Extract from

Are Computers Alive

By Geoff Simons

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A cybernetic sculpture, 'The Senster', was constructed by Edward Ihnatowicz in 1970 for the Philips Evoluon in Eindhoven. The device is a large electrohydraulic structure in the form of a lobster's claw: six hinged joints allow great freedom of movement. It is interesting that the device's unpredictable behaviour makes the observer feel that the sculpture is alive. Reichardt (1978) commented: 'It is as if behaviour were more important than appearance in making us feel that something is alive.' The Senster has senses - sound channels (effective ears) and radar - to allow it to monitor its environment: it will, for example, react to the movement of people in the immediate vicinity. Electrical signals are fed from a control unit to activate mechanisms which cause movement in the device. The brain (a computer) has learning abilities and can modify the machine's behaviour in the light of past experience. Confronted by this artificial device, it is clear that people have no difficulty in organizing their psychological responses as if The Senster were alive - an animal or another human being.

J Reichardt (1978): Robots: Fact, Fiction and Prediction (Thames and Hudson)