

Magnetic encounters and embodied conversations

Jane Goodall

Abstract

The Articulated Head is a collaboration between the performance artist Stelarc and researchers from the Marcs Auditory Laboratories at the University of Western Sydney, to explore the potential for robot-human communication. A three-dimensional image programmed with a complex range of human facial expressions and wide repertoire of everyday speech is mounted on a robotic structure to create a human/machine hybrid.

As a gallery installation, the Articulated Head works to establish real-time dialogue between a virtual presence and physically present human being (the gallery visitor), but what does 'presence' mean in this situation? At one level, it means simply that the two conversational participants are co-present in time and space. Their engagement, though, involves highly nuanced processes of mutual sensory detection that may be far more subtly communicative than the verbal content of the dialogue. One might say quite literally that they are attracted to each other.

This presentation explores the historical association between presence, attraction and magnetism in electro-mechanical research, going back to the speculations of Renaissance Magus John Dee (1527-1608) whose writings on magnetic rays may still have something to teach us about sensory interaction between different kinds of intelligent bodies. Stelarc professes a dislike for historical research into antecedents, and that is not the nature of this enquiry. Rather, I am interested in how certain ideas and images form cultural feedback loops across time, forming remote conversations of another kind.

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About the Speaker



Jane Goodall was a Professor in the Writing and Society Research Group at the University of Western Sydney until 2007, when she gave up her academic position to concentrate on her work as a writer. She is the author of three novels and several books on literature and the performing arts, and was joint winner of the 2009 Calibre Essay prize, awarded by Australian Book Review and the Copyright Council. Since the 1980s, she has maintained a dialogue with Stelarc about the changing cultural contexts of his work, contributing articles to many journals and book collections, including *Stelarc: The Monograph* (2005).