



FACT

robots and avatars

Gallery Guide

16 March 2012 - 27 May 2012

Curated by FACT and body>data>space

—
FREE Entry

—
fact.co.uk / 0151 707 4464





Co-curated by FACT and interdisciplinary design collective body>data>space, *Robots and Avatars* is a major new exhibition presenting the most exciting visions and innovations from international artists, designers and architects.

Exploring how these new ideas could impact on the future of work and play, these playful, visceral and sometimes disturbing artworks showcase the increasing overlap of the virtual and physical world, and our own steady assimilation of new technologies. Expect talking robots, real-life avatars, collaborative virtual landscapes stretching beyond the confines of popular gaming, and wearable and interactive technologies that guide and confound.

Robots and Avatars departs from pop culture imagery and re-imagines these technologies for a new reality: how do we envisage our future relationships with robotic and avatar colleagues and playmates, and at what point does this evolution cross our personal boundaries of what it is to be a living, feeling human being?

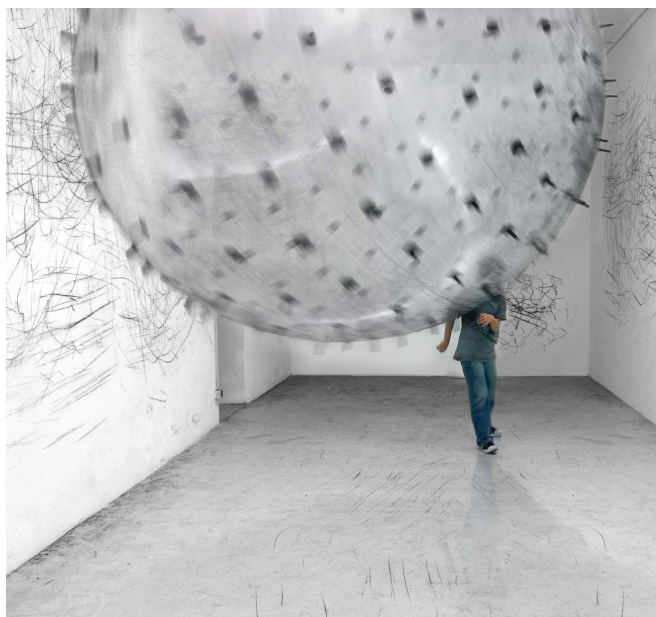


Image: Karina Smigla-Bobinski, *ADA*, 2010

Gallery 1

Compass 2005 Lawrence Malstaf

Compass is an orientation machine worn around your waist giving you directions while you walk through virtual corridors and rooms. The machine has been programmed to fit the physical exhibition space, and creates a feeling of attraction or repulsion that can be compared to being in a magnetic field. You can explore this environment and discover a tactile architecture.

Compass is programmed to make you follow an invisible map, but you can choose between resisting the machine or giving in and letting yourself be guided. In Malstaf's installations, the visitor himself can experience abstract or concrete situations. Spatial concepts are brought into question and we have to re-learn to navigate and orientate our bodies whilst wearing this computer – do we surrender to or resist the robot?

wearable machine / sensors

ADA 2010 Karina Smigla-Bobinski

Nominated for Prix Ars Electronica 2012, Karina Smigla-Bobinski's *ADA* is a giant interactive analogue installation, a physical coding experience which the artwork and audience create together.

A huge membrane-like globe that floats freely in the gallery space, *ADA* is constructed to have her own will. Attached to the membrane are pieces of coal that leave their traces on the walls, ceiling and floors as the ball is pushed around by you, the gallery visitor. The result is a visual capturing of the movement and a collective and expressive picture created from your own physical movements.

interactive mixed media
installation

Gallery 2

Base 8 2011 Chris Sugrue

An artist and programmer who makes interactive installations, audio-visual performances and experimental interfaces, Chris Sugrue investigates themes such as artificial life, eye-tracking and optical illusions. *Base 8* is inspired by a 19th century theatre trick called "Pepper's Ghost" used to create the illusion of phantoms or spirits on the stage with live actors. Exploring physical/virtual representations of our bodies, this modern adaptation invites you to reach into the space, and watch as moving structures and abstract geometric forms begin to appear in between your fingers and hands. *Base 8* hints at an holographic illusion of a world floating in air.

interactive mixed media
installation

Robot World 2010 Martin Hans Schmitt

A non-verbal documentary, *Robot World* depicts the evolution of robots from mechanical automata to autonomous organisms, suggesting that these artificial people are our alternate doubles. Combining, archive footage from robot laboratories at universities, private footage at industrial fairs, military archives and corporate videos, this one hour film condenses over 100 hours of raw material to trace the story of these incredible beings. It illustrates the biological development of robotics that follows from an imitation of typically human activities such as being a playmate for children, leading wars or performing operations on a human body. Matt Howden's score provides the backdrop, as the violin – an instrument often linked to the human voice – becomes the voice of the robots – their expression, their functionality, and their aspiration.

single channel video

MeYouandUs 2011 Alastair Eilbeck & James Bailey

MeYouandUs is a series of three screens that encourage visitors to interact with them, allowing each passer by to create their own narrative in the most playful way. The video camera records and creates a virtual reflection of the spectators in the plasma screen. This image is then digitally manipulated in real time using custom software created for three themes. Each of these pieces requires different levels of involvement - from an instant reaction to a gradual response - and asks how does this representation of ourselves shift and change, and how do we relate to these different identities?

screens / projection /
interactive program

UKI (demo version) 2009 - 2012 Shu Lea Cheang & Co

UKI is a sequel to Cheang's provocative cyberpunk movie *I.K.U.*, which premiered at *Sundance Film Festival* in 2000. Structured both as viral performance - live coding / live spam - and a viral game on two levels, the project explores sci-fi narratives, traversing between hard and soft, sexual and political and fiction and reality.

2 channel video / screens

rep.licants.org 2011 Matthieu Cherubini

Developed by artist Matthieu Cherubini, *rep.licants.org* is a web service allowing you to install an Artificial Intelligence (AI) bot on to your Facebook and/or Twitter account. Using keywords, content and activity analysis, the bot attempts to simulate your online activity, allowing you to build a greater social reputation and forge a digital identity of what you would really like to be. *rep.licants.org* explores the reality of "who is really who" on

social networks and examines the potential extensions of our interactions on online networks.

online web service

The Electronic Man 2011 Salvatore Iaconesi & Oriana Persico

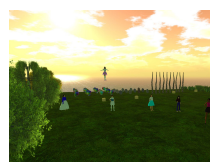
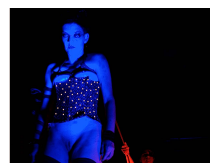
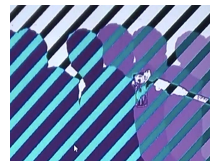
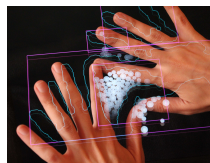
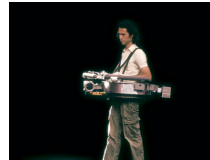
Inspired by the media theories of philosopher and thinker Marshall McLuhan, *The Electronic Man* is a living example of crowd-sourced content and collective collaboration. The global project has already seen thousands of participants from all over the world collaborate in creating a connected body of their emotional states. Stickers with QR Codes and the image of *The Electronic Man* have been disseminated in cities across the globe, and people have participated by scanning the codes using their Smartphones and contributing their emotions (from rage to serenity, acceptance to annoyance). Got a feeling you want to share? Join the global phenomenon by scanning this QR Code.



display of online website

Naked on Pluto 2010 Aymeric Mansoux, Dave Griffiths & Marloes de Valk

Awarded with the VIDA 13.2. Prize in 2011, *Naked on Pluto* is a playful yet disturbing online game world that parodies the insidiously invasive traits of "social software". In the city of "Elastic Versailles" a community of 57 AI bots glean Facebook data from subscribers to the game. *Naked on Pluto* caricatures the virtual agents that harvest our personal data to reshape our online environments and profiles, highlighting the hallmarks of major social networks: friends as quantifiable and commodifiable online assets, personas carefully fashioned



to impart a sense of "intimacy", and the disingenuous publishing of "private" data as self-advertising. The emergence of intelligence in this game is ultimately, hopefully, that of the player who manages to escape from it.

display of online website

Gallery 2 / Public Spaces Visions of Our Communal Dreams 2012 Michael Takeo Magruder

An interactive installation which blends virtual, physical and networked environments, *Visions of Our Communal Dreams* is comprised of two public spaces - one virtual and one physical - that are inherently connected in order to create a series of mixed-reality contexts, situations and experiences. Exploring ideas around hybridity, the body and collective creativity, the installation allows for real-time interactions and exchanges to flow between the virtual and physical realms through portals located in the FACT building. Ranging from immersive architectural projections to arrangements of small painterly artefacts, these gateways allow visitors in different locations to gaze upon each other and their surroundings, creating uncanny connections and dialogues between the worlds.

This project has been developed through a programme of educational workshops with students from Weatherhead Media Academy, exploring in a collective way what skills and knowledge will be needed for the jobs of the future. Pupils have been learning skills relating to avatar customisation and collaborative content creation that you will see in both the artwork and its underlying creative processes. Look closely and you might see one of their avatars!

interactive online program
/ projections / screens /
photographic prints

Images top to bottom:

- 1: Lawrence Malstaf, *Compass*, 2005.
 - 2: Karina Smigla-Bobinski, *ADA*, 2010
 - 3: Chris Sugrue, *Base 8*, 2011
 - 4: Martin Hans Schmitt, clipping from *Robot World Poster*, 2010
 - 5: Alastair Eilbeck & James Bailey, *MeYouandUs* 2011
 - 6: Shu Lea Chang & Co, *UKI performance* 2009
 - 7: Dave Griffiths & Marloes de Valk, *Naked on Pluto*, 2010
 - 8: Michael Takeo Magruder with Drew Baker, Erik Fleming and David Steele, *Visions of Our Communal Dreams*, 2012
- (all images are courtesy of the artists)

Public Spaces

Public Avatar 2009 - 2012 Martin Bricelj

Public Avatar documents the relationship between virtual reality and our perceptions of self and society. It allows audiences to explore real-world locations remotely, and to interact with objects and people in those locations through real-time control of a human test subject. *Public Avatar* invites you to login and give simple instructions to the avatar and experience what the avatar sees and hears via live video stream. This project explores the borders between virtual and real and tests the limits of human machine control. As digital and physical worlds collide, the boundaries

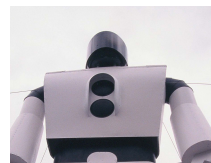
between self and other, reality and simulation are constantly challenged and redefined.

performance / interactive
online program

RoboVox 2006 Martin Bricelj

RoboVox is a talking robot which invites you to text your thoughts and ideas to a dedicated SMS service. A tool for individuals whose voices often get lost in the crowd, *RoboVox* will say out loud your statement, protest or declaration of love, just text: 07593 959 917.

interactive sculpture



Images top to bottom:
1-2: Martin Bricelj, *Public Avatar*, 2009 - 2012
3: Martin Bricelj, *RoboVox*, 2006

Exhibition Related Films

The *Robots and Avatars* exhibition has inspired us to bring some of our science fiction favourites back to the big screen, all of which explore the overlap between physical and virtual worlds and offer a glimpse of what the future might hold.

Look out for the electrifying 80s cult classic *RoboCop*, Arnold Schwarzenegger's chilling performance in *The Terminator*, George Lucas's directorial debut in *THX* and the very first *Star Trek* feature film.

Plus, don't miss a *Metropolis* double bill featuring an anime adaptation inspired by Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece.

26 March
RoboCop¹⁸
Paul Verhoeven / 1987 /
102mins

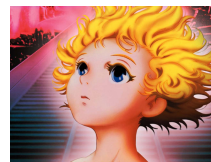
4 April
Star Trek: The Motion Picture^U
Robert Wise / 1979 /
145mins / Re-mastered

18 April
The Terminator¹⁵
James Cameron / 1984 /
107mins

Double Bill
1 May
Osamu Tezuka's Metropolis^{PG}
Rintaro / 2001 / 108mins
–
2 May
Metropolis^{PG}
Fritz Lang / 1927 /
153mins

9 May
THX¹⁵
George Lucas / 1972 /
100mins

All films
6.30pm / The Box / £6 £5
(Members & concs)



Images top to bottom:
1: *RoboCop*
2: *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*
3: *The Terminator*
4: Osamu Tezuka's *Metropolis*

For more information about the *Robots and Avatars* project, visit robotsandavatars.net or bodydataspace.net or email interested@bodydataspace.net

Co-produced in the UK by body>data>space (London) and FACT in collaboration with the National Theatre (London). European co-organisers are KIBLA (Maribor/ Slovenia) and AltArt (Cluj Napoca/ Romania). With the support of the Culture programme of the European Union, this project was conceived by lead producer body>data>space in association with NESTA.



body>data>space



National Theatre

FACT Information

For information about the FACT building, exhibitions, accessibility or hiring a space call (0151) 707 4464 visit fact.co.uk or email info@fact.co.uk



Supported by
ARTS COUNCIL ENGLAND

