DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

Contemporary Western societies live in reality which is strongly saturated with the impact of new technologies. We still try to understand their significance, the impact they have on us, and the reasons why we use it the way we do. Particularly interesting topics are connected with the issues of Web 3.0 and social robots also known as robot companions.

Web 3.0 is Internet, which is not only interactive, but also immersive – users do not interact with online environment from the outside, immerses into it. The most well known example is a game – or, as some claim, rather virtual reality than a game – called *Second Life*. Almost one million people participate in *Second Life* and lead their second – or in some cases their first – life within it. It has to be emphasized that *Second Life* is not simply an entertainment – academic courses are taught there, some users make real fortunes by designing virtual clothes, and in some countries courts of law have been investigating cases of stealing virtual objects that exist only in *Second Life* reality.

In case of social robots many people may claim that discussions devoted to them should belong to science-fiction area. However, it is hard to perceive examination of issues connected with social robots as hasty or unjustified, since there is already a hotel where robots have totally replaced humans, there are plans to use robots for care for elderly people (to some degree they are already in use – vide Paro), children are playing with moving and talking toys such as "Hello Barbie" or AIBO, and development of sex-robots and geminoids is already under way (the most impressive geminoids are probably those developed by Hiroshi Ishiguro).

Particularly interesting case of Web 3.0 and social robots functioning is the context of intimate relationships. In *Second Life* friendships, romances, and even marriages in virtual space are quite common. Some people claim that they are more satisfied with their online marriages than with the offline ones, even though – or maybe rather: because – they do not know who is the person that controls the avatar they are married with. In case of robots there are serious plans to replace people with robots in nursing homes – on the one hand enthusiasts claim that robots will be more patient and more precise, on the other sceptics perceive this scenario as dehumanization and leading in loneliness and isolation of elders. What is more, David Levy claims that around year 2050 the first legal marriage between human and robot will take place. Levy claims that it will help us to solve many problems with loneliness or unhappy relationships – each person will be able to buy the perfect partner and to replace it with another without any sense of guilt. Some other experts claim that it will lead to increased objectification of human beings and to erosion of social skills that will result in a kind of cultural autism, which means that people will live isolated in their own subjective worlds.

One of the most puzzling phenomena connected with new technologies is treating robots as alive beings. There are well known cases of soldiers making funeral for a robot used for mine clearing, users of automatic vacuum cleaners feeling guilty for letting the vacuums work too much, or experiments made at MIT that show that humans' empathy toward robots is comparable to empathy towards human beings. One of possible explanations of this phenomenon refers to brains functioning and biological evolution – it is based on assumption that during the process of biological evolution humans have developed the mechanism of reacting for objects that posses specific features and now our brains initiate this mechanism when we interact with robots. The other possible explanation refers to culture and cultural evolution – its basic assumption is that animization of inanimate objects is a well known phenomenon typical for primitive societies and little children and it is known as an element of magical thinking. Therefore, magical thinking is typical for early stages of development of individuals and societies.

This leads to a surprising conclusion that interactions with new technologies – that are developed thanks to science, which is the most sophisticated result of rational thinking – are connected with return of magical thinking, which is considered as primal, primitive and irrational. Does it mean that it is a symptom of regression? Not necessarily. Maybe the return of magical thinking is just a way to compensate some loss, to fill a kind of void. Maybe contemporary Western people have became so rational that they not only develop robots but also become increasingly similar to robots. Therefore, maybe return of magical thinking is an expression of attempt to come back to something that we have lost along the way.