

Research Article

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Becoming-with in Anicka Yi's Artistic Practice

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Abstract: The intent of this article is to investigate the works of Anicka Yi, looking for the elements that make this artist a primary figure in the artistic redefinition of the category of human and the boundary that divides it from everything that is more than human. After a short introduction, the theoretical aspects expressed by philosophers, anthropologists or academics of other disciplines such as Bruno Latour, Isabelle Stengers and Donna Haraway are analyzed to define the *worlding*, the central theme of this paper. At that point, the artist and her practice are introduced, and then, the *Metaspore* exhibition of 2022, in which the four works examined in this article are present. These: *Le Pain Symbiotique*, *When Species Meet Part 2 (Vegetable Psychology)*, *Releasing The Human From The Human* and *Biologizing The Machine (Spillover Zoonotica)*, are then presented and studied, combining the artistic process with theoretical concepts by Anna L. Tsing, Rosi Braidotti, Marilyn Strathern and Elizabeth Povinelli among others. The article, therefore, attempts to highlight how Yi's works and artistic making are particularly effective examples of *worlding*, *becoming-with* of human and more than human. Works are both a new perspective of investigation on life and a new urgent posture toward the future in the era of the Anthropocene.

Keywords: posthuman, contemporary art, symbiosis, post-anthropocentrism, relational ontology

1 Introduction

The aim of this article is to analyze, through the theoretical results of Donna Haraway, the artistic production of Anicka Yi. Starting from the awareness of living in difficult times, in which human activity has led to global warming and climate change, the effects of which are increasingly dangerous, this text tries to grasp and express a new posture, far from anthropocentrism and human exceptionalism. I will dedicate the first part to the theoretical aspects with which I approach this study, identifying Haraway's considerations as the most important element. From the assumptions that open up to the plurality of points of view of Jean-François Lyotard and Bruno Latour, I will rely on Isabelle Stengers' definition of *cosmopolitics* and Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's *rhizome* to highlight the fundamental relationships and connections between the elements for living in common, thus approach arriving at Haraway's own definition of *worlding*, in which she makes explicit those same relationships between human and non-human agents to live, to build, and modify the world together, in *becoming-with*. This vision will be therefore the starting point in analyzing four of Yi's works featured in the *Metaspore* exhibition of 2022. After briefly presenting the artist and the exhibition, in the second part, I will move on to the actual critical analysis of the works, the choice of which is not accidental, but designed for the contribution and effectiveness they bring to the themes. It will not be an in-depth analysis of the exhibition, but I will try to grasp its peculiar characteristics, as it covers almost the entirety of Yi's artistic production in terms of time. These works highlight, as will be underlined, the link with other species, plants or animals, invisible microorganisms or organisms visible to the human eye. The analyses will also highlight another fundamental consideration related to this theme: the culture we build and inhabit has separated us

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from what we call nature (non-human), justifying our actions of domination and causing the same effects that the planet, and ourselves, now suffer.

The ultimate goal, expressed in the conclusions, is, therefore, to demonstrate how Anicka Yi's artistic production is a perfect example of what Donna Haraway defines as *worlding*, in a necessary and urgent perspective in the time in which we are: the Anthropocene.

2 Worlding

"The world is not a solid continent of facts sprinkled by a few lakes of uncertainties, but a vast ocean of uncertainties speckled by a few islands of calibrated and stabilized forms" (Latour, 2005, p. 245) is certainly one of the best-known quotes by the French sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour. In a way, it synthesizes his relativistic position, aligning it with those *"incredulity toward metanarratives"* (Lyotard, 1984, p. 7) to which Lyotard exhorts in *The Postmodern Condition*. But to which continent of certainties was Latour referring? What metanarratives should we stop believing in for Lyotard?

Certainly, one of the most solid is the idea of progress. Twin of the concept of development, it has legitimized the presumed superiority of the West and has pushed its processes of colonization and racism, but it has also determined the ferocity of the waste of resources on the planet, considering them of infinite quantity. This same idea, so deeply rooted, goes hand in hand with many other principles that guarantee the subordination of a long series of marginalities: binomials such as man/woman, able/disabled, white/non-white, human/non-human, created by the same part who have the power to do so.

Stengers together with Latour, devised the concept of *Cosmopolitics* (2010), to address contemporary political, scientific, technological, and environmental challenges. This neologism aims to consider the plurality of points of view, practices, and interests, creating an approach that is aware of them. The term is composed of *Kosmos*, from the Greek "world," and *politikos*, related to politics. This not only represents a vision of global politics, but seeks to reflect on mutual dependence, a concept that emphasizes the interdependence between phenomena, actors and elements at both physical and conceptual distances. In this sense, it is an invitation to think about one's own actions, which affect the world, and the system in which we are. By being aware of inequalities, of our agency, of our role in this. Deleuze and Guattari's theorization of *rhizomes*¹ (1980) joins these considerations and shortens the distances of concepts, connected without hierarchy. The next step is to incorporate these principles into the redefinition of the human category. The human is not only within the environment – broadening the concept of *cosmopolitics* – there are a series of other actors, organisms, animals, plants, minerals, and invisible to our eyes, a long list of more-than-human characters. By applying these theoretical lines to the considerations of other actors more than human, new solutions can be grasped:

The slight curve of the shell that holds just a little water, just a few seeds to give away and to receive, suggests stories of becoming-with, of reciprocal induction, of companion species whose job in living and dying is not to end the storytelling, the worlding. (Haraway, 2016, pp. 118–119).

These are the words of Donna Haraway that manage to put together all these traces, in a rhizomatic way. *Worlding* is a concept that is extremely present in the writings and thoughts of the American philosopher. It represents the idea of an ideological and factual construction of experiences, and worlds, implemented in *becoming-with* by different species: human and more-than-human. This perspective obliges us to think of ourselves and position ourselves differently from Western customs, and in this, its urgency and effectiveness arises and develops. If the path taken by the ill-defined first world was the anthropocentric one, to position

¹ The term, used in botany to indicate tubers and bulbs, is instead used by the two philosophers to express the distributional complexity of a phenomenon, taking into consideration all the links that each element within this phenomenon possesses.

oneself external and superior to nature, Haraway's posture is free from this disease, it is lowered into *compost*² – a term widely used by herself – close to and together with all the more-than-human species.

3 Anicka Yi

Anicka Yi was born in Seoul, South Korea in 1971, and her family moved to the United States in 1973. She began her career as a fashion stylist and copywriter, and in the early 2000s, she became increasingly interested in artistic production. In 2008, she decided to devote herself totally to this field, starting exhibiting, first in a collective called *Circular File*, then alone.

Her artistic approach seeks to create something multi-sensory and expand the very notion of artwork. Using trans-disciplinary theoretical foundations, she experiments with new definitions for the categories of natural and synthetic, human and non-human, technology and biology. Inspired by contemporary thinkers, such as Donna Haraway with her concept of human/machine hybridization and her theories that challenge the conceptual boundaries of the human himself, or Tsing with her studies on interspecific connections, Yi aims to demonstrate, through her works, the inconsistency of those dualistic categories on which Western culture is founded. In the last decade she has had several exhibitions: in 2021 at the Tate Modern in London with *Anicka Yi: In Love with the World* for which she won the Hyundai Commission and in 2017 at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York with *Anicka Yi: Life is cheap* for which she won the Hugo Boss Prize, but also in 2019 *We Have Never Been Individual* at the Gladstone Gallery in Brussels and *Jungle Stripe* at the Fridericianum in Kassel in 2016.

4 Metaspore

In the exhibition *Metaspore*, curated by Fiammetta Griccioli and Vicente Todolí, the works of Korean American artist Anicka Yi effectively highlight the assumptions expressed by Donna Haraway. This is the artist's first solo show in Italy, held in Milan in 2022 at the Pirelli HangarBicocca exhibition spaces, and has brought to the public eye more than twenty works created since 2010. Considering that Yi entered the art world in 2008, the exhibition encompasses almost the entirety of her artistic journey.

The title chosen is a neologism of the artist herself: the word juxtaposes *meta* and *spore* to evoke the process she uses that contaminates and is contaminated by the surrounding environment, with all the elements that distinguish it. By invoking fungi, an element presents ideologically and physically in her works, Yi chooses to align herself with the ideas of anthropologist Anna L. Tsing, who says: "*Right now I am a spore, floating above it all, as autonomous as I'll ever be. (.) it wasn't so hard to figure out what action meant to me. Action was adventure, curiosity, and growing into new things, separately and together*" (Tsing, 2014, p. 230). Like Tsing, Yi continues to contaminate and be contaminated by her artistic process and the encounters that arise from it. During the study and creation phases, she encounters figures from other disciplines that allow her to have more points of observation and a greater knowledge of the topics covered. Working alongside biologists, perfume creators, architects or scientists from various fields, she consciously chooses a multidisciplinary collaboration aimed at exploring new definitions and postures towards human and more-than-human categories. Trans-disciplinarity and the *Trans-species*³ vision (Tsing, 2021) are important and objective elements to which her work tends.

Another peculiar element of Yi's works is their often-ephemeral character. The organic components mutate, deteriorate, and change shape and position until the point of changing the physical and conceptual

² Haraway uses this term to refer to the idea of union between the elements of the planet, which together form this substance.

³ The term was coined by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing to explore the ways in which the relations between species could transcend traditional biological and cultural distinctions.

content of the work itself. This is a fundamental characteristic, strongly sought by the artist, both for the success of her practice and as a questioning of the monumentality of the work of art. She opposes the logic according to which one must seek eternal images, which overcome one's own death itself, in fact, she says: *"I think it's a very masculine drive (.). That the whole needing to create things that are going to outlive us all, that these cradles of civilization need to have these sculptures until the end of time."* (Yi, 2018) It perfectly captures the masculine character of this practice, which is a practice of power, creates, and reinforces meanings and, therefore, culture.

Metaspore finds itself in the company of other exhibits that seek to break down the boundary and bend the definition of human. At the Frankfurter Kunstverein, for example, three exhibitions have been curated, over a period of 4 years, which see the collaboration between contemporary artists and international research institutes of natural sciences: *Trees of Life – Stories for a Damaged Planet* in 2019, whose title already echoes Anna Tsing's essays and the anthropocentric question; *The Intelligence of Plants* in 2021, whose intentions are explicit; and finally, at the turn of 2023 and 2024, *Bending the Curve – Knowing, Acting, Caring for Biodiversity*, an attempt to underline the urgency of reacting, changing our habits and our positions toward the more than human. In the same way, Anicka Yi is in line with other artists such as Pierre Huyghe and his aquariums which are invitations to *"expose viewers to something rather than just expose something to someone"* (Bourriaud, 2019), to our idiosyncrasies; Tomàs Saraceno and his spiders, through whom he tries to enter other worlds, he who believes art can *"help us see this multiplicity of scales and phenomena, use a multi-lens to show that we co-exist and share the space with more-than-human beings"* (Saraceno, 2017); Pamela Rosenkranz and her investigations that *"questions the subjective element in the apprehension of an artwork, shifting the viewer's focus toward material, biochemical and neurological determinants of human behavior"* (Rosenkranz, s.d.), just to name a few of the most effective.

Among the works on display, *Le Pain Symbiotique* (Figure 1), originally conceived for the 2014 Taipei Biennial, allows us to pause and reflect on our coexistence and *becoming-with* bacteria and viruses. In the same way, as Katie Paterson's work, in which sound recordings of glaciers or light bulbs simulating moonlight



Figure 1: Anicka Yi, *Le Pain Symbiotique*, 2022, Credits: HangarBicocca.

allow us to “collapse the distance between the viewer and the most distant edges of time and the cosmos” (Paterson, s.d.) by putting people back in touch with the environment, Yi’s work investigates organisms that are out of scale with respect to the possibilities of human vision, which, as a result, has abandoned its tasks and relevance.

In the installation, five sculptures in resin and glycerin are each placed on a pedestal, at their feet the floor is composed of a mixture of bread and ochre pigment, together they are inside a synthetic structure in transparent PVC. Microscopic images of microorganisms in constant motion are projected onto the sculptures. Overall, the work is conceived as a “giant, synthetic stomach” (McLean-Ferris, 2015) within which a process is in progress that starts from the invisible work of organisms.

The title has a double reading: the French *pain* recalls precisely the nourishment, in particular, the artist investigates that obtained precisely from companion species, the same term that derives *cum-panis*, literally “eats bread with another”; the English *pain*, on the other hand, has a direct link with plants of the genus *Nepenthes*. These carnivorous plants, whose name translated from Greek means “without pain,” have modified leaves with cavities at the ends in which different species take refuge. If an ant falls into these fluid-filled sacs, some bacteria digest the insect and turn it into nutrients needed by the plant. These are precisely the microorganisms projected in images on the sculptures inside the installation, bacteria that live in symbiosis with the *Nepenthes*.

There is a close link with the ideas expressed by Haraway: the stomach system is a reproduction of a body in which elements of different species collaborate; using bread dough as a floor, Yi recalls the leavening process that demonstrates the work done by microorganisms, thus highlighting their importance; and, finally, the choice of placing the sculptures on pedestals is a way to restore their different relevance, thus placing them under a different perspective, like monuments. The installation is designed to convey the idea of an ecosystem, which manifests the symbiosis in our body: the coexistence of different species in the same system, all relevant, none in domain, expression of *worlding*. We are not separate, our actions affect and are influenced by other beings.

Another work that deserves attention is *When Species Meet Part 2 (Vegetable Psychology)* (Figure 2), which borrows its name from Haraway’s (2008) text of the same title (2008). It is part of a series of works in which mushrooms are the protagonists, entitled *Mushroom Cages: When Species Meet Part 1 (Shine or go crazy)*, *When Species Meet Part 2 (Vegetable Psychology)* and *When Species Meet Part 3 (Sessile)*; all created in 2016. The installation, a 2-square-meter cage covered with fake animal hair and open at the top, contains a sculpture representing a bamboo mushroom, characterized by a mesh structure that spreads vertically from the top of the stem in the direction of the ground. The fur upholstery inserts an animal dimension and recalls Meret Oppenheim’s iconic object with symbolic functioning: *Le Déjeuner en fourrure* of 1936. This revival is not an end in itself, but, moving away from surrealist speculations on the unconscious and the dream world, here Yi seems to use its potential to refer to another dimension typical of the objects of the avant-garde movement. Hanging from the bars are ampoules and other laboratory instruments containing liquids. The mushroom, a central figure in the installation, is called Bamboo Mushroom in Asia and is widely used in Asian cuisine and traditional medicine, while in the West, it is called *Phallus Indusiatus* (literally “clothed penis”) in Latin.

The work therefore contains plant, animal and human data. These elements, with the subtitle *Vegetable Psychology*, are acutely highlighted by the artist who opens to the question of cultural relations and subordination created by humans. Starting from the scientific name with which the mushroom is referred to in Latin, it is possible to delve into the Latin-Western name of the plant world, which dates to the studies of Linnaeus (1707–1778), the Swedish botanist of the eighteenth century, well immersed in the cultural system of the Age of Enlightenment. The choices on the nomenclature of the parts of the plants devised by the academic are based on the organs of sexual reproduction, a mirror of sexual binarism. These classifications are the foundations on which Western culture was built, impelled enormously by the Enlightenment, assisted by the ideas of progress and modernity. Just as a sexual dimorphism and consequently, a gender dualism has been emphasized (Fauste-Sterling, 2000), to which different expectations, tasks and spaces have been applied, so it has been done by separating the so-called nature from the human. The linguistic aspect is extremely relevant and powerful in the creation of knowledge, and it is precisely on this that Guattari expresses himself by saying: “All things considered, though, I think it’s better to biologize things that to turn everything into linguistics.” (Guattari,



Figure 2: Anicka Yi, *When Species Meet Part 2 (Vegetable Psychology)*, 2022, Credits: HangarBicocca.

2006, p. 76) Despite the name, in fact, to spread its spores, this fungus needs the help of flies or other non-winged insects which, attracted by the gel it secretes containing the spores, scatter them with their paws in the undergrowth. Asexual reproduction shows another example of symbiosis.

The installation therefore highlights the anthropocentric power dynamic and seeks to overcome it: the laboratory instruments typical of the traditional relationship between human and the rest of the living in an action of study or forced withdrawal from an elevated perspective; a mushroom-shaped sculptural element that is widely used in Eastern culture, and in Western culture named in the phallogocentric perspective; and finally, an animal cage.

It is precisely by thinking back to the separation between human space and natural space, also expressed visually in this work, that it is possible to understand how the construction of concepts and meanings leads to beliefs that still place the human species on a pedestal – the same one in which the artist places the projections of microorganisms in *Le Pain Symbiotique*. Because, as Haraway says, referring to Marilyn Strathern's studies of relational ontology:

It matters what matters we use to think other matters with; it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with; it matters what knots knot knots, what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories. (Haraway, 2016, p. 12)

Strathern's studies (2005) reveal a different path, in which she focuses on the interconnections between beings and things, not on individualities – whose perspective is typical of the Western world – suggesting that reality is not made up of subjects (human) and objects (more-than-human). This adds further value to the work that overturns what is taken for granted: the container and the content, the subject that analyzes and the object analyzed; all the denominators of the installation conceptually occupy a precise place to show our anthropocentric action and to exalt a necessary and urgent anti-speciesism. Leaning in the same direction are the works of Nina Canell who said: *“The nature of process is the material of my work, in the sense that I don't really make objects, but rather work in a syntax of relations and transfers. I think about sculpture as something that is*

grounded in material and objects, but is, at the same time, external to them” (Canell, 2016); both because objects communicate and modify space, and vice versa, and, in a more effective way, because the binary distinction between object and subject is out of logic as the result of an anthropocentric dynamic.

Yi, considering this, comes very close to the notion of *Geontology* proposed by Elizabeth Povinelli (2016). A neologism designed to counter the traditional Western ontology which, as we have seen, separates the human from the non-human, culture from nature. With this term, the American theorist and critic proposes to take into consideration the interconnection between power, land and life forms, promoting attention to the relationships between species, individuals and the environment. *When Species Meet Part 2* is a representation, a small world in which all this is condensed.

Six olive-colored spheres make up the installation *Releasing The Human From The Human* (Figure 3), the third work under examination. This installation was first shown in the artist's solo exhibition in 2019 at the Gladstone Gallery, which, not surprisingly, was entitled: *We Have Never Been Individual* to emphasize once again Yi's intentions and attentions for symbiotic life, human and non-human *becoming-with*.

These sculptures, lit from the inside, have a porous structure that allows light to radiate, making them feel like floating sea creatures. Animatronic flies fly inside them; with their shadows and the buzzing they produce, they give the sculptures a kinetic dimension. The spheres are reminiscent of Japanese lamps, but, instead of rice paper, they are composed of brown seaweed and, as Yi herself says: “are a mutating play off of the iconic *Akari lamp* by Isamu Noguchi, while the scratches resemble the work of abstract expressionist artists such as Cy Twombly” (Aspesi et al., 2022). If the aesthetic is reminiscent of the works of abstract expressionism, like the famous *Leda and the Swan* from 1962 by the same Cy Twombly, the installation solicits multiple levels of meaning.

Connecting with the two works described above – in *becoming-with* one can think, as spores not by chance do – elements that recall digestion and reproduction return. In *Le Pain Symbiotique* digestion was aimed at demonstrating the presence of organisms that live and die in contact; in *When Species Meet Part 2 (Vegetable Psychology)* arrogance presents itself in the choice of applying arbitrary human categories to plant nomenclature in relation to the asexual reproduction of the bamboo fungus; here, however, the two concepts



Figure 3: Anicka Yi, *Releasing The Human From The Human*, 2022, Credits: HangarBicocca.

investigate human specificity: “for what are cocoons if not hybrids of stomachs and wombs?” (Griccioli & Todolí, 2022, p. 20).

The algae (*kelp*) have been used in an attempt to grasp its potential for energy production, since this type of macroalgae, according to phylogenetic⁴ studies, from a unicellular origin incapable of generating photosynthesis, has then acquired this ability through secondary endosymbiosis. This means that it has incorporated another organism, in this case red algae with plastids capable of generating photosynthesis. On the one hand, this action may seem predatory, in a vision that responds to an evolutionary perspective that has characterized for centuries, and still today, the belief that is the sole peculiarity of the human species, which has distinguished its exceptionalism; on the other hand, considering the issue as predatory is a choice, it really has nothing to do with the concept and action that the human brings toward the more-than-human. This vision is surmountable, in the direction of post-anthropocentrism and post-exceptionalism. The title refers to this: *Releasing The Human From The Human*, both freeing the human from the habits, expectations and actions which, from the presumption of being the dominant human species, continues to exhaust the planet and the other species; both freeing it from that concept and from that weight that that human carries with him. Because it must be remembered that: “it matters (.) what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions, what ties tie ties. It matters what stories make worlds, what worlds make stories.”

Like any definition, the term with which we define our species draws its strength by trying to distinguish itself from what the other is. By defining oneself by otherness, one identifies what one is not, to escape from the other elements and define oneself. This is how the animal, the vegetable, and nature as a whole have been defined, with a series of characteristics applied to their category, such as lack of reason, absence of self-awareness, and an exclusively instinctive nature. Denominators that are then destined to people who are not identifiable in the norm, the marginalized, and consequently dismissed, stigmatized, and made subordinate. The human, and above all those who have power, has raised an ideological boundary in which it has thus been possible to see itself, and this operation has justified its presumed superiority. The Christian religion, the ideological fuel of the West, lays its very foundations on the superiority of man and guarantees, indeed solicits, his action of domination over other species. In a passage from Genesis, the Bible says:

Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every the creeping thing that creeps upon the earth. (...) Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue It; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. (Coogan et al., 2007, p. 1.26–28)

When religion seems to have given way to the age of reason, scientific, and empirical, the dynamics of power have not changed, but rather the dogma of reference has changed: “the Cartesian subject of the cogito, the Kantian community of rational beings or, in more sociological terms, the subject-citizen, holder of rights, owner, etc.” (Braidotti, 2013, p. 1), so scientific theory has given names and meanings based on that posture of domination. The conception of the human with which we construct our knowledge and our ideas is contaminated and shaped by these conceptions. Hence, the urgency to go further to post-anthropocentrism.

Also, in these sculptures, there are robotic elements inside, which resemble flies. The choice to use an animatronic insect brings into play a subject dear to all posthuman culture: technology. Without falling into transhumanist approaches all dedicated to human progress and improvement, which continue to tread the furrow of human exceptionalism, the post-humanist vision grasps in elements such as prosthetics, genetically modified food, reproductive technologies and so on, the fall of the very concept of human. Yi makes the animal, hidden inside the cocoon, a *cyborg*, according to Haraway’s conception of it (1991). It challenges the limits imposed on animal and plant intelligence and consciousness, so as to undermine beliefs of human exceptionalism.

⁴ The branch of science that investigates the origin and evolution of a system of organism. To learn more in this regard, the study conducted by the Alfred Wegener Institute (Germany) sequenced the genetic heritage of *Ectocarpus siliculosus* (a type of kelp) for the first time: *The Ectocarpus genome and the independent evolution of multicellularity in brown algae*, Nature, 3 June 2010.

The version of the fourth work under examination, *Biologizing the Machine (Spillover Zoonotica)* (Figure 4), is composed of seven rectangular glass and metal structures suspended from the ground at different heights. The *Biologizing the Machine* series is the sum of several installations created over the years. The closest, in terms of typology, was presented at the fifty-eighth Venice Biennale in 2019 with the title *Biologizing the Machine (Terra Incognita)*. If looked at from a distance, they again resemble abstract paintings, but out of the similarities in visual aspects, they are both Winogradsky cultures, named after the Russian microbiologist who created them. These are normally columns into which mud, water, and other components of carbon and phosphorus are inserted to allow the proliferation of microorganisms. In the case of *Terra Incognita*, Anicka Yi collected the mud present on the bottom of the Venetian canals, in an operation like the collection of waste in the same canals by Mark Dion, who, however, in doing so, exposes the overproduction and waste of humans in the environment. Yi, on the other hand, exposes the ground, the city itself, the human and more-than-human space. In the case of *Spillover Zoonotica*, it has taken, in a similar way, parts of land in the Milan area. These characteristics make them works with site-specific qualities, not only for the exhibition halls, but in relation to the city itself.

In both cases, the structures have components of a robotic nature, computers with different tasks in the two cases. In Venice, these were responsible for managing the growth and changes in the processes of microorganisms, while in Milan the task of the sensors, placed on the top of each panel, is to consider the changes in values and the activities that continue to occur within the rectangular structures: the amount of sulfuric acid generated by growth, death or state of equilibrium of the living ecosystem. This system varies over time in temperature, color and texture, making its life, its dynamic complexity in the fragile symbiosis, evident. The electronic elements are also connected to a display that allows the visitor to read the variations, in a delta ranging from a week to a few hours earlier, symptoms of life, thus making them meet this reality, often ignored.

The installation, conceived and produced in collaboration with the Environmental Department of Earth Sciences of the Università di Milano Bicocca – in a practice that is necessary and fruitful as demonstrated by the exhibitions at the Frankfurter Kunstverein – seeks, as in the case of *Releasing the Human From the Human*,



Figure 4: Anicka Yi, *Biologizing The Machine (Spillover Zoonotica)*, 2022, Credits: HangarBicocca.

to insert the technological theme as a tool to break the boundaries of the human and more-than-human concept. The name itself, also in this case, is well studied, referring to the process of zoonotic spillover, dynamics of transfer between different species of virus, a term that has become familiar to everyone during the COVID-19 pandemic. This path is not only a danger, but it is a further demonstration of the contacts, relationships and interconnections between species. The installation, however, opens to a further level of investigation: it leads us to reflect on the natural/cultural binomial, a note not new to Yi's works as seen above. The soil it carries inside these structures represents the city itself. Normally, when we think of a city, we imagine the streets, the buildings, the monuments, perhaps the people who live there and some park that is located as a green area within the geographical boundaries that we have predetermined. Certainly, images of marginal and peripheral areas rarely come to light in minds, much less all those other species that are physically inside cities, walking, crawling or moving on the same roads, flying over the same buildings, or filling the earth on which those same structures are built, eating, digesting, deforming, moving, and making up the city. If one wonders why is not taken into consideration, a quick answer, even an effective one if you want, it is that the very concept of "city" is created and thought by the human. It is certainly true, but it is also a demonstration of how clear, in the imagination, and deliberate, even in actions, is the separation between what is considered nature and what is considered human, culture.

Jared Diamond in his long reflection on his famous text *Guns, Germs and Steel* (1997) places as a watershed date, in the physical and conceptual separation of nature from human, the moment in which hunter-gatherers we passed agriculture and breeding. That step where we created a division between the area that we cultivate or raise and the other area, is the point at which conceptually we started this separation. With similar aspects, and if you want in a relationship of succession, Tsing coined and uses the term *Plantationocene*⁵ to identify the era of plantation expansion that transformed the landscape, human societies and the relationship with the environment. Human actions have led to this separation, but what is stronger is the mental aspect, we think of ourselves as separate, superior, more evolved and dominating. All this has brought us to the present day: countless dangers due to climate change, future and probable shortages of essential resources such as water, dynamics that cause and will cause great migratory phenomena, with the consequent problems, the system of domination over the other, human and non-human, and so on. This installation is indeed a portrait of the city of Milan, but from another perspective, it conveys the complexity of an ecosystem of which we are part. It moves us toward a different posture because, as Eduardo Kohn says: "*all beings see the world in the same way – what changes is the world they see*" (Kohn, 2013, p. 38). We don't look at the same world, we only look at our own, the one built on our anthropocentric knowledge.

5 Conclusions

This reflection has brought to light several important elements. Even if briefly, the theoretical aspects called into question have highlighted the urgency of considering ourselves as parts of a system, not solitary nor in a position of superiority. This environment is built in the making with the action of elements of different species, human and more than human, as I have often repeated. *Worlding* is indeed a practice to be implemented, but it is also a way to rethink the actions already done. Considering these new actors – new to our eyes – shows all the idiosyncrasies, habits and actions that have led us to this historical context.

Anicka Yi gives back these reflections. Her works are worlds, considering Nelson Goodman's studies on *worldmaking* (1978), they are systems, which could magnify and show what we do not look at, not only from a physical point of view, but above all metaphorically. Goodman highlights the power of words and meanings to create these worlds and to constitute their rules and relationships. The installations of this artist have the same peculiarities, they have a degree of complexity that is a distinctive feature, the elements are not juxtaposed,

⁵ The term was coined during a conference in Aarhus University, Denmark, in 2014. It emerged during the discussions between Haraway and Tsing.

and they connect, intertwine and refer continuously, in a stratification of rhizomatic meanings that allow us to pause on concepts and themes that require constant reflection. As Kohn says, “*what changes is the world they see*,” Yi helps us to get in touch with these worlds. She highlights that series of more-than-human elements with which we share the construction of worlds: in *Le Pain Symbiotique* she shows us the co-dependence with microorganisms in our stomachs or in culinary processes; in *When Species Meet Part 2 (Vegetable Psychology)* she makes us reflect on the importance of the posture we assume, and have assumed, toward what is not human, the creation of our culture; in *Releasing The Human From The Human* she asks us to abandon those positions of exceptionalism and anthropocentrism precisely as a function of a vision in which we are placed on a par with other species, collaborating with them; and finally in *Biologizing the Machine (Spillover Zoonotica)* she makes it clear that we are not separate subjects, agents living in different systems. These considerations express and are intended to show us how our life is in *becoming-with* with these more-than-human elements, just as Haraway points out.

The works are part of a contemporary framework in which the categories on which we have built our knowledge lose certainty and become an instrument of this uncertainty. Yi's position is clearly and openly anti-speciesist, she sees in the transpecies relationship a key to finally entering a post-anthropocentric era. An age in which the foundations on which to build knowledge are the understanding of the errors in the positions of human exceptionalism, the porosity of the boundaries of the definitions of human, intelligence, progress, consciousness and all the other data that have placed the human on a self-erected pedestal. In a perspective, therefore, that is post-human, which frees itself from the concepts that the human category still carries with it, post-anthropocentric and set in a world that is built in *becoming-with* between humans and more than humans.

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