

hacktivism >news



Spacejunk, the Kessler syndrome

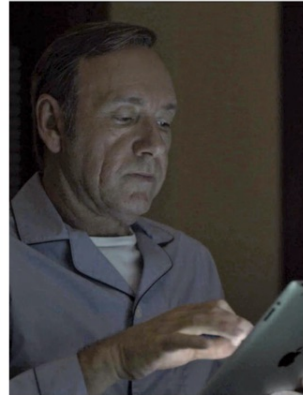
Following the conquest of space, tons of space debris, some as big as buses and others smaller than flakes of paint, are now orbiting the Earth at speeds of up to 36,000 km per hour. This accumulation of space debris represents not only a concrete danger, but also a huge accumulation of unmanaged galactic waste. There are several aerospace institutes monitoring this swarm but art also wants to do its part. The American artist David Bowen makes use of robotics, sensors, telepresence and software to realise an installation that is both scientific and poetic in its execution. Inside a room, a group of robotic arms driven by a real-time observation system of space junk weave through the air. They map the invisible traces of thousands of space debris that orbit our planet at breakneck speed. Here Bowen recreates a silent, dense, threat -the child of unfulfilled promises of utopian technology and innovation - in a robotic dance that is both scientific and environmentalist in its message.

> Benedetta Sabatini



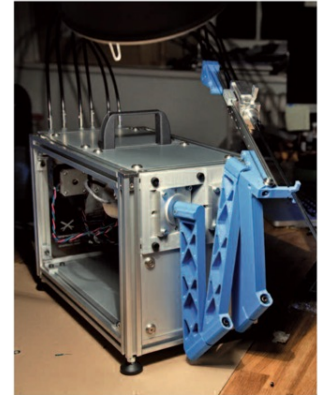
Technologies of Care, online worker stories

Part of "The Download" series, and as such fully downloadable from Rhizome, who commissioned the piece, "Technologies of Care" by artist Elisa Giardina Papa consists of portraits of different types of online workers, six of whom are identified as women, plus a possible bot. They are structured as interviews with those who practice what the artist defines as "network-based affective labor". The artist is a researcher, who, very importantly, hires the respective workers, whether real or bots. Once played, each interview takes over the viewer's browser through a script that can only be watched and listened to with slowly rotating 3D shapes obtained from the workers' domestic environments. Precarity, the negotiation of identities and personal working environments are some of the emerging key elements from the online relationship between the commissioner and worker. The narrated stories become then the vivid and abstracted human beings that remain once the interface is removed.



Touching Software, the enthrallment to touch

Technology has educated human beings to incorporate new gestures into their communication. These may initially be perceived as strange but then become part of a contemporary universal language. Touch screens have taken this language to a whole new level, triggering us to touch our phone on average more than two thousands time per day. But these gestures, inextricably both intimate and public, have not found a definitive way to be aesthetically represented. "Touching Software" by Ben Grosser is an artwork dealing with this aspect from an ideal public imaginary perspective: the web television series. Grosser assembled a 'supercut' of touch-based interactions from the popular TV series House of Cards, unsurprisingly with no voices heard and various evolving strategies to render the content. It is a difficult rendering of intimacy, as the screen is always oriented to the protagonists' faces, but the expressions and gestures viewed become suddenly both empathic and iconic.



OpenSurgery, the surgery pirate

The surgical robot first appeared in operating rooms in the mid 80s and has since become a necessary presence, enabling more accurate and less invasive interventions for patients and reducing the risk of post-operative infection. Currently Intuitive Surgical Inc. controls the market in robotic surgery, with their flagship product, the da Vinci® system, costing over three million US dollars. OpenSurgery, developed by designer Frank Kolkman, investigates the possibility of building DIY surgical robots as an alternative. The OpenSurgery robots collide with the thorny issue of healthcare patents, most of which are held by private corporations who received state funding. If these patents, on the one hand, safeguard the valuable work of many people, on the other, they prevent the development of more democratic alternatives. Kolkman presented his project at RCA's Design Interactions without proposing he build a surgical robot, but demonstrating that there are possibilities to develop cheap alternatives. > Benedetta Sabatini