional and ethical dimensions of such phenomena.

The workshop will generate debate on new directions of social rituals, alternative socio-political scenarios and technological departures.

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## FORMAT

The workshop considers the role of the designer as author, the body as a site layered with meaning and emotion and design as a critical, transformative and speculative tool.

The discussion will be placed in the context of critical practices and positions that explore the blurred territories between design, art and science, a not new phenomena of overlappings, coincidences and interferences (GREFF, 2008), responding to the current phenomena of de-territorialisation and de-hierarchisation of aesthetic practices.

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## STRUCTURE

- 20' Introducing the topic, short visual essay
  - 10' Debate
  - 30' Work in groups: discussion, summing up and documentation
  - 20' presentation of results
  - 10' conclusion
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## SHORT BIO:

**Prof Christoph Zellweger** (Switzerland/UK), graduated from the Royal College of Art in London after working for several years as a maker/designer in the jewellery trade in Germany and Switzerland. Through objects to wear, installations and limited editions Zellweger's work focuses on diverse aspects related to the manifestation of human identity, the many factors that challenge contemporary living and their impact in the humans' perceptions about themselves. Besides running his Zurich-based studio and exhibiting internationally, he holds a professorial research post at Sheffield Hallam University and lectures in Europe's leading Design and Art Colleges. His work features in museums and collections in Europe and in North America. Beside other European prizes he won the Swiss Federal Prize for Design three times. i

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