

## **Description**

Metaphysical Nexus: what it means to be human

Celebrating more-than-human co-dependence

Echoes from the future and from faraway prophecies: the fantasy of AI

## **Further information**

We are made of relations. AI is no different. All too often, however, those relations are concealed, made invisible, dismissed as unimportant. But the relations we hold between each other, the worlds we live in and create, and the technologies we use, create a living nexus, which sustains so much of what we do. Crawford and Joler's project of mapping a single Amazon Echo device shows in vivid detail how expansive the map of relations is that sustains AI in everyday life. As they put it, 'each small moment of convenience – be it answering a question, turning on a light, or playing a song – requires a vast planetary network, fueled by the extraction of non-renewable materials, labor, and data.' (2018).

Crawford and Joler's work makes up another network of people researching and making visible these planetary-scale relations upon which we rely. Making visible is one part of the task. Instead of starting from the human, positioned at the top of the chain, visiblising relationality shows our place in a horizontal network of protocols, decisions, labour, and data exchanges. We are all enmeshed in a more-than-human co-dependence, which can be empowering, but also demanding. We are not the centre of the universe, and even what we consider to be "us" is conditioned by cultural, historical, and political factors.

What we do share in common, however, are the vast data trails and exhausts produced by our daily interactions with technology. We are both consumer and consumed. Using an Amazon service creates a vast network of actions and procedures. The warehouse worker who is tasked with locating and boxing the item, the labour rules that allow Amazon to constantly monitor its employees, the factory that produced the item in the first place, and the algorithms working in the background to track, learn from, and feedback your consumer preferences. AI creates new realities of connection and isolation, new flows of information, new ways of conceiving our relationship to the world, of what it means to be human. Rather than leaving relationality in the traffic of datafied existence, we can, in addition, recognise our connectedness to others, and to the planet that sustains us.

## **Resources**

Crawford, K. (2021). *The Atlas of AI*. Yale University Press.