

STS Conference Graz 2015

Conference Theme: Bodies, Health and Technology, Session 1: Intimate Technologies: Embodying artefacts, remaking bodies, enacting norms.

Standing, H., Exley, C., MacGowan, G., & Rapley, T. (2015) 'It's like a Siamese twin around your neck' Patients' accounts of living with Ventricular Assist Devices (VADs).

Declines in the number of donor hearts available for transplantation have led to an increase in the use of ventricular assist devices (VADs) as a bridge to transplantation. VADs are mechanical circulatory devices which support or replace the function of a failing heart. The VAD is located both within and outside of the recipient's body. Whilst the pump aspect of the device is internal, there are external components including batteries and a controller, these are permanently connected to the body via a driveline. Life, following the VAD implantation becomes intimately linked with technology; recipients must learn to become essentially dependent upon the device to live and accept the technology as something which is intimately connected to them. The 'not-self' (Jackson, 2002) becomes intimately entangled with the 'self'. This entanglement with the 'not-self' causes the patient's body to dys-appear (Leder, 1990), bringing it back to consciousness. It also alters recipient's perceptions of their surroundings causing previously innocuous objects, such as door handles, to become threats to safety due to the materiality of the VAD. Work is required to adapt the materiality of the VAD into the choreography of everyday life to protect it (and hence them) from damage. Patients must learn to re-inhabit both their own changed body, routines, and physical environment, and establish a coherence between the practices of caring for the 'self' and the 'not-self'. This paper explores how patients make sense of their new bodies, the mix of 'self' and 'not-self' and impacts on their identities and surroundings.

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