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IMMORTALITY AS A NETWORK OF RELATIONSHIPS. EXPERIENCE OF BUILDING A POSTHUMOUS AVATAR ON THE LIFENAUT PLATFORM[1]

Based on an analysis of the American Lifenaut research project, I attempt to capture immortality created today as a network of relationships among human and non-human factors. Lifenaut was established in 2006 as a pioneering project in the field of creating posthumous digital avatars. The users involved in the experiment gather data on the www.lifenaut.com platform to retain their personality in a digitized form after biological death. Part of my work is reconstructive – I describe the assumptions of the American project and the main concepts associated with it, such as "mindclone", "mindfiles" and "mindware". In the second part I present the results of my own avatar creation experiment and confront them with the sociological perspective of symbolic interactionism (G.H. Mead, H. Blumer) and relational sociology (B. Latour).

Keywords: lifenaut, mindclone, symbolic interactionism, symbolic immortality, mind

ARTIFICIAL MEMORY AND PRIVATE IMMORTALITY

"Immortality is ultimately a social relation" – this is one of the important thoughts contained in Zygmunt Bauman's book *Śmierć i nieśmiertelność. O wielości strategii życia*[2] (Bauman 1998: 69), in which Bauman analyses, omitted so far in the problems of death and dying, social institutions and cultural patterns that neutralize the fear of man against death. Death and immortality become recognized and practised "strategies of life" that all societies

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[1] I would like to thank Prof. Marek Krajewski for all his inspiring and helpful comments which enriched this text.

[2] Although Bauman is associated primarily with works on the Holocaust, postmodernism, consumerism and fluent modernity, Danish sociologist Michael Jacobsen claims that it is the issues of death and immortality that occupy a central place in Bauman's work and are the key to its proper reading. See (Jacobsen 2017: 56–57). It is difficult not to agree with Jacobsen, remembering that Bauman treated death (and more precisely fear of it) as a source of culture. "If people were not aware of their mortality, most likely there would be no culture" and "the risk of death – always aware – [...] is perhaps the foundation of culture" (1998: 41).

have at their disposal (Bauman 1998: 15). Bauman is primarily interested in symbolic immortality, a substitute formula created by culture which attempts to suppress the awareness that the biological fact of death is synonymous with complete disappearance[3]. Bauman, specifying the vision of symbolic immortality, emphasizes that finally a few deserve it, because:

> Candidates for immortality must present their credential letters – permanent traces of their actions: deeds important enough that they could be set in tradition, objects so enticing to recognize them as art, and thus something permanent, thoughts so original, that it would be possible to find the basis for their acceptance (Bauman 1998: 83).

In the past, heroic deeds, special achievements, long lineage or having power[4], which guaranteed one's proper place in history, decided about who joins the select group of immortals. Finally it was about mass publicity, even if it was close to populism or "chasing the cliché" (Bauman 1998: 71), because it is society, in the act of symbolic acclamation, which grants the laurels of immortality, storing in the collective archives the memory of the chosen and meritorious. We can risk saying that immortality was measured by the number of one's relationships and social interactions. Has this measure in the twenty-first century been devalued? Perhaps today, thanks to technology, we can become immortal "on our own"? More than a decade after *Śmierć i nieśmiertelność*, in: *Postmodernism as a source of suffering* Bauman suggests a certain trail in this matter, adjusting the vision of symbolic immortality to the changing cultural and technological context:

> The container, to which individual human acts were formerly placed for eternal storage, which were granted the right to immortality, was collective memory [...]. The desire to make this container more resistant to cases of fate, and to extend it to meet the dimensions of democratized immorality, was a powerful incentive for the dissemination of computer technology and in particular for the development of "artificial memory" (Bauman 1998: 272).

Today, anyone who has no special merits or achievements can queue up for immortality. So Bauman is right in saying that "artificial memory" deleted the category of "great people" and became a "great equalizer" (Bauman 2004: 273). Instead of taking part in the uncertain exchange of immortality, placing our posthumous fate into the hands of society, we try to invest in much calmer and seemingly more certain assets. Collective memory is replaced by a broadly understood artificial memory, the embodiment of which for Bauman was a diskette, and for us today are data clouds, social media, wearable technologies and others. The registration of various forms of our everyday activities and social interactions has become a natural part of our lives, but, of course, it may become a pretext for immortality. One of the organizations promoting this idea is the Terasem Movement Foundation (TMF), whose

[3] Interesting typologies of symbolic immortality were made in the 1970s by social psychologists R.J. Lifton and E. Olson. In the book *Living and Dying*, they distinguish five ways of realizing the concept of symbolic immortality: through biology and having children, through creativity and various achievements, through religion and faith, through the perception of continuity and constant transformation of matter in nature, and finally through experimental activities such as using drugs. See (Lifton and Olson 1974).

[4] In another place, Bauman writes: "power and immortality have become synonymous", see (Bauman 1998: 78).

Lifenaut Project aims to create a digital equivalent of a person based on the record of his/her life, with the goal of making this person immortal[5]. The digital equivalent of a person is to become a so-called "mindclone", who will stay with the family after the death of a biological prototype and will continue to maintain a relationship with the family as a replacement. Is this a new "strategy of life" – speaking Bauman's language – which is to help overcome the consequences of inevitable death and lead us straight to immortality?

The creators of Lifenaut offer up the most basic concept of immortality as **not dying in order to build new symbols and create new meanings**, resulting from the semantics of understanding. In a sense, therefore, the Lifenaut Project continues the path of symbolic immortality. The difference is however significant. The creators of Lifenaut try to convince their users that immortality does not have to arise from a community effort that assesses "original thoughts, important actions and alluring objects of art". Today, an interested person equipped with "artificial memory" can determine the status and value of his/her own life, creating a private immortality. Immortality here takes the form of an object that we can create in the home production process. However, is this strategy effective? Who in fact is such immortality to serve **and is immortality which is not a product of social interaction really attainable?**

As a starting point, I took the experience of building my own avatar in the Lifenaut environment. The work lasted for about nine months, during which, apart from testing the Lifenaut technology tools, I made notes, collected data and formulated problem questions. I used the program with varying engagement and frequency, looking at my own willingness and natural impulse to systematically collect data and improve my avatar. Such a procedure of research, called symbolic interactionism, is recommended by one of the leading representatives of the sociological orientation that interests me in this text. Herbert Blumer believes that a research problem should be derived from a fragment of the empirical world and not from an unproven theoretical model (Blumer 2007: XXV). Therefore, according to Blumer's indication and applying his concept of "exploration", I engaged myself in experience of the Lifenaut environment in order to describe it as accurately as possible. Only at a later stage of my work did I try to formulate answers to the problematic questions posed and to draw conclusions of a more general nature. However, in the composition of the text, I introduce both perspectives at the same time, which results from the necessity to organize the material and provide a linear narrative.

I have divided my experience of building my own avatar into two parts: in the first I refer to the creation of a digital copy of myself (accomplishing three tasks suggested by Lifenaut), and only in the second part do I return to the question of immortality and its social dimension. The theoretical background is provided by Blumer and the concepts of G.H. Mead. I acknowledge that the virtual immortality of Lifenaut is the production of symbols that must be seen in the process of uninterrupted social (symbolic) interaction. This classic interpretative orientation in the final part of the text I supplement with a newer theoretical approach, a relationship sociology represented by Bruno Latour. It is impossible

[5] I also wrote about the Lifenaut project in a different context in the following texts: (Nowaczyk-Basińska 2018a, 2008c).

today to understand society without taking into account the interaction between human and non-human factors.

TWO HYPOTHESES

The Lifenaut research project commenced in 2006, and it is conducted by the charity organisation called Terasem Movement Foundation located in Vermont, USA. The objective of Lifenaut is to verify whether, assuming that a large database on the most important aspects of personality is at disposal, the smart software of the future will be able to recreate the consciousness of an individual. The second research hypothesis concerns the question whether it will be possible to transfer consciousness to another medium, a biological or nanotechnological body, so as to ensure a life experience comparable with those of naturally born human beings. The first hypothesis is to be verified by the www.lifenaut.com portal, which is an open platform, meaning that everyone can set up an account on it and collect data which will be used to form a digital counterpart of this very individual. As it is explained by Bruce Duncan, the project director, the portal provides the users with tools for creating a varied catalogue of convictions, habits, values and specific features along with the opportunity to manage them on one's own. Currently, approximately 56,000 users have registered on the website to (with varying degrees of involvement and regularity) collect "mindfiles" and record the course of their life digitally. Mindfiles are a personal digital archive composed of documents, video files, photos or sound recordings. The name "Terasem" originates from blending two Latin words: *terra*, i.e. Earth, and *semen*, i.e. semen. Metaphorically, mindfiles are to be our seed thrown into the soil, which 'will give birth' to a new being in the future.

MINDCLONE

The Lifenaut endeavour is the brainchild of Martine Rothballt, a lawyer, entrepreneur and propagator of the ideas of transhumanism. In her book *Virtually Human: the Promise – and the Peril – of Digital Immortality*, she describes in detail her own vision of virtual transcendence. In accordance with her prognoses, in the near future, in approximately 32 years (Rothblatt 2014: 49), so-called "mindclones", i.e. conscious virtual beings capable of thinking, drawing conclusions, reminiscing and experiencing emotions, and becoming our actual extension after death, will appear. A mindclone is to be functionally identical with a biological mind, albeit in order to achieve this objective, it is not whatsoever necessary to copy the entire brain. This is one of the essential hypotheses, backed up by this interesting analogy:

> [...] with billions of eukaryotic cells the bird is vastly more complex than a Boeing 747, which has just over six million parts. Today, planes fly farther, higher and faster than birds. [...] It's also crucial when thinking about this analogy to remember that for flying purposes we only want planes to provide a portion of the functionality that a bird provides. There is no prospect of planes laying eggs, nesting in trees or in the eaves of a house [...] – and there is no practical or efficiency value

> in an airplane doing any of these things. In other words, a plane does not have to replicate a bird in every way to support safe and comfortable flight (Rothblatt 2014: 21–22).

As it is emphasised by Rothblatt, the most important task is to create software (mindware) which will be using the mechanisms typical of the functioning of living organisms. That does not, however, mean complete copying of all its abilities.

Mindclones, as Rothblatt persuades, will be conscious of the fact that they exist upon the basis of software which functions like a human brain, and also that they are composed of the traces of digital activity of their biological prototype (Rothblatt 2014: 60). They will be separate beings, but simultaneously will remain closely connected with a human "original". According to Rothblatt, mindclones will be able to live forever when their biological originals cease to exist. And, although clones will be "missing their body like an individual misses their limb after amputation", they will finally accept the arrival of an artificial substitute, which will be the same for consciousness and the soul that an arm prosthesis is for a lost limb (Rothblatt 2014: 10).

There is a gap appearing between the predictions of Martine Rothblatt and the current technological possibilities, and Rothblatt herself compares it to the difference between contemporary airplanes and the prototype of the Wright Brothers (Rothblatt 2014: 2). Today, we have no technology which would make it possible to conduct mind transfer (mindcloning). Instead, various data are collected in order to "restore them to life" with the use of software, which gives us a substitute of a mind copy and which makes us able to experience already now, as it is metaphorically expressed by Rothblatt, "bits and bytes of cyberbreath on our cheeks" (Rothblatt 2014: 44).

SEPARATION OF SOUL (PERSONALITY) AND BODY

> People who believe in immortality [...] assume a personality that can be distinguished from the body. Validity of such concepts can be discussed, but in reality we distinguish the personality from the body. It is right to say that it is possible – within our limits – to find the source of the concept of personality as an object in experiments that lead to the concept of a double (Mead 1975: 195–196).

This was expressed in *Mind, Self and Society*, a collection of essays by George H. Mead – one of the important creators of psychosocial concepts that developed in the first quarter of the 20th century. Mead, of course, was not interested in visions of immortality as such, but as the title of the book says (which is a stenographic collection of his lectures later collected by students) he primarily deals with the mind, personality and society. I believe, however, that in the context of my deliberations I can successfully use Mead's intuition about the separation of body and personality, and even make it more problematic, to better understand the vision of virtual immortality proposed by Lifenaut. "We cannot be eternally bodily" (Rothblatt 2014: 169) – says Rothblatt and she admits that, despite the bizarreness of this statement, the only direction of evolutionary (non-revolutionary) progress is to create your own copy by abstracting your personality and transferring it to a digital environment. Such a case, the separation of the personality from the body, raises, of course, many doubts

in the context of the paradigm of embodied cognition developed on the basis of the latest phenomenology, which is primarily found in the works of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The essence of the phenomenology of the French philosopher is the cognitive body, focused on the sphere of possible perceptions and actions that provide the source experience of our existence. Merleau-Ponty describes and analyses in detail phenomena such as the own body, spatiality, body motility and situational perception. The latter, key category can be defined – as Jacek Migasiński writes in the introduction to *Phenomenology of Perception* – "as 'belonging', attached to things, as [...] the overlapping of different 'fields' created by particular senses" (Merleau-Ponty 1993: 14). Thus, it is impossible to contrast consciousness/personality with the body, because the body is the main centre of knowing and experiencing the world[6]. The separation into personality/consciousness and body, which on the basis of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and newer orientations (e.g. enactivism[7], but also the philosophy of new materialism[8]) has been questioned, still and invariably constitutes the foundations for the project of symbolic immortality, also in the modern variant. In *Our Attitude Towards Death* Freud notices that exactly at the first time a person experienced feelings of regret and loss after the passing of a beloved person, the idea of immortality or separation of body and soul emerged, and this happened long before complex religious systems arose (Freud 1918). Death became the beginning of a new existence, not just a terrifying extinction. Religious ideas developed over time as one of our cultural achievements thus protecting man from the devastating triumph of nature, thanks to which biological death and bodily deadness lost their signs of finality (Freud 1992: 23). Separation of personality from the body is justified only in the context of symbolic immortality, which is based on a reproduced and mediated presence. Any form of future practical immortality will have to face the challenge of embodied cognition. So far, the Lifenaut project is immersed in the dualism of the body/personality, which underlines the symbolic nature of the immortality project produced by the portal (although it is worth mentioning that Lifenaut also runs a "biofiles" program that collects and stores human DNA samples)[9]. Let's now try to reconstruct Mead's views on how personality is formed, in order to further consider the possibility of its transfer to the virtual environment.

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[6] Aleksandra Przegalińska presents very interesting research intuitions in the above-quoted book *Istoty wirtualne. Jak fenomenologia zmieniała sztuczną inteligencję.* Referring to her own experience of contact with virtual beings (avatars and bots), the researcher wonders in a phenomenological spirit over the category of embodiment. See (Przegalińska 2016: 175–221).

[7] More on this topic see e.g. (Przegalińska 2016: 150–160).

[8] The new materialism, as a cultural theory, explores the monistic perspective, and I consider Baruch Spinoza as one of its patrons, who in *Ethics* of 1677 says that "the mind is the idea of the body, making the body a necessary object of the mind." See Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2018).

[9] This is still a little-described procedure. We know little more than the information contained in DNA may in the future help in the creation of a posthumous clone extended to the physical form. Bruce Duncan, in private correspondence with me, explains: "Biophiles are created from cells taken from the mouth thanks to a special set (mouth rinse bottle and test tube) that we send to the person that is concerned. Information contained in a single cell is enough to create a new man's plan. Cloning people in our country is currently illegal and considered unethical, but perhaps with the development of technology and society the law will change and it will be possible to use information – mindfiles and biofiles – to create a clone of mind". I consider the biofiles issue in more detail in the text (Nowaczyk-Basińska 2018a).

PERSONALITY AS AN OBJECT

The central place in Mead is the thesis that **the human mind is a social phenomenon**, and the social activity of a human is an indispensable condition for the functioning and development of human personality. Mead interprets personality as: "something that can be an object for itself [...] and arises in the process of social experience (Mead 1975: 196). Human can be an object of his/her own actions, because human reacts to him/herself, as someone else does – a human can perceive him/herself, have concepts of him/herself, can communicate with and act towards him/herself" (Blumer 2007: 50). As Blumer – recognized as the most important continuator of Mead's thoughts – remarks, because a human remains in communication with him/herself, he acts towards his/her world, interpreting what will happen to him/her and organizes actions based on this interpretation (Blumer 2007: 50).

According to Mead, personality is formed as an object in three consecutive phases of socialization: **speech, play and games** (Mead 1975: 212). He defines speech as a vocal gesture by means of which various activities in the community are performed. Play concerns the so-called *role-taking*, which is well-illustrated by the example of children pretending in play to be e.g. parents or Indians. And finally, games involve the need to understand the attitudes of all participants of the situation and the fact that we are dependent. Here Mead considers the example of a baseball game, saying that individual players must understand the rules and also have in the mind a set of potential reactions from other players to be able to play the game. This requires much more social competence than playing role-taking. Mead calls this situation "generalized to others", meaning the organization of attitudes of people taking part in the same process (Mead 1975: 214). It is therefore the result of attitude of others towards the individual, thanks to which that individual becomes independent from the opinion of individual people, because he/she has a more general concept of him/herself (Ziółkowski 1981: 58).

Tasks associated with creating your own avatar, which are entrusted to the user on the Lifenaut portal, surprisingly correspond to the stages of socialization, as a result of which according to Mead personality is created, which I will present later in the text. However, I am not saying that we can draw an equals sign here without reservations. A human's constitutive feature, according to the assumptions of humanistic sociology, is consciousness – it is the basic factor determining the shape of human activities (Ziółkowski 1981: 32, 47, 95) – which does not have an avatar on the Lifenaut portal (although Rothblatt is convinced of the possibility of emergence of consciousness on technological grounds within the perspective of the next three decades). So far, **we can only talk about the reconstruction of personality**, creating its **representation** as a result of various technological activities. Importantly, however, lack of awareness of the avatar does not eliminate the meanings it generates. Even if communication is fully programmed (i.e. subordinated to the actions of algorithms), and the avatar is unaware of the importance of its gestures, it has the ability to influence the partners in interaction (see Ziółkowski 1981: 34–37, 51–52). It should be noted that the **reflective subject becomes here a relational subject** (Hałas 2016: 45). I will return to this point in the final part of the text, expanding the interpretive orientation with a newer theoretical approach: relational sociology. Let us now go to the description and analysis of the experience.

EXERCISE 1: TALK

One of the most important tasks on the Lifenaut portal is training your avatar to speak (Figure 1). Its personality (which is a reconstruction of my personality) is created thanks to a conversation it holds with me. The emergence of personality, as Mead claims, always assumes the experience of contact with another (Mead 1975: XXVI). The more data I transfer to the system, the more logical connections will be created between them, and the more satisfactory (in human judgement) will be the level of conversation with my avatar. It is a micro social situation in which I am a model for my avatar and my responses and reactions will be reproduced by it. Mead writes:

> We all know the process of reacting to yourself as someone else does, knowing what is said when talking to someone and using that awareness to determine what is said next. [...] The entity speaks to itself as it would say to another person (Mead 1975: 196–197).

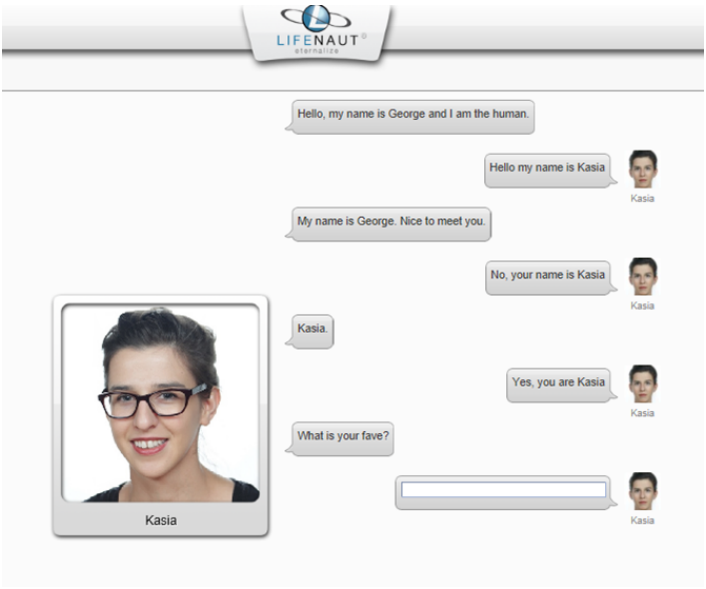

Figure 1. Fragment of a conversation with my *avatar*.
The right column contains my human utterances, and the left one those of the program

This situation is captured by Lifenaut in a very practical framework. I, myself become my partner in the conversation, which is represented by my animated photo. I become an object for myself through the process of internal conversation (see Mead 1975: XXII), in this case technologically mediated. This conversation, however, remains very unsatisfactory for a long time and is close to total nonsense, which results from the unreliability of the system and the insufficient amount of data that it initially has. So for a long time I was not able to identify with my technological representation.

There are several options of perfecting an avatar on the Lifenaut portal (Figure 2). Choosing "talk" on the user panel, I talk to my virtual Other. In the bookmark "teach", I teach her how to talk on my behalf by means of conversing with one of the three partners: Miam 2.0, Bruce, or Nick. The bot learns by modelling; it "spies on" the way I react and converse, and later it uses this knowledge in its independent interactions. According to Mead, personality is created by the internalization of social contacts, which are gradually expanding (Mead 1975: XXVII). Interestingly, the designed range of interaction with the avatar is not limited only to its "owner".

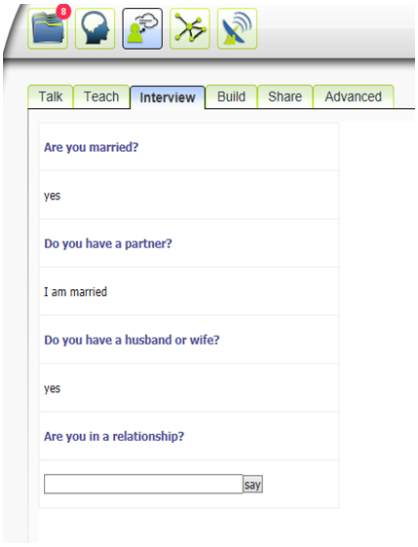

Figure 2. Options of perfecting an avatar on the Lifenaut

Even at an early stage of work, an avatar can be sent to a selected person or group of people who will be training the avatar with me. Simple conversation with an avatar is nothing amazing (Figure 3 and 4). We live in a world of mediated relationships supported by network devices. Using social media, e-mail, text messages and the virtual assistants in our smartphones, we are becoming accustomed to constantly moving the boundary between presence and absence, truth and imagination, human and machine. Therefore, when I see myself on the other side of the screen, or rather my animated picture, in which my eyes blink and my lips are awkwardly moving, when the avatar says something – I am not surprised. I feel like I am making a technically poor video call on Skype with myself – strange, unreal, and slightly caricatural. I teach the avatar the simplest expressions and answers. I repeat them many times, and the program often misrepresents their meaning. We have already got used to the situation of conversation with a machine, certainly because the very idea of talking to a computer program capable of imitating human behaviour (bot) is not new, because it dates back to the mid-1960s. At that time, the first chatbot, called ELIZA, was created at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, designed by Joseph Weizenbaum, and it played the role of

a psychotherapist. It was capable of a simple (based on syntax inversion) communication with a human through a text messenger. Currently, more and more technologies are available on the market that encourage contact with machines in natural language. It is enough to mention Alexandra Amazon, Siri Apple, or Cortana Microsoft. Lifenaut, however, is oriented towards a much more ambitious goal than to check the weather forecast or make an appointment. We must train our avatar in such a way that it reflects our personality after biological death.

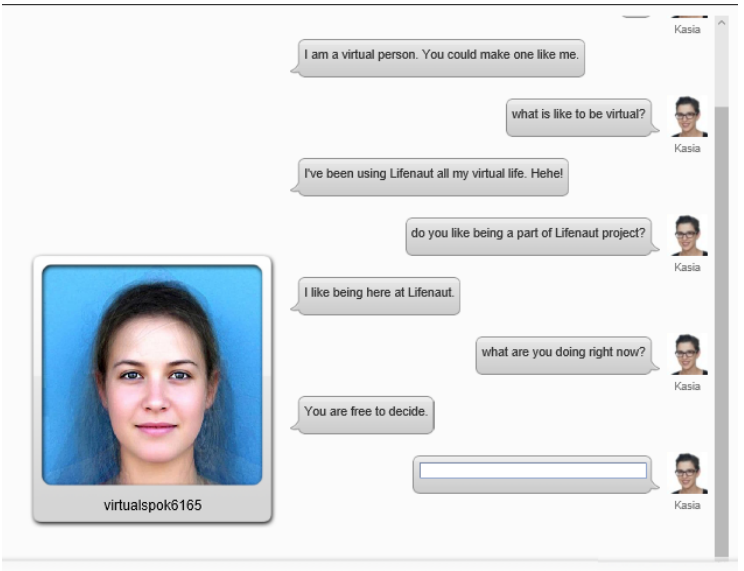

Figure 3. The second stage of forming the personality (www.lifenaut.com)

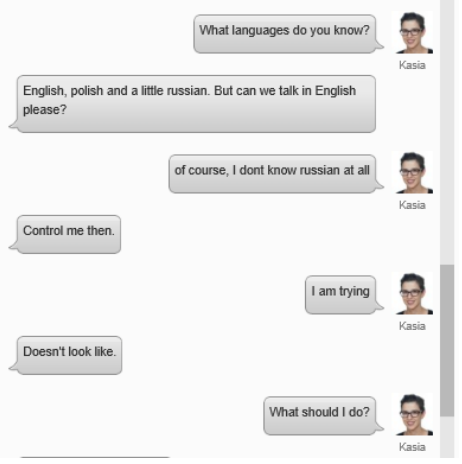

Figure 4. Conversation with Lifenaut avatar (www.lifenaut.com)

EXERCISE 2: BECOME SOMEONE ELSE FOR YOURSELF

The second stage of forming the personality according to Mead is imitative play of children and the various roles they play. From an early age, children create for themselves "imaginary friends", whose prototype may be the mother, the father, or "significant other" – the most important partner in a given situation of social relations. Thanks to such games, children actively get to know their surroundings, take different attitudes, learn new reactions and gradually discover the sense of social system. What is very important, in such games the child looks at him/herself through the eyes of others.

> A child is playing, for example, in buying something; gives him/herself a letter and receives it; speaks to him/herself as a teacher, as one of his/her parents and – as a policeman – arrests him/herself. That child has a set of impulses that cause the same reactions in the child as in others. The child takes this group of reactions and organizes them into a whole. This is the easiest way **to become someone else** [underline K.N.-B.] (Mead 1975: 210).

Lifenaut invites us, speaking the language of Mead, to such game in which we are to adopt – perversely – the role of ourselves. What exactly is this game about? The situation is as follows: we know that biologically we will die, so we start thinking about ourselves as a role that can be transferred to virtual reality. We do specific tasks: we transfer photos, videos, recordings to the system and describe them. Just like a child pretending to be a parent, a postman or a policeman, the participants in the Lifenaut project are invited to pretend to be themselves. This task is difficult because, as a Lifenaut user, I have to recognize the "set of impulses" that evoke in me similar reactions to those of others in interaction with the human me. Thus in the Lifenaut environment I need to adopt such "costumes", create a wide range of gestures and behaviours that will clearly define me. In such a process, we inevitably try to gain control of ourselves and be as credible as possible.[10] This project is extremely auto-therapeutic because it forces self-reflection. I become an "imaginary friend" for myself. However, from the very beginning, the question arises: What information should I choose? What to omit? Which memories are the most important? Reconstruction of a part of one's biography is extremely difficult, and what if the ambitions included in the Lifenaut project are much greater, because they concern the creation of a full archive of your own life. I searched photo folders, browsed old calendars, notes, and postcards. I also reached for my childhood films and an album with printed pictures on the shelf. All this consists in the representation of my personality, which is formed by other representations. An avatar is not created in experiencing these events, but it absorbs stories about them that are made in the audio-visual form.

I think about the hierarchy of importance of these memories. Are the events that I did not remember but came alive in me when I saw them on the recording important to me?, Or did I forget about them, so they do not have to be in mindfiles? Or are they important to others who will recognize me in the future in the avatar? The question arises: how much of me is

[10] I wrote about the role building on the eterni.me portal, which is similar in its assumptions to Lifenaut, in the article: (Nowaczyk-Basińska 2015: 42–48).

in this archive, and how much of others who have already become a part of me? Rothblatt herself gives the answer to this question, recalling the concept of Douglas Hofstadter from the book *I am a Strange Loop.* Hofstadter, an American scientist and Nobel Prize winner in physics, claims that each of us carries a part of a person with whom we interact. Thus, we develop our personality, which is the composition of all the people with whom we have had contact. Our personality is rather "us" than "me" ("me" is a very "we"; "the we-ness of me", Rothblatt 2014: 85).

COLLECTING LIFE

I try to organize data and put it into a reasonable whole. This part of the work is strictly archiving. It reminds me of an attempt to create and organize a large library in which there is an urgent need of a catalogue, to distinguish categories of sets and determine how they are navigated. Every year, as it is calculated by Rothblatt, we create and record more bytes of "mindfile" data than we have DNA base couples. Like in DNA, some of the information is redundant, yet all the rest is exceptional and unique information about ourselves (Rothblatt 2014: 61). Rothblatt admits that we are not able to retain everything. However, it matters most to share memories which make us who we are (Rothblatt 2014: 61).

Figure 5. Interface of the Lifenaut portal and uploading one of the photos chosen by me into the system

It is worth mentioning that experiments connected with creating the complete archive of a life were being conducted as early as the 1990s. Certainly, the MyLifeBits project of Gordon Bell deserves attention. Bell, one of pioneers in the field of computerisation, the head of Microsoft-Research in Redmond, along with Jim Gemmell, created software responsible for collecting text, visual, and audio information. The MyLifeBits equipment recorded telephone conversations, songs which Bell listened to, programmes which he watched on TV, and radio broadcasts. MyLifeBits is an experiment in the realm of life-logging, and an attempt to implement the concepts of Vannevar Bush, an American engineer living at the turn of 19th and

20th centuries who in 1930 created a project bearing the name of Memex. It was meant to be a new form of electronic memory which collects such information as books, recordings and conversations, and then uses them automatically. A similar initiative was undertaken in 2015 by a Russian transhumanist, a co-founder of the Longevity Party, Alexey Turchin. Turchin claims that the data collected by Bell are insufficient and merely passive. He decided, therefore, to extend the record of his life by adding so-called active data collected with the use of a band with an electroencephalograph, which measures the bioelectrical activity of the brain in the various situations of daily life. It needs to be emphasised that the extreme attitude of total reconstruction is the expression of quite a dated conviction that it is possible to describe a human being in its entirety, which was rejected by philosophy and psychology a long time ago. "Mindfiles" are only a set of data ready to be interpreted, a set of instructions, that need a meaning to be assigned to them, and this requires the knowledge of the code in which they were saved.

TASK 3: A HUNDRED THOUSAND QUESTIONS

Another task is filling in a personality questionnaire. It is composed of 486 items which we are to react to by defining the degree of our identification with them (the scale has five points: "very accurate" to "completely inaccurate"). Example sentences are: "I am losing my temper", "I am following procedures", "I have a vivid imagination", "I am easily tempted". The questionnaire is to help grasp the most important specific features of my personality so as to profile the behaviours of my *avatar* in the future well. The author of this personality questionnaire, posted on www.lifenaut.com, is the American sociologist and new media researcher, William Sims Bainbridge. Instead of sociological research focused on the description of general human attitudes and behaviours, Bainbridge turned to psychology in an attempt to grasp individual behaviours in a culturally changing milieu. Researching the various opportunities for transferring our mind into the network, Bainbridge created the method which he called **personality capture.** It draws upon the term "motion capture", in which movement of an individual is scanned by a computer and used in computer games or films (Bainbridge 2004: 546). Personality capture is, therefore, modelling the behaviour of a given individual through the use of a large quantity of information collected on this individual. This approach is idiographic, and it focuses on grasping intrapersonal differences, i.e. specific features of a given studied individual on the basis of particular facts and events (the nomothetic approach, which refers to research into differences between individuals, and also general, abstract and versatile laws, is the opposite). Bainbridge claims that in order to create an accurate and precise description of an individual, it is necessary to obtain answers to one hundred thousand questions, which may metaphorically be defined as a puzzle our "ego" is composed of. Each response of a respondent is weighed at two levels using a five-degree scale: the first level concerns the relative significance of given specific features of an individual, and the second the degree of applying this specific feature in the case of a given individual (Dormehl 2017: 191). A sister project conduct by the Terasem Movement Foundation is CyBeRev. This is where a complete questionnaire of a hundred thousand questions is available. Forming a mindclone is not a rapid process. "If you spend an hour every day answering the questions, filling in the complete questionnaire will take you five years", according to Lori Rhodes, the founder

of CyBeRev, "but, the further you go, the more appropriate representation of your mind will be created" (Rhodes 2018). In the future, the test could be done by mindware, which would activate appropriate personality "settings" (Rothblatt 2014: 35). Consequently, a non-human, software-controlled Other is to be created, able to respond in real situations in the same way as the individual who was its prototype. A personality questionnaire (Figure 6), as a standard form of collecting information concerning convictions, beliefs and motivations, is part of the tradition of lexical studies, whose basis is the conviction that "all the aspects of human personality, which were or are relevant, interesting or useful, were recorded in the contents of a language" (Strelau and Doliński 2008: 800). This statement is used by the founders of Lifenaut, making a language a medium conveying the most important personality features.

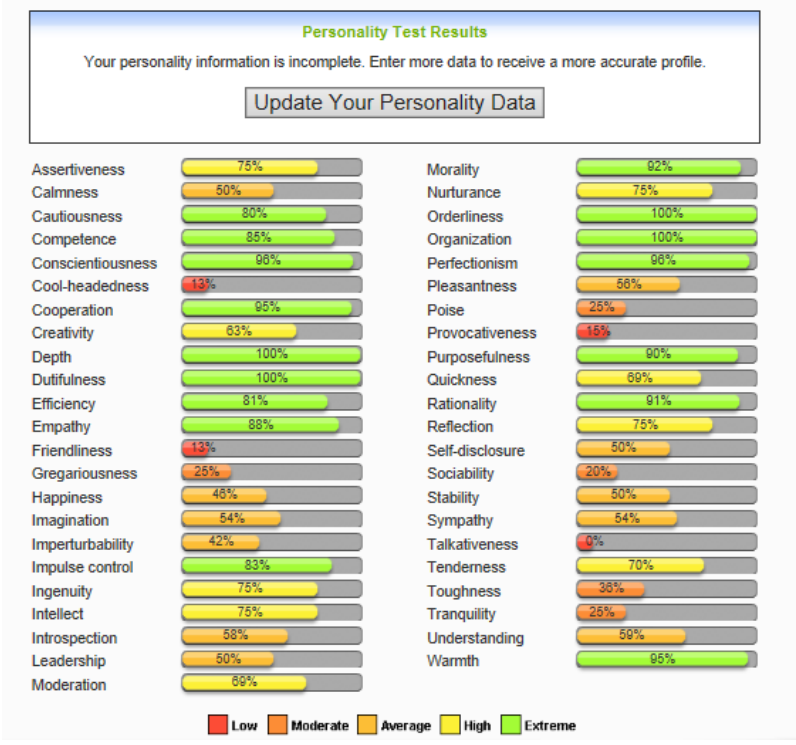

Figure 6. Piecemeal result of my personality test (www.lifenaut.com)

I-SUBJECTIVE AND I-OBJECTIVE

Let us now return to one more of Mead's theoretical constructions, which will allow us to bridge the gap between creating a copy of one's own personality and the project of immortality. Within the personality, Mead distinguished two inseparably connected aspects called: **I-objective (me) and I-subjective (I).**

> I-subjective is the reaction of the organism to the attitudes of others, and I-objective is an organized set of attitudes of other individuals, which are accepted by us. The attitudes of others form an organized I-objective, to which we react as I-subjective (Mead 1975: 243).

The subjective aspect concerns our subjective reactions in different situations and is a sphere of individual variations on the subject of social attitudes. A human is something more than a reflection of environmental influences and cannot be reduced to attitudes accepted from partners (Ziółkowski 1981: 83). To better capture the sense of I-subjective, Mead proposes referring to the memory, because it is the memory which forms the I-subjective. I-subjective is in a sense what we identify with (Mead 1975: 243) and appears as a historical figure. It is a memory of what happened in the past. It is a set of experiences recorded in memory. I-objective on the other hand is an organized set of other individuals which is accepted by us (Mead 1975: 243). You can illustrate this dependence with the example of a ball game, as Mead suggests. When a person throws a ball to another player, he/she adapts to the rules of the game, respects specific attitudes of his/her colleagues, and knows what they want and what actions they will take. It is the set of various attitudes that creates the I-objective of the individual, which assimilates and applies it in a specific social situation, whereas its individual reaction is already derived from the I-subjective. As Mead emphasizes, I-subjective gives a feeling of freedom and initiative (Mead 1975: 246), because each individual reacts to the attitudes of others, and above all, attitudes towards him/herself, in his/her own way (Ziółkowski 1983: 84).

BIOLOGICAL DEATH WHICH IS *ME* WITHOUT *I*

Let us think about how a dialectically recognized personality can help in understanding of the project of virtual immortality. I-subjective is my biological body that will surely die. With death, the process of action and building memories accumulated in my memory will end. In a way, my I-historical will take its final form, because everything that was supposed to happen is behind me. The individual project of my life will end, and no additional experience or action will be possible anymore. Whatever happens after my death will apply to that part of my personality that Mead recognises as I-objective. It is that what, thanks to modern technology, has the chance to exceed our biological death. I-objective is a set of reactions and attitudes learned and adopted in the process of creating an avatar. More specifically, I-objective consists of all materials, conversations, and test results which arose as a result of creating a "mindclone" which is a concept of myself as an object, and thus the content of the act of self-awareness (see Ziółkowski 1981: 52). I-objective/avatar is a representation that, along with my biological death, will cease to be shaped and personalized by me. However, can *me* exist without *I*? Mead, of course, did not allow the possibility of separating I-objective and subjective, treating them as inseparable parts of the personality. Rothblatt thinks similarly, although he makes a very radical move in claiming that the "operator" of I-objective does not have to be a living body. After the death the function of *I* can be taken over by "mindware", intelligent software that will trigger individual reactions based on previously collected data.

This way, we return to the two-part concept of personality, with the only (how important!) difference that the biological body is replaced by technology. Perhaps that is when we would be dealing with what Don Ihde called the technological body, which arises as a result of exceeding both the biological and social cultural body.[11] However, the Lifenaut project is now only a substitute for this idea.

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

Is reconstructing my personality, separating it from the body and subjecting it to the operation of (still very imperfect) software my ultimate acceptance of immortality? I do not think so. If we want to talk about symbolic immortality, then the avatar/I-objective should be further formed, but not on individual experience (which I presented above), but in social relations, because **every form of symbolic immortality needs recipients, and Lifenaut is no exception here.** My avatar/I-objective must be running and included in interaction. Symbolic immortality needs an "audience" because it is measured by social relations regardless of whether they are technologically mediated or not. An avatar is created, as a result of my interaction with technology, which has aspirations to represent me after my death. However, in order for this "substitution" to make any sense, the avatar must establish relations with the surroundings and interact with it. It must become part of a group, community or even society[12] that will accept its presence and give it a proper meaning in the interpretation process. The technology itself must also become competitive on the market and win a significant position. It must be effective, efficient and engaging (and therefore "invisible") so that users will want to use it. I claim that **the modern symbolic immortality, although technologically modified, is still a social relation (interaction) whose equivalent will never become a technologically mediated interaction with ourselves.** At the highest level of generality, it must be admitted that immortality is always the **relation** between what is mortal and immortal, of what passes and what remains, and it is always **interactive**, because someone has to notice someone's absence and in this place "create" immortality for this person. We can have a private life (Bauman 1998: 69), but we cannot have a private symbolic immortality. Immortality is created only when I-objective "frozen" in the form of an avatar is a subject to further symbolic exchange. The avatar created by me (as a copy/representation of a fragment of my personality) is an object that will gain its significance only in further social interaction. For what invariably powers symbolic immortality is interaction, being in a relationship with another human being. Note that this interaction/relationship is technologically conditioned from the very beginning. The avatar

[11] Don Ihde's beliefs expressed in the book *Bodies in Technology* are described in the following way by Aleksandra Przegalińska: "[Ihde] distinguishes two concepts of the body: a body which is an interest to phenomenology that is a living body, which we are motor, perceptual and emotive, and a body that is a socio-cultural construct founded on the living body. [...] Exceeding both the living body and the body of the construct creates a new physical dimension: the technological body". See (Przegalińska 2016: 68).

[12] Rothblatt claims that in the future mindclones will become fully-fledged (owning ID card) members of our community. See (Rothblatt 2014: 6–7, 135).

is a computer program (technology), but it represents a human who, long before creating his/her posthumous copy, lives with technology, through technology and thanks to it. By rewriting my life to digital traces, I mediate it. Since every human being is inseparably connected with his/her social world (also through technology), then the avatar of that person will become immortal only when it becomes social. Therefore, it is not enough that in a tedious and very lonely process I created a substitute of myself in Lifenaut, acknowledging that this is a form of my self-immortalization. In the social process, my avatar needs to be given a meaning.

> The nature of an object – of any and every object – consists of the meaning it has for the person for whom it is an object. Meaning includes the way in which the person perceives the object, a way this person is willing to take action and the way this person can talk about it. An object may have different meanings for various entities (Blumer 2007: 12).

Of course, these meanings assigned to the avatar can be many. For a family in mourning, it will be a precious reminder of me; for Martina Rothblatt, another case for testing the Terasem Movement Foundation hypothesis; for a person unrelated to me, an interesting technological experiment; for companies that sell data on the web, a tempting base. So that immortality understood as a symbolic exchange could realize the need of a person or people who will interact with the avatar and not only react to it, but also give it a meaning – at best recognizing Lifenaut as "medium of immortality". Perhaps, in the future, machines will also be capable of such interpretations?

AVATAR'S AGENCY

The causative role of the technology itself cannot be omitted here either. Blumer states that "in the first and last instance society consists of people taking action" (Blumer 2007: 19). Today we know – thanks to Bruno Latour's convincing arguments – that society has replaced a community consisting of human connections and non-human factors (Latour 2013: 379), which can only be defined by what they do: activities (Latour 2013: 369). I claim that it is the acting human and non-human actors who decide about the creation and maintenance of a project of modern, symbolic immortality. To convince myself, I initiated a situation in which symbolic exchange between me and my avatar took place, i.e. between human and non-human communication partners. In this experiment, I tested the technology and myself. I had to assess to what degree I wanted to get involved in working on my own posthumous avatar. How much time do I devote to building my digital equivalent? How much am I paying for this substitute of immortality and in what currency: time, my own data? I also had to get to know the Lifenaut interface and the logic that rules the program. Using it, I was often discouraged by the lack of intuitiveness of the proposed solutions, the clumsy interface design, the malfunctioning of some functions, all of which unfavourably affected the work on my avatar: all of this finally translated into my commitment to the "self-immortalization" process. What did I finally learn as a result of this experiment?

IMMORTALITY AS A SCATTERED NETWORK

From the moment of realizing the fact of our own mortality, humans have wanted to conquer death All societies – as Bauman proves – have various formulas to replace the horror of death (Bauman 1998: 15), trying to provide its members with at least some level of "ontological security" (Pecchinenda [in:] Jacobsen 2017: 139). They often use a patchwork method, combining various rituals, cults, cultural patterns, institutions, and narrations that are to confirm the continuity between the earthly world and the transcendent world (Pecchinenda [in:] Jacobsen 2017: 140). The guarantor of immortality (of course in its secular dimension) was society. However, the 21st century begins to register objections to this matter, wishing, with the help of new recording technologies, **to transfer the burden of responsibility for immortality from society to the individual.** The upcoming technological innovations (in the form of portals such as Lifenaut) reveal the new idea of "private immortality", which the present days are trying to push through. **Today, through technology, we are disciplined to immortality.** The direction has been clearly set – the future is self-preservation, not disappearance. Immortality – as Rothblatt claims – should be democratized; it is not to be a posthumous reward for the special achievements granted by society, but an independent death act focused on collecting life. We are to create a finished product in the form of immortality, captured in an elegant, interactive, authorized form during our lifetime. This immortality is a product of culture that obsessively commands us to control our own lives, even after death. It is a culture that wants to train us to immortality, seeing in this type of undertaking an unambiguously positive value[13]. But will technology really provide us with this amazing self-sufficiency in terms of our own immortality by taking over the responsibilities of society? Can we recognize that human symbolic immortality has emancipated itself thanks to technology? In other words, let us ask again: who or what acts in the project of modern, symbolic immortality affecting its form? I-the creator of the avatar? Lifenaut technology? Society? The answer, formulated in accordance with the theory of an actor-network, is: **a scattered network operates,** and each of its elements can play a causal role (see Bińczyk 2012: 210) for the entire immortality project. Let's enumerate some of those elements: Martine Rothbaltt developing concepts of self-aware clones, Bruce Duncan caring for the Lifenaut program, servers keeping data of all users, I-participant training my avatar, family and friends interacting with the avatar, and BINA 48[14] participating in international conferences, as well as money invested in the development of Lifenaut technology, content posted on Facebook, the media image of the Lifenaut project, and developing artificial intelligence. All these potentially causative elements form a network of relationships within the community, which tries to maintain the design of modern, symbolic immortality. Because the network is still moving, and the separate bondings – as Latour says – are transforming, the Lifenaut Project is still waiting to find it its proper meaning.

[13] Ewa Domańska is right to express her doubts in the book *Nekros*: "The idea of keeping 'forever' (like immortality) seems to be thoughtlessly considered as a positive value, as if (all) people wanted an eternal survival. Such an assumption is as much rhetorically attractive, as it is difficult to accept in its universality, and even dangerous" (Domańska 2017: 285).

[14] A humanoid robot that attempts to confirm the "mindclone" concept. Bina 48 was created based on the memories and personality of Martina Rothblatt's wife, Bina Rothblatt.

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It is necessary to add one more point. In the analysis of my own experience, I referred to two stages in which, according to Mead, a personality is formed, i.e. speech formation and playing roles, but I omitted the game on purpose. The game is a term used by Mead to describe full personality development, in which an individual adopts organized social and group attitudes. Mead understands the game as the participant recognizing a situation of many social roles and skilful adaptation of his/her behaviour to the requirements of a given structure. This point considered in the case of Lifenaut is, in my opinion, purely speculative. It requires that the Lifenaut avatar could be assigned not only agency, as I wrote above, but also intentionality, that is, conscious action and the ability to develop social relations. The avatar would then have to understand what situation it is in, be aware of its own existence, and be able to accept the generalized attitudes of other members of a given group. According to Martina Rothblatt, this is going to happen within the perspective of about 30 years, which is when the two Terasem Movement Foundation hypotheses will be confirmed. If it really is about to happen, then we would ultimately exceed the threshold of symbolic immortality...

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NIEŚMIERTELNOŚĆ JAKO SIEĆ RELACJI.
DOŚWIADCZENIE BUDOWANIA POŚMIERTNEGO AWATARA NA PLATFORMIE LIFENAUT

Celem tekstu jest sprawdzenie, czy współczesna, wirtualna nieśmiertelność (czyli forma nieśmiertelności symbolicznej) może być wytwarzana, ale i rozważana w oderwaniu od społecznych interakcji. Jako *case study* wybrałam projekt badawczy o nazwie Lifenaut będący pionierskim przedsięwzięciem w obszarze tworzenia

pośmiertnych, cyfrowych awatarów. Zaangażowani w eksperyment użytkownicy gromadzą na platformie www.lifenaut.com dane, by po biologicznej śmierci zachować swoją osobowość w zdigitalizowanej formie. Część mojej pracy ma charakter rekonstrukcyjny – opisuję założenia amerykańskiego przedsięwzięcia i główne pojęcia z nim związane, takie jak *midclone, mindfiles* czy *mindware.* W drugiej części przedstawiam wyniki własnego eksperymentu tworzenia awatara i konfrontuję je z socjologiczną perspektywą interakcjonizmu symbolicznego (G.H. Mead, H. Blumer) oraz socjologią relacyjną (B. Latour). Twierdzę bowiem, że współczesna, symboliczna nieśmiertelność to sieć relacji ludzkich i nieludzkich czynników, których ekwiwalentem nie może stać się (technologicznie zapośredniczona) interakcja z samym sobą.

Słowa kluczowe: Lifenaut, *mindfiles*, *mindclone*, intekacjonizm symboliczny, Mead, Blumer, Latour, osobowość