

(12) A Psychological Approach to Presence

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Abstract

Biocca (2003) pointed out that research on presence has been carried out from the perspective of a two poles psychological model: the user is present in the physical space or in the virtual world. From this perspective, it has been stated that the central aspects in presence were technological, and technology was given priority. But currently there exists an extensive accord about considering presence as a psychological phenomenon (Schubert, Friedman and Regenbrecht, 2001). From a psychological perspective, this accord is an advance, but the current theoretical models keep contemplating the sense of presence as a direct function of the immersion capacity of the system. Most of the current definitional proposals about presence are mainly focused on one part of the binomial considered by Slater (2003), and they give a central role to the *medium*. In the same way, even recognising the role of the human processing, the proposal by Lombard and Ditton (1997) talks about "the perceptual illusion of non mediation", so it is also centred on the medium, by speaking about non mediation. Finally, Steuer (1992) defended the convenience of speaking of a human experience. However, he has been also focused on the analysis of the factors of the *system* (vividness and interactivity) that have an influence on that human experience. Nevertheless, it can be a mistake to assume a lineal relation between presence and immersion. As Schubert et al. (2001) point out, several cognitive processes *mediate* the effect of immersion in producing presence in the user.

Our intention is not to forget the other part of the binomial, that is, immersion (in Slater's terminology). We think that technology is important, but are the technological aspects sufficient to achieve the sense of presence? We do not think so. In this work we defend the convenience of considering psychological aspects in the field of VR and, specifically, in the ambit of presence. We defend the following thesis: 1) The need of a psychological theory of presence in the field of VR; 2) the need of taking into account other psychological aspects in addition to presence. At least for some applications it is necessary to consider concepts such as consciousness, reality judgement, memory, attention, emotions, personality dimensions, etc. In this work, we analyse briefly the importance of the consciousness and reality judgement.