

(36) Emotions and Presence: A dual link

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Abstract

A critical point in the theory of presence is its link with emotions. To answer to this question we started from our three layer model of presence (Riva & Waterworth, 2003): *proto presence*, *core presence*, and *extended presence*. Each layer of presence solves a specific facet of the internal/external world separation, and it is characterized by specific properties.

What is the link between presence and emotions? According to our model, the emotional processes influence two of the three layers of presence: *core presence* and *extended presence*.

One of the main activities of the self is to track changes in core affect (feeling good or bad, energized or enervated), in proportion to its rapidity and extent. When this happens, it is critical for the self to focus on its sensorial experience by leaving in the background the remaining neural processes. In this sense, a shift in the level of core affect activates a higher level of core presence, needed to separate between reality and fiction. As underlined by Russel (2003), core affect is not dependent by any reality judgment: it responds to the contents of consciousness whether based on reality or fiction. It is core presence that allows the organism to make this essential distinction.

On the other side, another key activity of the self is affect attribution: the perception of causal links between events. Having extended presence the role of identifying significant experiences for the self, the possibility of an easy attribution (e.g. an easy identification of who is bad or is good in a movie), allows high levels of extended presence. Here, however, the reality judgment plays a key role. In fact, fiction does not activate any instrumental behavior.

In summary, we can expect two level of influence of the emotional processes on the level of presence: (a) a shift in the level of core affect activates a higher level of core presence; (b) an easy attribution of the shift allows a higher level of extended presence.

Moreover, we can expect two level of influence of the reality judgment on the level of presence: (a) Core presence is not a product of reality judgment. Rather, the level of core presence contributes to reality judgements; if we feel high core presence we are more likely to judge events as real. (this mechanism is fooled by VR); (b) Positive reality judgements will tend to increase extended presence.