Book review

"Fundaments of robotherapy and psychotherapy through virtual reality"

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Integrating social and behavioral sciences (which are by tradition rather non-technological approaches) with technology is one of the major challenges of these domains, and psychology is no exception. The volume "Psychology and Technology: Fundaments of Robotherapy and Psychotherapy through Virtual Reality" addresses this important and innovative topic with a robust evidence-based approach. The book gives the reader throughout its five chapters first of all a basic understanding of the principles behind such an integration. But, as the book is the result of work done by a group of researchers at the Babes-Bolyai University, who are active through the International Institute for the Advanced Study of Psychotherapy and Applied Mental Health, the book is by no means theory-driven, but also explores directions for the application of said principles, in empirical studies and in professional work. The authors take a militant stance on the integration between psychology and technology. Given their background as psychotherapists, they explore integration only in this area of professional work.

The first chapter explores in a historical and theoretical approach the basic principles of interaction between psychology and technology. The second chapter focuses on the applications of virtual reality (VR) in psychotherapy. It addresses the state of knowledge, shows how contemporary research into VR-assisted therapy drives evolutions in practice, but also addresses the use of VR in fundamental research. The third chapter focuses on robotherapy, i.e. therapy through the use of physical robots, either as Robo-therapists, as Robo-mediators or as Robo-assistants. The fourth chapter addresses wider applications of robotherapy, by focusing on computer-assisted and online therapy. The fifth chapter expands on the previous chapters by discussing the current state of the domain, drawing conclusions on the limitations of previous studies and making predictions on the most likely future evolutions. The volume also contains a series of appendices, with useful resources for the readers (students, practitioners, or researchers), in the form of information on current technology projects in psychotherapy, and descriptions of technology-driven platforms used in research and practice.

The authors have approached a fast-moving, rather non-integrated, and controversial subject and have offered a compelling vision of a possible future evolution in psychotherapy. Their treatment of the subject is robust, based on current research and theoretical advances, and does not lack a critical outlook on some of the limitations of both empirical studies and theory. The volume makes a good argument for a domain which is not well-known or maybe even disregarded by many psychotherapists, urging all to boldly go where few have gone before.

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