

Response to “Presence, Absence, and Knowledge in Telerobotic Art.”, Machiko Kusahara

By Randy Horton

As the title suggests, the reading provides an overview of 4 artists’ telerobotic works. The works raise questions that deal with the traits of telepresent experiences. They investigate the ideas of disembodiment, the definition of real, and the validity of physical presence in true experiences.

In particular Stelarc’s, “Wired Flesh” stood out as a physical disembodiment example. He created a kind of exoskeleton. He later climbed into the robotic exoskeleton and let internet users control his body movements. This work explored the relationship of control that Stelarc had over his own body – and the control the public had over his body. In letting internet users control his actions, he was disembodied from his physical self.

“The Telegarden”, by Ken Goldberg is another example of telerobotic art. The piece questions perceptions of reality. “The Telegarden” enabled Internet surfers to telerobotically control and take care of a real physical garden. The entire experience is mediated through the Internet and causes the user to question if the experience is actually REAL, and not a series of pre-programmed and illuminated responses.

“The Telegarden”, was in fact, a work based on a real garden, and users could maintain the garden through telepresence. In this regard the work questioned the validity of needing to be physically present in order to know something is real. Whether the garden is real or not, does it change the user’s physical experience?

The reading provides other interesting examples of telerobotic art. It concludes by stating how this practice expands creativity for new media artists, and in particular it raises questions of, “proximity, distal and virtual spaces.”