Probots (2015-) by Chris Csíkszentmihályi

Probots are teleoperated robots designed to replace or augment human protestors in demonstrations and manifestations. They are designed to disassemble into a suitcase, be reassembled in short order, and to picket for up to eight hours. They are controlled via smart phones, and each has a megaphone and can either produce synthesized speech or relay a human voice. They can protest in Santiago, controlled by a clicktivist in a café on the Left Bank.

Should protest be conducted by robots? What does it mean to have a vacant body in public space, that neither understands nor benefits from a direct action, but is only a proxy? Can movement solidarity be maintained through telepresence? Regardless of the answers to these questions, governments are funding research and development of next-generation autonomous weapon systems: UCAVs, USVs, UGVs, LAWs, ARSS, SUGVs, VIPeRs and Ripsaw MS1s, ULAQs and Krunks… Thousands of different models, increasingly used by police forces in addition to armies, all built atop decades of civilian research by computer scientists and electrical engineers. Should war be conducted by robots? Too late! Rhetorical question!

Probots were developed[1] on the island of Madeira with engineers Victor Hugo Aguilar and Victor Azevedo, based in part on an idea from Julio Fernandez Ostolaza. They are part of a series of politically engaged robots that Csíkszentmihályi has been developing since 1991, including hunter hunter, Species Substitute, Afghan eXplorer, and the DJ I, Robot Sound System. These projects and others may be found at https://www.edgyproduct.org/

Chris Csíkszentmihályi *is an artist and Associate Professor of Information Science at Cornell University, where he leads the Redistributive Computing Systems Group*[2]

Photocredit: Sara Tranquada

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[1] https://github.com/VitorHugoAguiar/ProBot
[2] https://rc.infosci.cornell.edu/