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Biomimetic and Biohybrid Systems

Lecture Notes in Computer Science Volume 8064, 2013, pp 444-446

# Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy – A Living Wearable Connecting Humans and Their Environment

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Abstract

This research presents an artistic project aiming to make cyberfiction become reality and exemplifying a current trend in art and science collaborations. Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy is a speculative design for a living wearable that combines the protoplasmic structure of the amoeboid acellular organism *Physarum polycephalum* and the *chromatophores* of the reptile *Chameleon*. The underpinning idea is that in a future far away or close, on planet earth or in outer space, humans will need some tools to help them in their social life and day-to-day routine. Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy enhances the body aiming at humans in extreme habitats for an aggression-free and healthy life. Our approach will address actual issues of scientific discovery for society and catalyse idea translation through art and design experiments at frontiers of science.

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## Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy – A Living Wearable Connecting Humans and Their Environment

Theresa Schubert

Faculty of Media, Department Design of Media Environments,  
Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany

`theresa.schubert-minski@uni-weimar.de`

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humans will need some tools to help them in their social life and day-to-day routine. Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy enhances the body aiming at humans in extreme habitats for an aggression-free and healthy life. Our approach will address actual issues of scientific discovery for society and catalyse idea translation through art and design experiments at frontiers of science.

**Keywords:** body, design, wearable, hybrid, artificial vascularization, distributed sensing, decentralized intelligence, health, novel substrates.

## 1 Introduction

Let's imagine we live in outer space, somewhere far away from our orbit:

- There is no day or night-time anymore as the human body is used to. Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy is showing night-time by darker colours. Thus humans are able to follow their circadian rhythm and minimising risk of sleeping disorders and related health issues.
- UV-radiation from a sun will be very high. Human skin will need a measurement device to alert when radiation levels are getting too high. Physarum polycephalum is an excellent light sensor. It prefers darker environments thus it would try to move and change its physical pattern visibly.
- Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy can measure temperature and air humidity and reacts with colours thus the wearer can take steps to counter dehydration.
- Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy can sense the body temperature of the wearer and the heart beat through vibration. Accordingly it will make an interpretation of his current emotional state by changing colours, which will help deciding how or if at all to communicate with fellow humans.

N.F. Lepora et al. (Eds.): Living Machines 2013, LNAI 8064, pp. 444–446 2013.

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## 2 Future Manual

Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy comes in a box, ready to be applied directly onto the skin. It sits between a transparent layer of special medical adhesive silicone, that is permeable to air, humidity and temperature. After more than 48h of usage it has to be returned into the box that contains a nutritious, humid gel to 'recharge' for a few hours. Then it can be worn again, in total up to three or four weeks.





**Fig. 1.** Prototype of box containing the Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy (left), box opened with living organism inside and recharge media (right)

### 3 Methods

The slime mould *Physarum polycephalum* has a complex life cycle. In its most active phase it looks like an amorphous yellowish mass with networks of protoplasmic tubes. The plasmodium behaves and moves as a giant amoeba. It is possible to divide the plasmodium and it will live on as separate entities or merge with another blob to one. It is a large single cell capable of distributed sensing and primitive memory [1]. The most prominent feature of the reptile *Chameleon* is its ability to change colours. Its function is in social signalling, in reactions to temperature and other conditions as well as camouflage. Colour change signals a chameleon's physiological condition and intentions to other chameleons. Chameleons have specialised cells, *chromatophores*, which contain pigments in their cytoplasm in three layers below their transparent outer skin. Dispersion of the pigment granules in the chromatophores sets the intensity of each colour, which can change due to rapid relocation of their particles of pigment [2].

We use this specific function of colour change combined with the decentralised logic of *Physarum* and its ability to attach and connect to any surface ignoring all gravitational laws. Inside the membrane *Physarum* is filled with cytoplasm. Through genetic manipulation *Physarum*'s membrane and cytoplasm can be merged with *Chameleon*'s chromatophores mechanism. For our research we designed a series of in vitro experiments that mark first steps towards the realisation at first without transgenic methods.

Nathan E. Lepora · Anna Maria  
Hölgel G. Krapp · Paul R. M. J. Verschuere  
Tony J. Prescott (Eds.)

LNAI 8564

## Biomimetic and Biohybrid Systems

Second International Conference, Living Machines 2013  
London, UK, July-August 2013  
Proceedings

LIVING MACHINES

Convergence Science Institute  
of Artificial and Biological Systems

 Springer



### References (2)

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## About this Chapter

### Title

Chroma<sup>+</sup>Phy – A Living Wearable Connecting Humans and Their Environment

### Book Title

Biomimetic and Biohybrid Systems

### Book Subtitle

Second International Conference, Living Machines 2013, London, UK, July 29 – August 2, 2013.  
Proceedings

### Pages

pp 444-446

### Copyright

2013

### DOI

10.1007/978-3-642-39802-5\_61

### Print ISBN

978-3-642-39801-8

### Online ISBN

978-3-642-39802-5

### Series Title

Lecture Notes in Computer Science

### Series Volume

8064

### Series ISSN

0302-9743

### Publisher

Springer Berlin Heidelberg

### Copyright Holder

Springer-Verlag Berlin Heidelberg

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## Keywords

- body
- design
- wearable
- hybrid
- artificial vascularization
- distributed sensing
- decentralized intelligence
- health
- novel substrates






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## Authors

- Theresa Schubert <sup>(23)</sup>

## Author Affiliations

- 23. Faculty of Media, Department Design of Media Environments, Bauhaus-Universität Weimar, Germany

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