"Relationality and Posthumanity" The COLLECTIVE INTELLIGENCE

Katarzyna Ostalska, University of Łódź, Poland
ORCID: **0000-0001-8553-7517**

The exhibition *The World Through AI: Exploring Latent Spaces* at Jeu de Paume, in Paris in 2025 rendered in an evolutionary way the spatial development of more-than-human entanglements with AI captured from a declarative non-anthropocentric standpoint. As the exhibition's title suggests, the focal point is not human projections or anxieties concerning AI but the vision of the world that is processed, recorded and analysed by the machines in which the human presence is a small part of the larger network of capital, information, cultural and infrastructural relations, to name just a few. The curators of the exhibition capture this grid as follows:

> What exactly do we mean by 'AI'? How can we map this "hyper-object," in which theories and technologies, energy resources and geological materials, human labour and digital data, institutions and infrastructures, state policies, corporate ideologies and financial capital are intricately interwoven?

Morton's concept of "hyper-object," understood as all-permeating, beyond scale, global, "viscous" phenomenon seems to resonate well with the idea of mapping artificial intelligence. *The World Through AI: Exploring Latent Spaces* might be read as the de-centralising of the human position and shifting the power balance to AI's entanglements with the more-than-human world into the territories where interactions are crucial and formative but not always overtly discernible. Very much in this vein, Collective Intelligence (CI) signifies the relational capacity to generate the co-operative output to the creation of which contributed more-than-human organic and non-organic beings and entities. To a large extent, Collective Intelligence is the embodiment of the posthuman relationality put into practice in the 21st century.

(Fig. 1)

The section devoted to Collective Intelligence at *The World Through AI* encompassed, among others, two separate works (Fig.1) by Agnieszka Kurant (born in Lodz in 1978): the colourful "chemical gardens" (in the words of an artist) in the background called *Nonorganic Life* 2 (2023) and the grey sculpture in the foreground entitled *A.A.I* (*System's Negative*) No. 6 (2016). Kurant's *Nonorganic Life* 2 renders the seemingly oxymoronic concept that defies the idea of life as exclusively organic, embedded in carbon and not in pixels. The posthuman relationality comprises minerals (i.e. from which computers are produced), the soil, microbes, human and non-human animals and many more entities, such as water for cooling the server factories. In *Nonorganic Life* 2 the entanglements of the collective inputs, ranging from machines, human effort and mineral processes

have contributed to creating the artistic, collective vision of life that goes beyond bio-centrism. Kurant's *Nonorganic Life* 2 is teeming with the mobile, Bennettian vibrant matter. To create this work of art, the artist has interacted with metals that make up computers (i.e. cobalt and copper), aluminium upon which crystalline composition was imprinted, and then painted with manganese, calcium, chromium, iron (TWTAI 2025: 106-107). Such pixelated, volatile artistic practices (Fig.1) bathed in green, red and blue appear to some extent to "mimic" carbon-based life but at the same time they remind one that what is considered to be "silicon-based" is still rooted in the earth minerals.

In a similar vein, Julian Charrière's *Metamorphosis LI* (2016) (Fig. 2) creates an assemblage made from the melted computer metals and the soil reversing the cycle of de-mineralization and industrial refuse process (TWTAI 2025: 58). The assemblage deconstructs what is considered "natural" and "cultural," "rare and precious" and "rubbish," showing the arbitrariness of these tags and their mutual entanglements.

Fig.2

Referring to computers made of minerals, Parikka observes that they transcend human time and scale, being "crystalized as part of the contemporary political economy: material histories of labor and the planet are entangled in devices, which, however, unfold as part of planetary histories" (2015: 58) and at the same time "social and technological relations and environmental and ecological realities" (2015: 46). Following this line of thinking, the Collective Intelligence, according to Kurant, can be applied ironically, i.e. to conceal the underpaid human cheap labour force that train AI globally (TWTAI 2025: 106). Clickworkers are low-wage recruits who categorise images, so that AI could be trained in recognising them. The foregrounded grey sculpture *A.A.I* (*System's Negative*) No. 6 *Artificial AI* reminiscent of plant, animal and human matter entanglements (Fig. 1) embodies the combined, anonymous effort of clickworkers all over the world encapsulated in the zinc mould of the inside the thermite colony (TWTAI 2025: 106). Critical as the implication is, one cannot, however, resist the pure aesthetic pleasure of *A.A.I* (*System's Negative*) No. 6, where more-than-human entities seem to be joined in their shared embrace, which further renders the human-machine-more-than-human fascination, not devoid of (energy-charged) eco-guilt. Moreover, one can further speculate whether anthropomorphised by the comparative ground thermites (standing for clickworkers) do not appropriate nonhuman animals' work relations via anthropocentric analogies? As Braidotti warns, posthuman relationality (more-than-human "collectivity, relationality and hence community building") cannot exist without posthuman ethics, "embodied and embedded" and with a "sense of accountability" (2013: 49) that rejects alleged human exceptionalism and speciesism. Starting from the present-day forms of the Collective Intelligence, the following article aims to go back to the earlier scientific research in biology and quantum mechanics to provide the background for understanding how posthuman relationality evolved and altered over the last decades.

The Symbiotic Planet

Lynn Margulis in her revolutionary study *The Symbiotic Planet: A New Look at Evolution* (1999) stresses that relationality is a symbiotic, evolutionary force which, thanks to different forms of interaction with more-than-human organisms, brings new species into life. In other words, Margulis applies the

concept of symbiosis (invented by Anton deBary in 1873) and symbiogenesis (attributed to Konstantin Merezhkovsky) (1999: 43) to the theory of the evolutionary emergence of species by "physical contact" (as she defines symbiosis) (1999: 9). Arguing that symbiosis is the force behind the evolution, Margulis claims "we are all symbionts on a symbiotic planet" (1999: 7). In this vein, Gilbert in "A Symbiotic View of Life: We Have Never Been Individuals" compares humans to lichens (symbiotic organisms consisting of fungus and algae), which combined their strengths to create a multispecies body. None of the (human/nonhuman) organisms is an individual, claims Gilbert, but they all function relationally like lichens, co-operating with viruses, bacteria, other species that make up their corporeality. "We are all lichens," Gilbert sums up (336). "In We are all Lichens 2," Gilbert calls symbiosis "the signature of life," adding that an organism is "a consortium of several different species." He argues that due to molecular research on symbiosis, "genomic" individuality has been abandoned in many disciplines, such as anatomy, biology, immunology, and physiology.

Gilbert's research has been popularised by Donna J. Haraway, who included the motto "We are all lichens" in *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016: 30). In her study, Haraway pays tribute to Margulis's symbiosis, at the same time proposing her own concept of symbiotic assemblages (holobionts) (2016: 60). Rather than autopoiesis ("self-organising") Haraway opts for sympoiesis as an expression of relationality, as "making-with" and "wordling-with" (2016: 58). Multispecies relationality can take many different forms, for instance, interspecies kinship: "Make Kin, Not Babies!" as Donna J. Haraway puts it (2016: 103). Instead of reproducing, Haraway encourages to create bonds with the more-than-human world, acknowledging their personhood, "the stretch and recomposition of kin" and the shared genetic lineage of all earth creatures (2016: 103). Such interactions need to be "relentlessly relational, sympoietic, and consequential" (2016: 49). On the other hand, Haraway rightly observes that symbiosis does not necessarily mean all the sides will gain equally on such exchange since such dynamics rests upon countless numbers of participants (2016: 66). What is more, not all relations are based upon reciprocity and co-operation, some of them promote competition and exploitation. With the above in mind, Haraway advocates to "relationally unmake" structures that are based upon unjust power balance, i.e. Capitalocene (2016: 50).

Posthuman, Relational Ontology of Mattering

Posthuman relationality views people as inseparably entangled (on equal footing) with more-than-human beings, organic and nonorganic entities. Agentic and active matter persistently re-constitutes human and nonhuman beings, beyond the binary boundaries of the subject and object, the observer and the observed. Barad rightly observes that "'We' are not outside observers *of* the world. Nor are we simply located at particular places *in* the world; rather, we are part of the world in its ongoing intra-activity" (2003: 828). Barad does not discriminate between human and more-than-human bodies, all of them perceived as "material-discursive phenomena" without "inherent boundaries and properties" (2003: 823). She claims that what makes human and more-than-human bodies appear as different is discursive exclusion and not any innate essence. Starting from the assumption that discursive practices are "specific material (re) configurings of the world" (2003: 828), Barad creates her relational ontology, in which meaning is entangled with matter and matter is entangled with meaning and they both are reconstituted simultaneously (2003: 822). She explains that a relational ontology based upon posthuman refiguration of material-discursive practices challenges divisions into words and things, nature and culture, knowing and being, outer and inner, "materiality in the fullness of their becoming" (2003: 812). Posthuman relationality operates upon relational ontology, becoming rather than being, posthuman ethics and making kin with more-than-human beings, machines, AI, minerals, NH animals, and many more.

The Special Issue of *The Polish Journal of English Studies* is devoted to "Relationality and Critical Posthumanism." Each article included in the journal approaches this theme from its own, idiosyncratic angle, redefining the core ideas of posthuman relationality outlined here in its own manner and in new directions. The article "Cartographies: Relational Ecologies and Decolonial Belonging in the Works of Olga Tokarczuk and Amitav Ghosh" by Samiul Azim, Akidul Hoque, Farida Parvin places the readings in a postcolonial context, subverting the imperial past, as if Haraway would put it, "relationally unmaking it" and moving toward posthuman futurities, entangled with more-than-human beings and entities, climate and environmental justice. According to Tokarczuk, the acknowledgement of our entangled, differential, interconnected lives activates ethical practices on how to shape diverse futures ("Tender Narrator"). Tokarczuk in "Tender Narrator" declares:

> Tenderness is spontaneous and disinterested; it goes far beyond empathetic fellow feeling. Instead it is the conscious, though perhaps slightly melancholy, common sharing of fate. Tenderness is deep emotional concern about another being, its fragility, its unique nature, and its lack of immunity to suffering and the effects of time…It is a way of looking at the world as being alive, living, interconnected, cooperating with, and co-dependant on itself.

Remaining within the sphere of "relational unmaking", "Cannibalistic Capitalism in Agustina Bazterrica's *Tender Is the Flesh*" by Bartosz Jastrzębski explores the detrimental workings of Capitalocene (Moore), which monetises the natural world as the capital resource, damaging the relational balance of organic and non-organic multispecies networks. Capitalocene destroys "mosaic of open-ended assemblages of entangled ways of life" (Tsing 4), and by doing so, it opens the path to all kinds of abuses and power imbalances. Bazterrica's novel, the human-eat-human world of late capitalism, is reaching the point of its own exhaustion. "Beastly Humans, Humane Beasts: The Blurring of Human-Animal Boundaries in Fairy Tale Retellings for Adults" by Kricie Ann Jonsson further elaborates the notion of transgressions done by human animals to non-human ones. The article criticises speciesism, which justifies any atrocities committed in the name of "humanity". With her theory of the symbiotic evolution, Margulis provides the ground for the posthuman critique of speciesism and challenges, at the same time, the alleged superiority, uniqueness, and centrality of human beings. Claiming that *homo sapiens sapiens* does not occupy the highest and privileged position in the evolutionary chain, Margulis (1999: 4) proves that evolution does not discriminate between species and all of them are of equal importance. She maintains that:

> All beings alive today are equally evolved. All have survived over three thousand million years of evolution from common bacterial ancestors. There are no 'higher' beings, no 'lower animals,' no angels, and no gods. (1999: 4)

Challenging speciesism, Kricie Ann Jonsson explores the narrative possibility of establishing non-hierarchical relations between HA and NHA in retellings of the fairy tales. Still, in the vein of speculative narratives for adults, "Posthuman

Love in *Her* and *Ex Machina*" by Maciej Piaskowski moves posthuman relational divagations into the sphere of AI, techno culture, and emotionality. Since human relations with computers, machines, AI have become as intimate as never before, the question arises how this affect can be transferred into the digital world and vice versa. Would machines gain autonomy in the emotional exchange or would they become objectified as much as animals have been for centuries, becoming pets or human toys. Finally, can humans, as suggested by Barad, see themselves and machines as the mutually entangled in the process of discursive-material mattering or the attachment to one's ideas of human corporeality will prevent any meaningful relationality? Katarzyna Nowak in her article "Affect, Hope and Collective Consciousness as acts of radical rebellion in Wachowski's *Sense8*" approaches posthuman relationality based upon affect and solidarity as a promising futuristic project in fostering collectiveness and cooperation which manages to become a viable, non-competitive alternative for the social development.

Last but not least, the notion of corporeality in the game *Soma* (body) is studied in detail via posthuman and transhuman readings by Karolina Sawa in her article "Fragmented Minds: SOMA and the Reconstruction of Identity". The video game *Soma* (2015) contemplates the transhuman idea of the mind uploading into the computer or a body of a different person. Karolina Sawa asks vital questions about the continuity of posthuman subjectivity and the integration of past memories into a corporeality that is not an organic one. Her article also offers a critical comparative study of posthuman and transhuman divergencies and shared areas.

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