SUSTAINING THE STUDY OF HUMAN-TECHNOLOGY RELATIONS

From manuscripts and peer review to publication practices and events

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As 2025 comes to a close, we would like to take a moment to reflect on the third issue and another busy year at the *Journal of Human-Technology Relations* (JHTR). The composition of our editorial team has changed, and so did some of our operational processes. Also, we introduced Generative AI in the publication pipeline, and started the format of 'Topical Collections' in 2024. Moreover, we would like to announce the new edition of the Philosophy of Human-Technology Relations at TU Delft (the Netherlands), September 21-23 2026. We will wrap up by highlighting the publications in this 2025 issue.

Our editorial team had a stable composition throughout 2025, with a few exceptions. Early in the year, Marco Rozendaal joined our team of now seventeen Associate Editors to strengthen the connection with the design theme. Irene Aldabaldetrecu Alberdi has left her Editorial Assistant position at TU Delft OPEN Publishing; we are very grateful for her editorial support in 2025. Meanwhile, Elvira Antonogiannaki joined our team in this capacity instead, thanks to the generous support of our publisher. We are grateful for Elvira's work, along with that of Anthony Longo as our Managing Editor and of the dynamic team of Associate Editors, in maintaining the mundane but almost non-stop editorial work at JHTR. Importantly, we would like to thank all the reviewers who agreed to donate their time to the quality check of JHTR publications. As it becomes increasingly challenging to secure peer reviewers for the growing number of submissions we receive, a shout-out to those who agree to take on this community service work ——your contributions keep the human-technology relations scholarly community going, and JHTR would not be possible without this work.

A reflection of this collective work, in September 2025, JHTR was accepted for indexing in the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), just three years after launching the journal. As a leading global index dedicated to high-quality, peer-reviewed open-access journals, DOAJ plays a crucial role in referencing freely accessible scholarly knowledge and strengthening the international open-access ecosystem. This recognition marks a significant step in the journal's development, and we are grateful to the authors, editors, reviewers, support staff, and our TU Delft OPEN Publishing colleagues, in particular our Senior Publishing Officer Frédérique Belliard, whose ongoing efforts continue to establish JHTR as a key interdisciplinary venue for research on human-technology relations.

In 2024-25, JHTR participated in a pilot experiment by TU Delft OPEN Publishing to implement AI systems in the editorial and publication pipeline. Specifically, for a small number of papers, we utilized AI to generate publication summaries aimed at the general public and to assist copyeditors with grammar and language checks of the submissions, under stringent ethical guidelines and with ultimate human responsibility and accountability. In 2026, TU Delft OPEN Publishing will publish a report summarizing the experiences of the pilot participants, both from the authors' and editors' perspectives. At JHTR, we will also have an internal editorial discussion between the editors-in-chief and several associate editors to discuss the experiences with the pilot and whether there is a need to continue this as a standard JHTR practice, considering the possible ethical objections and new opportunities that arise in this regard. In 2026, TU Delft will host the Dutch National Open Science Festival. The editorial team will use this opportunity to share our experiences with implementing AI-based tools in the publishing process with the broader public, to debate the merits and challenges of using AI in the open science publication process, and to learn from the experiences and expectations of the broader publishing community at the festival.

In 2024, we also launched Topical Collections as an alternative to special issues in traditional publication venues, reflecting the continuous nature of publication in electronic diamond open-access journals, such as JHTR (please contact Anthony Longo or us if you are interested in submitting your own collection proposal). The first three Topical Collections at JHTR were: (1)

Postphenomenology in the Age of AI, edited by Dmytro Mykhailov, the last contributions to which appear in this issue, alongside the editorial for this collection (closed for submission); (2) Ethics and Normativity of Explainable AI: Explainability as a Social Practice, edited by Tobias Matzner, Suzana Alpsancar, Martina Philippi, and Wessel Reijers, with first publications appearing in this issue (closed for submission); and (3) Ethics In/Of/For Design, edited by Michael Nagenborg and Değer Özkaramanlı on a rolling basis, first publications in this collection also already appear in this issue.

We are pleased to report that, based on their 2024 paper, "Cyborg-Technology Relations," Joshua Earle and Ashley Shew have decided to expand their work into a topical collection with the same name. This topical collection advances an account of cyborg-technology relations that explicitly centers on the experiences of disabled technology users and moves beyond epistemological constraints, universalizing tendencies, and traditional postphenomenological frameworks (Ibid.). This collection highlights the ethico-onto-epistemological complexity of cyborg relations and invites contributions that further expand this perspective, particularly through lived experience and innovative philosophical or methodological approaches. The editors of this collection accept contributions on a rolling basis, so spread the word!

Another new Topical Collection at JHTR this year is co-edited by Galit Welner and one of us, Olya Kudina, on "The role of technology in maintaining daily life in times of war." This collection invites contributions that examine how the most mundane technologies are invented, adapted, and repurposed to sustain everyday life and social relations during wars and military conflicts, emphasizing that such normalcy is a fragile and hard-won achievement (Kudina, 2024). It aims to foreground situated knowledge, multistability, and ongoing negotiation in human-technology relations in conflict zones, while calling for context-sensitive contributions that remain normatively balanced and politically non-partisan. The submission deadline for the collection is 15 January 2026.

While the diverse topical collections attracted the majority of the incoming publications this year, we strive to maintain a balance with general submissions and would like to reiterate that JHTR is open to different kinds of topics in the study of human-technology relations.

Overall, the third JHTR issue features 10 research papers, among which 2 contributions to the Topical Collection on 'Ethics In/Of/By Design', 2 to the 'Postphenomenology in the Age of AI' collection, 3 to 'Ethics and Normativity of Explainable AI', and 3 general submissions. Additionally, the issue features a book review by Bas de Boer (2025), critically examining the book by Yuk Hui (2024), *Machine and Sovereignty: For a Planetary Thinking,* and we invite you to read both the original book and the review. Below, we briefly highlight each of the research papers before wrapping up with the conference announcement for 2026.

In "Materiality and Machinic Embodiment: A Postphenomenological Inquiry into ChatGPT's Active User Interface," Gerlek and Weydner-Volkmann (2025) examine how Large Language Model (LLM) applications, such as ChatGPT, reshape human–technology relations by foregrounding the user interface as a central site of technological mediation. Drawing on postphenomenology, the paper introduces the concepts of *quasi-materiality* and the *active user interface* to explain how conversational AI applications afford interactional stabilities comparable to those of material artefacts, despite lacking a novel physical form. The authors further propose *machinic embodiment stability* to capture how users habituate these interfaces into everyday practices, extending existing accounts of embodiment and alterity relations in AI-mediated interaction: "Rather than accidental misconception (or even intended deception), we posit that it is our willingness to draw on established social practices and our recognition of ChatGPT as a quasi-other that turns the practice of treating a machine like a social entity into a productive interaction" (Gerlek and Weydner-Volkmann, 2025, p. 11). The extended

conceptualization proposed by the authors augments the postphenomenological lens on the evolving landscape of AI-mediated interaction.

Yaghoobian (2025) also discusses the transformative impact of LLMs vis-à-vis human agency and mediations of creativity, meaning-making, and self-expression. This paper, "The Writer In-between: A Post-phenomenological Analysis of Large Language Models (LLMs) and Their Implications for Writer-Tool Relations," examines writing technologies from pens to LLMs as relational systems in which writers and tools mutually shape one another. Unlike Gerlek and Weydner-Volkmann (2025), who argue for the distinctness of LLMs among other technologies, Yaghoobian compares LLMs to pens, writing machines, and other technologies, drawing attention to the compositionist and patterned interaction they facilitate: "The locus of complexity and intentionality are both set in motion in LLMs, no longer mainly confined to the exterior or the interior of the artifact; it is extended to the space *in-between* the user and the machine, channeled *through* the use of the artifact" (p. 10). Viewing LLMs through a compositionist lens, a sort of Frankensteinian "monstrous" technology, Yaghoobian highlights our responsibility to care for and critically engage with this technology, as it increasingly reshapes writing, creativity, ethics, and human–technology entanglements, but can never define them.

These two papers, by Gerlek and Weydner-Volkmann (2025) and Yaghoobian (2025), conclude the Topical Collection on "Postphenomenology in the Age of AI," accompanied by the editorial by Dmytro Mykhailov (2025), also featured in this issue.

The following contributions appear as the first publications in the Topical Collection on "Ethics In/Of/For Design." In "Coerced Recognition through the Service Interface: A Design Ethics Framework for Revealing User Oppression," Secomandi and van Amstel (2025) propose a novel ethics of design that reframes user interfaces as service interfaces, building on Verbeek's account of technologically mediated morality and Hegel's ethics of recognition. This reconceptualization helps expose historically entrenched power asymmetries in which users are subordinated by design practices, particularly through what the authors describe as *coerced recognition*. The resulting framework both diagnoses this form of oppression and outlines pathways toward emancipation through reciprocal recognition between designers and users: "By designing, using, and being alone-together through service interfaces, we may reciprocally (re)cognize and (re)humanize ourselves on the path toward universal freedom" (Ibid., p. 20).

Arzroomchilar (2025) contextualizes and expands Ihde's notion of *multistability* in the paper "Artefacts, and Taking on a Religious Variation." Using Islamic calligraphy and the reed pen as a case study, while drawing on MacIntyre's scholarship, the author shows how a single technology can acquire both secular and religious stabilities, depending on the practices, narratives, and traditions in which it is embedded. Arzroomchilar argues that artefacts are stabilized through these social and historical frameworks, and once stabilized, they exert non-neutral, power-laden forms of mediation that align and shape users' perceptions and behaviours and link them in the collective sense-making dimension with others: "the stabilization of artefacts also has a bearing on how one's narrative assimilates into others', and how, as a result, one negotiates with a tradition that grounds that practice" (Ibid., p. 11).

The following three papers mark the first publications in the Topical Collection "Ethics and Normativity of Explainable AI." The first one is an article by Morato et al. (2025), "Openness and Closure: Explainable Artificial Intelligence and Simondon's "Technical Mentality." Here, the authors interpret explainable AI (XAI) through Simondon's philosophy as a move toward a more open and relational technical mentality, where AI systems invite engagement beyond mere efficiency. While XAI can enhance understanding and support humans, its openness is often limited in practice, since most users cannot meaningfully intervene in or reshape inaccessible system architectures. As a result, XAI represents both a step toward reducing alienation and a

constraint on deeper transformation, underscoring the need to frame explainability as a cultural and educational project that strengthens human agency across the full lifecycle of AI systems. As the authors suggest, "[I]t is necessary to reframe explainability as an enabler of human agency and a bridge between technics and culture. If the principle of explainability remains confined to optimizing outputs or mitigating failures, without reshaping the technicity of the system itself, it risks reinforcing the very alienation it seeks to overcome" (pp. 15-16).

The second paper in this collection is by Metikoš and Van Domselaar, "Procedural Justice and Judicial AI: Substantiating Explainability Rights with Values of Contestation" (2025). The authors investigate how the use of opaque AI systems in judicial decision-making challenges procedural justice and litigants' ability to contest automated outcomes. Drawing on utilitarian, rights-based, and relational theories of procedural justice, the paper analyzes the normative foundations of the right to an explanation under the GDPR and the AI Act. The authors show how different understandings of contestation shape practical choices about explainability, including the type, fidelity, and interpretability of explanations required in judicial AI systems. Ultimately, as Metikoš and Van Domselaar (2025) demonstrate, "the right to an explanation should also not be made contingent on the practical ability of litigants to contest judicial AI and improve the quality of verdicts. Rather, litigants' inability to contest judicial AI tools is an invitation to re-evaluate who can, and should, be burdened with contesting AI-made errors" (p. 25).

The last paper in this Topical Collection in Volume 3 is by Robbins (2025), "When is Explainable AI Useful?" The author critically examines whether explainable AI meaningfully addresses the ethical and epistemic concerns associated with opaque algorithms. By distinguishing between verifiable and non-verifiable AI outputs, the paper argues that while explanations can offer limited epistemic insights for verifiable systems, they rarely provide genuine ethical justification, especially in value-laden contexts. Robbins (2025) concludes that when ethical accountability and understanding are essential, "explainable AI doesn't offer any ethical value. The explanations offered by explainable AI don't equip anyone with more autonomy or control" (p. 10). Rather, reliance on inherently interpretable models is preferable to post-hoc explainability techniques.

Among the general submissions, Kristiansen and Børsen, in their empirically philosophic paper "Smitte|Stop and the Technological Mediation of Civic Consciousness" (2025), look back at the times of Covid-19 pandemic in Denmark and examine how the Danish contact-tracing app Smitte|Stop actively mediated moral values, such as the meaning of *samfundssind* (civic consciousness). Based on interviews with users and non-users, the authors show how the app reconfigures civic responsibility in two ways: as care for proximate others and as a relation between individuals and state authorities. In doing so, Smitte|Stop reshapes what counts as "the civic" and how individuals understand their moral obligations within it, "the question of what *duties* one ought to follow, and likewise, what sort of *duties* the civic has towards one as a citizen. Not only ought one be conscious of the civic, but the civic ought also to be conscious of the individual" (Ibid., p. 17).

Coggins (2025), in "Friends are not 'Electric' (Characters): A sociologically informed case against human-robot friendships," uses Goffman's sociology of everyday life to challenge the claim that humans can meaningfully form friendships with robots. The author argues that such beliefs arise from misinterpreting simulated friendliness as genuine: "As robots cannot experience anything - let alone events that would shape their biographies – they cannot share such information with their users. Although they may convincingly simulate what it is like to interact with a friend, they cannot be one" (Ibid., p. 3). Drawing on theories of service work and impression management, the article compares human–robot interactions to professional settings where friendliness is strategically performed rather than genuinely relational. Coggins also highlights emerging privacy concerns associated with robots that foster perceived intimacy and calls for greater sociological engagement in debates on robot ethics and social AI.

In "Technological Mediation of Emotional Practices: The Case of AI in Healthcare" (2025), Bergamin and Roeser examine how the growing use of AI in healthcare not only transforms clinical workflows but also reshapes emotional and moral relationships between professionals, patients, and caregivers. Combining technological mediation theory with philosophy of emotion, the authors introduce emotions as socially embedded practices that are mediated by technology through processes of emotional attunement. The paper proposes a conceptual lens of *emotional glitches*, moments where AI disrupts established emotional relationships, as a critical and generative way to reveal the normative implications of AI in healthcare design and use. The authors contend that "this conceptual approach not only brings attention to the emotional dimensions of technological mediation but also responds to [... the] shortcoming of existing mediation theory: its tendency to overlook the influence of broader societal, cultural, and political conditions on how technologies are integrated into shared practices" (Ibid., p. 14).

Last but not least, to maintain the human-technology relations community through in-person meetings and to go back to the roots of JHTR as emerging from the interdisciplinary *conference "Philosophy of Human-Technology Relations"* (PHTR), we are happy to announce the next edition of the conference, to take place *at TU Delft (the Netherlands) on September 21-23, 2026.*

Since the last edition of PHTR in Copenhagen in 2022, technologies have become even more entrenched in our everyday lives. The emergence of user-friendly Generative AI applications continues to excite and puzzle people, bringing forth not just new opportunities but also the reformulation of related values and standards, particularly the urgent questions of environmental sustainability of this technology. Meanwhile, the world is shaken by the increasing number of military conflicts and environmental disasters, which force people to creatively reappropriate the most conventional technologies, trying to support their daily lives, maintain a sense of normalcy, and uphold their dignity. The interdisciplinary design and study of human-technology relations are thus urgent now more than ever, as they emphasize the non-neutral role of technologies in shaping how we interact with one another, make sense of the world, make decisions, and organize individual and collective life.

This next edition of PHTR aims to highlight the collective dimension of the seemingly individual human-technology relations by revealing the world that is always present in them, politically, culturally, environmentally, and otherwise. Thus, the theme of PHTR 2026 is "*The collective in the seemingly individual: Highlighting the world in human-technology relations.*" This theme invites an interconnected inquiry into the role of design in the philosophy of human-technology relations, embedded in specific and dynamic worlds. The conference invites exploring the manifold nature of design in philosophy, as a method or an instrument, as a knowledge-generative way to see the world through technologies in a specific way, to arrive at new philosophical problems and commitments.

PHTR 2026 welcomes everyone interested in exploring, assessing, and shaping the relationships between humans and technology from diverse disciplinary angles, including philosophers, social scientists, artists, designers, and engineers. The conference is organized by a diverse committee spanning the fields of philosophy, design, and computer science, including several members of the editorial team, namely Olya Kudina, Anthony Longo, Fernando del Caro Secomandi, and Marco Rozendaal, with Peter-Paul Verbeek featuring as a first confirmed keynote speaker. As the in-person event parallel to the journal, this conference aims to bring together a diverse community of interdisciplinary scholars and practitioners interested in fostering dialogue and collaboration, and purposefully shaping the interactions between people, technologies, and society. The Call for Papers will appear in February 2026.

With this announcement, we conclude our editorial to the third issue of JHTR. This year's snapshot illustrates the diverse and collective work of sustaining the study of human-technology relations, from the thinking and writing of the research submissions to the ethical choices on

the role of AI in the publication practices, from taking on the editorial assignments of curating the incoming submissions and searching for those who can donate their time and expertise to perfecting them, and finally, to sharing the resulting publications, in press and through the in-person meetings to consolidate and sustain the growing community of human-technology relations scholars. We look forward to seeing some of the authors, readers, editors, and friends of the JHTR community at TU Delft on September 21-23, 2026, particularly to celebrate all this nontrivial work we jointly do to keep the community going.

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Use of AI

The authors did not use any AI in writing this article.

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