SAMPLE STUDENT ESSAY

**Analyse how technology has changed the role of the interaction between artist, artwork and audience.**

*(Written in 45 minutes under examination conditions)*

Contemporary technological advancements and innovations have opened the doors to a world of augmented interaction between the artist, their artwork and the audience. Australian artist Stelarc and American artist Bill Viola are two contemporary artists who have embraced this new and forward-thinking methodology, adopting technology and new technological developments to create postmodern, interactive artworks. These artworks show how technology is revolutionising the relationship between audience and artist, expanding the possibilities of form and expression and redefining the art object itself.

*Interpretation of the question with relevance to two artists*

With technological advancements the artist uses his own body as sculpture or as an interface for technology. In Stelarc's early work the artist allowed metal hooks to be inserted into his skin and then attached to one of his robotic inventions, which would then hoist his body into suspension and often move the body around in space. For his work *City Suspension* 1985, Stelarc's body was connected to steel cables, hoisted to the midpoint of a crane arm, shuttled to the end, then rotated four times around a building in Copenhagen for a 24-minute suspension. These suspension performances demonstrate how technology has given the artist the ability to use his own body as a performance element. Stelarc has since developed his artmaking practice, further embracing the use of technology to enable him to interact to a greater extent with his artworks. *Muscle Machine* 2001–02 is a six-legged human–machine robot that is controlled by the artist, whose body stands on the ground within the chassis of the machine. Encoders positioned at the artist's hip-joints transmit data to allow the human controller to move and also to direct the six-legged machine to move. The operating system of *Muscle Machine* is dependent upon the movements of the artist's body, simulating human–machine choreography and demonstrating a closer link between man and machine. Here it can be seen that technology has enhanced the interactive capabilities of artmaking so that direct artist–artwork interaction becomes a fundamental feature of the artwork.

*First artist introduced*

*First artwork example*

*Second artwork example*

*Relationship to technology links back to question*

American artist Bill Viola similarly embraces technology to allow for new artmaking methods that expand the possibilities of direct interaction with the artwork. Viola's works have a personal significance and hence already relate directly to the artist's personal thoughts and emotions. The artist's involvement is determined by the use of his own body as the subject matter in many of his video installations. By directly positioning himself in the artwork, the artist is simultaneously demonstrating direct artist–artwork interaction and ensuring that the artist has a greater control in the creation and execution of the artwork. ‘I want to have more of an input in the process of creation than simply to determine where to point the camera. An active position enables me to exceed my own physical limitations and manifest my imaginings, which then serves more to really transform myself than just to change the images existing within the confines of the monitor screen.’

*Quote from artist strengthens essay*

*Second artist introduced — his individual approach to the use of technology*

*The Messenger* 1996 is a perfect example of how the artist uses his own body as the subject of his video works. The video presents the slow rising to the surface of a naked male figure (the artist) in a body of water. He emerges slowly as the camera zooms in to focus on the head and torso. The mouth slowly opens and takes a breath, the eyes stare upward penetratingly but the face never breaks free of the lapping water. As Viola slowly submerges the camera zooms out, losing sight of the artist's body as it disappears from the line of sight. This concept of submergence is repeated in a number of Viola's works, stemming from his personal experience of nearly drowning as a child. The artist has successfully embraced technology as a means of incorporating his own body in the artworks, and hence providing a means to enable direct artist–artwork interaction.

*An artwork example explained*

*Relates back to the question*

Contemporary technological advances and innovations have given artists the means to further enhance the interaction between the artwork and the audience. Stelarc is a prominent artist in this field. His latest artworks are based on audience interaction, and at times the audience serves as the controller of the artwork and determines the nature, form and action of the work. Stelarc's *Prosthetic Head* is an interactive, technology-generated artwork that explores the narrowing divide between human and technological intelligence. The artwork is a three-dimensional, animated representation of the artist's head that has been programmed to ‘answer’ any question the audience asks by typing onto a keyboard. The head is able to answer with synchronised facial expressions and lip-synchronisation. The head's brain is modified, customised and personalised so that it has the capability to hold a conversation on a variety of topics as well as tell jokes. Through the audience asking questions, the head effectively learns new concepts and develops its intellect. As the head increases its database, it will be more autonomous in its responses, and the artist will then no longer have full responsibility for what the head says. This idea is revolutionary, as the audience effectively takes charge of developing the artwork and furthering its development. Stelarc has employed technology by means of the internet to allow his audience to view and control an artwork from anywhere in the world. In *Factal Flesh* 1995 the artist invited internet users to log on and take control of his body's involuntary muscle movements through being hooked up to electrodes. The audience became anyone who was in front of a computer screen and participating in commanding the movements of the artist's body. People were therefore projecting their presence onto a body elsewhere, the artist's own body acting as a host. Stelarc's latest project, *Ear on Arm*, 2003 onwards, sees the artist replicate his ear and then surgically attach it to his left arm. Although the attachment has been successful, the latest operation in April 2009, when the artist planned to implant a microphone to enable a wireless connection to the internet, making the ear a remote listening device for people in other places, has had some technological problems. An alternate functionality, aside from this remote listening, is the idea of the ear as part of an extended and distributed Bluetooth system, where the receiver and speaker are positioned inside Stelarc's mouth. If you telephoned the artist on your mobile phone he could speak to you through his ear, but he would hear your voice ‘inside’ his head. If Stelarc keeps his mouth closed, only he would be able to hear your voice. This ground-breaking use of technology, when perfected, will enable both audience and artist to interact directly with the artwork to a greater extent than ever before.

*Further explanation of significance of the question*

*First artist — third example*

*First artist — fourth example*

*First artist — fifth example*

*Relationship of the artist/artwork to audience*

Bill Viola's artworks also encourage audience interaction through the artist's use of technology as a means to create allusive and hypnotic video installations. His videos, by their size (generally projected onto a wall or large screen), slow motion speed, sound and context, have an intentional impact on the audience, absorbing the viewers and engaging them through aural and visual sensations. The videos encourage private contemplation and can be interpreted by the viewer in various ways based on the viewer's memories, perceptions and ideas. Viola's *Reflecting Pool* 1977–79 is a video structured around a male figure (the artist) and a swimming pool. In this visual narrative, the audience is captivated by the sounds of nature while being hypnotised by the slow and poignant imagery. The viewer is forced to slow down and identify with the slow-paced, peaceful sounds and to look carefully to try to decipher the rift between the reflection in the pool and reality. The viewer is left in awe, anxious to rewatch the video to make sure they didn't miss the subtle nuances of seeing and being. By slowing down time and shifting focus and scale, viewers' concept of time is distorted and they feel drawn to the experience as they are placed between the present and the timeless as images dissolve before their eyes. Through Viola's effective manipulation and crafting of video, the audience feels a strong connection to the artwork, interacting on a personal and subjective level.

*Second artist — second example*

*Relationship to audience*

Developments and innovations in technology allow artists such as Stelarc and Bill Viola to experiment with new techniques and artmaking practices which enable them to further develop the interactive capacities of their artworks. Through the use of technology, artists are able to redefine how they, as artists, interact with their own artworks, as well as the interactive relationship between the audience and the artwork. Technology has therefore revolutionised the interaction between artist, artwork and audience.

*Conclusion*

*Sophie Stanton, Year 12*