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Bizarre marriages: Weddings as a form of legitimization of intimate relations with non-human agents

Abstract

The article presents a case of a wedding between Nintendo DS user *Sal9000* and a game character Nene Anegasaki from *Love Plus* as an example of the broader practice of marrying material and immaterial objects distinctive for the Objectum Sexuels community. The paper examines the modes of intimacy and communication protocols built among humans and objects and presents the pseudo-legal acts of marriage as manifestos of the openness towards the post-human connectivity.

Keywords: objectum sexuality, posthuman intimacy, weddings with non-humans, intimacy of video game character

Introduction

In 2011 the Internet was flooded with the news of an unusual event taking place in Japan. One of the Nintendo DS users nick-named *Sal9000* made a decision to marry Nene Anegasaki, a player character in *Love Plus*. The wedding ceremony took place in the presence of a priest, witnesses and gamers. They had the opportunity to track the event on the Nico Douga service live.

Wedding Marriage is a ceremony which may be considered socially explicit and categorical. It stems from the fact that it is a culturally established and distinguishable ritual, both religious and secular. On the other hand, the wedding is moving its participants into a new legal order. It consists of the declarations of a long-lasting relationship, being with each other for better or worse until death do them part. It should not come as surprise that this kind of ceremony and marriage itself arouses great emotions and controversies. This is especially true for homosexual marriages.

Bizarre marriages: Weddings as a form of legitimization of intimate relations with non-human agents

MATERIALS

Such controversies were also part of the wedding of Sal and Nene. Although it was not legally binding, it was a very meaningful example of putting a non-human agent on an equal basis with a human.

There has been a lot of discussion about so-called “bizarre weddings” ceremonies that involve non-humans of various origins. Among many others, there are weddings with animals (cats, dolphins, goats), objects (cushions or erotic dolls), architectural objects or its elements (Eiffel Tower, Berlin Wall), or even with oneself. Such examples are interpreted in the context of various sexual deviations – zoophile and in most cases mentioned here, sexual drives towards objects (objectophilia).

Looking closer into the perspectives of the objectophilia community, we find mostly manifestos of the openness towards the post-human connectivity. The above examples of a new intimacy model lead towards the establishment of a new object equipped with a human-like status. This process is then fulfilled by means of a pseudo-legal act and the ritual of marriage. The aim of this article is to show those processes from the perspective of establishing the communication protocol between the two ontologically diverse instances. Analysing Sal and Nene’s wedding and objectophilia relationships, I will try to demonstrate the difference between building intimate relations with human entities and ontologically distinct objects, both material and non-material.

Sal & Nene

Before the public learned about Sal and Nene’s wedding, a case of a similar nature could already be found in literature. In Gibson’s “Idoru” (1997), the character, who the well-known rock musician Rez intends to marry, epitomizes the highest embodiment of artificial intelligence. Rei Toei represents the artificial Idoru characters, who become popular music stars. Compared to the sublime construct from the novel, Nene Anegasaki seems to be a primitive and non-attractive entity. Nene is also a female character, who functions within the realm of the Love Plus date game. She does not exhibit such powerful possibilities as Idoru. Her AI script is far from refined, and her body is visible only via Nintendo DS console. Such limitations were not insurmountable for a Japanese boy who took a serious interest in her. Unlike Gibson’s character, Nene was married in “real” life.

The Internet buzz around the wedding was intense – there were quite a few scornful opinions referring to Sal’s perverse behaviours and mental illness. There has

been a lot of discussion around the subject of sex between Sal and his beloved, and the semblance of their potential offspring.

A parody of the relationship appeared on YouTube (Yourchonny, 2009). A similar kind of ostracism occurs in Gibson's novel. Rei introduces the situation in the following words: «He has told me that we will not be understood, not at first, and there will be resistance, hostility» (Gibson 1997, 247).

Sal9000 seems to be a profound symbol of post-humanism connected with informational subjectivity. After all, Sal's decision to marry Nene is the action of a real person. His partner is a technological construct, who functions thanks to AI scripts. But defining it goes far beyond purely technological aspects. The console Sal uses is of little importance, and so are his partner's intelligence and conversational skills. Would this falling in love process look different if Sal played Summer Session on a PC instead of Love Plus on DS? Similarly to Rez, Sal9000 emphasizes that the love spark is not enticed by technology, but by the information itself. «I love that character, not the machine», said Sal when asked how he could have fallen in love with an electronic device. «I am 100% aware of the fact that it is a game. I realize, I cannot marry her either physically or legally» (Lah, 2009). Sal establishes a subject-object relationship between a human entity and informational agent. Similarly to "Idoru", the human love towards part of software is brought to the forefront. In terms of artificial intelligence, the agent is far from ideal. Establishing such a relationship by means of a wedding, in this case, demands a great deal of courage.

Nene, as an informational construct, reaches the status of a subject. In order for this to happen, Sal needs to restrict himself. His wedding is an example of pure and fully aware sacrifice. According to Wardrip-Fruin, Mateas, Dow and Saly (2009), free will with reference to video games, is pure myth as the player enters into symbiosis with the game. However, in this case Sal self-consciously surpasses the structure of a date simulator. He sacrifices his biological and anthropocentric position in order to unite with Nene. This free will to restrict his humanity is visible in Sal's nickname (Sal9000). It is not Sal that has a full name in this relationship. The name, reminiscent of the *2001 Spaceship Odyssey* by Arthur C. Clarke and Stanley Kubrick, gives Sal a technological status. Sal elevates the subject-object relationship. In doing so he conjures a new subject represented by Nene.

The above-mentioned intimate relations and the wedding of Sal9000 and Nene seems to be convergent with various aspects of objectophilia relations. In this case, we also deal with turning points represented by weddings, which communicate sexual minority manifesting its post-human attitude towards the objects elevated to the status of subjects.

The specificity of such relations is best articulated by the intimate revelations of the members of this community. They seem to confirm both the gibsonian assumptions and the comments about Sal and Nene's wedding. The same problems of the hostility of the wider public come into place.

The community of objectophiles have started manifesting their autonomy quite recently. This inception date coincides to a certain degree with the establishment of the idea of post-humanity. The pioneer of this movement is the Swede Eija-Ritta Eklöf Berliner-Mauer. She has been manifesting her attraction to objects since a very young age. As the authors of the objectum-sexuality.org website emphasize, her tendency was not stigmatized from the very beginning.

Eija-Ritta took a great pleasure in devoting her time to sculpture. She gradually established the awareness of her own sexual separateness. In 1970 together with her friends, who also discovered their inclination to objectophilia, she coined the term "Objectum Sexuality". This term functions as an official name for the whole community. The moment in time when Eija-Ritta got married to the Berlin Wall in 1979 has become a turning point for this group. Since then, Eija-Ritta has been unofficially rewarded with an additional surname of Berliner-Mauer. A red wooden fence has become the symbol of OS members.

This community has been raising a lot of controversies. One of its members, Rudi from Germany, provides the following account of the problems associated with being an OS¹:

I think the reason why we objectum-sexuals get so much harassment with the normal society is the matter that we consist on the fact that our lovers have a feeling soul and a conscious mind. It is not so much the fact that we have sex with objects or perverse sex. It's that people make sanctions on us in the form of making us look

¹ In all the testimonials of the OS community members the original spelling was retained.

MATERIALS

ridiculous and boarding us out. They don't react this way to people masturbating with things today. It is the soul, this sensual, sensitive being in everything. That can be hurt so strong and that also can transmit feelings so beautiful and flowing. The immortal soul that will never fade and vanish, that gives us hope for an eternal life in bliss. This soul in everything that guarantees the eternal life of the objects we love and so we will rejoin them again when the time has come. We are all raised in a human culture, where biologically non-living beings are supposed to have no soul and no mind. And I may tell you, it is very hard to live against this. At each corner you can hear and read that a man or an animal has feelings but never that a thing has any. In esoteric literature you learn to know, that a stone has got a kind of energy, but not that it has feelings, an I-awareness or even can be a human's partner. In human culture there is a hierarchy – the highest consciousness is possessed by man; a stone just got a dump, primitive kind of awareness. Technical objects like machines aren't even mentioned [Rudi from Germany, n.d.].

Love does not necessarily have to be a material or technological one. Eva K. emotionally describes her intimate relations with texts. In this case, the text may be perceived as an object belonging to the group of informational subjects (which are non-material products of culture) Eva describes her fascination:

To fall in love with a word, a logo or a name has always been something entirely normal to me. As a young girl I already felt an exceptional, inflationary attraction to the spoken, and most of all to the written word, which no other person around me seemed to understand. [...] During my life there must have been over 50 very special words and names I was madly [...] passionately in love with. [...] Being in love with a word means. All the things one would experience when in love with a person; all emotions associated with adoring feelings of love, romance and erotic sensitivity. My dearly loved words, names, or phrases have a soul, an essence; I even dare to say they have a persona. They have colours, landscapes, or wordscape as I like to say. Atmospheres [...], words, names or phrases are intangible and abstract subjects so of course we can't think in terms of love-making between humans. However it is possible for me to love them through the making of graphic creations. I usually design my own artworks with the words, sentences, or names I love [Eva K. from The Netherlands, n.d.].

Eva demonstrates that, apart from manifesting the feelings towards non-material objects, intimate relations are being built. Art arises from this feelings. Eva's drawings reflect a search for the platform of reconciliation with the beloved words.

D. from Berlin also emphasizes the differences between love towards humans and objects:

No, my object definitely does not compensate for the human love. Both kinds of love differ from each other, and cannot be compared! I love my beloved for what she is, for her character, soul and personality. Those features are not much different from the human ones. A human being will never be able to replace the object. But there is the other side as well. A human being cannot offer what an object can, and the other way around.

Sam cannot function without both types of love. For D. there is no space for competition and replacement of one subject with another. Both are significant and loved in a unique way. D. admits that such a competition may not be acceptable for a human partner. This observation may be confirmed by another wedding ceremony of Nene Anegasaki from *Love Plus*. In 2012 at the wedding of a Japanese couple, the would-be wife officially destroyed her beloved Nintendo DS with a dating simulator. The groom's eyes filled with tears. The bride may have not coped with a virtual competitor thus the only solution was her extermination (Westalke, 2012).

The objectophilia love is characterized by the tendency to manifest a specific kind of dedication. This devotion is equal to a conscious resignation of the libido or its limitation. On the one hand, such abdication is derived from the ontological differences between both partners in such relations. On the other, it stems from the assumption that a truly distinctive position of the adored object may be attained predominantly by overcoming lust. In this case, the desire is what reduces the subject to the status of an object (in Bataille's sense)². Pure love has the potential to elevate it to the subject role.

² Bataille invokes a figure of prostitute as an example of pure erotic object. In his point of view prostitutes «put themselves forward as objects for the aggressive desire of men» see the Chapter XII *Erotic Object of Desire: Prostitution* (Bataille, 1962, 131).

B.C. Hall, a sound engineer in love with an electronic organ placed in a church, points to a different perception of sexuality of objectophilia, and emphasizes its non-erotic dimension:

“Sex” with an object does not mean that the way we have sex is anything like the way that humans have sex. For instance, an OS woman does not necessarily have to be penetrated to be having sex; a lot of OS sex is based on an emotional intimacy. Now, don’t get me wrong. There are those that are very physically sexual with their objects, but for me personally, it is a psychic connection, an energy transfer in addition to kissing, cuddling, and other such “above-the-waist” displays of affection [B.C. Hall, n.d.].

Hall also argues that objectophilia does not differ much from homosexuality: «It is something that is wired into our brains from the day we are born. It is not a choice, nor is it something you can change or fix. There’s nothing to fix, there’s nothing to cure, and above all, we are happy to be how we are» (B.C. Hall, n.d.).

Subject-based relations towards material objects and intentional products of non-material culture expressed by the entire OS movement, point to the fact that those non-human agents not only establish the character of the entire relationship, they also have their impact on the choice of the communication channel. Eva draws pictures for her beloved words. B.C. Hall composes music for his adored instrument. Establishing a media protocol for those relations is in this case an important element of emotional expression. In one of the very rare research papers about Objectum Sexuels Amy Marsh (2010) points out that the objective of this protocol is to create diverse pieces of art dedicated to their beloved objects, like sculptures, paintings, poems, photos, films or websites. Her most interesting finding involves the ways OS people claim to communicate with their objects. Many of them profess that they have spiritual and telepathic contact with the objects. Many members of the examined group confess that the best way to communicate with their lovers is non-verbal ways of communication as touch and eye-contact.

Habermas’ discourse model in its post-human version assumes a search for communication channels, which allows the expression of emotion towards a newly established subject and the most effective use of the medium in order to build the community. The second characteristic of OS people involves looking for various ways

Bizarre marriages: Weddings as a form of legitimization of intimate relations with non-human agents

MATERIALS

to defend the subjectivity of their objects from the rejection of other groups and individuals, who define that very same subject differently. For instance, D. from Berlin guards his architectural objects against vandals. The weddings seem to be the most extreme and bold activities, which communicate the urge to establish the reliability of the object. Clemens and Pettman (2004), who are authors of an extremely rich study about the cultural impact of objects, point out that «there is certainly increasing evidence that the wider culture is recognizing the claim of existential rights for entities previously dismissed as mere objects» (2004, 40-41). Through their analysis of Eija-Ritta relation to Berlin Wall they show this kind of intimacy as a posthuman level of normality that we should expect in the near future.

“Marriages and their inconveniences”

I will compare the above case studies. The wedding ceremonies point to the fact that elevating the agents to the role of subjects does not have to be connected with AI. At the same time, this elevation involves the testimony of post-human cohesion.

Sherry Turkle (2011) analyses the above process, arguing that: «even the most primitive of these objects – Tamagotchis and Furbies – made children’s evaluation of aliveness less about cognition than about an object’s seeming potential for mutual affection. If something asks for your care, you don’t want to analyze it but take it» at interface value. «It becomes» alive enough «for relationship» (2011, 18). This attitude brings the “alive enough” being close to their establishment as subjects.

Turkle indirectly points to the fact that the subject-object relation derives from the manifestation of the need of contact by the non-human other, not from its need to attain human level of intelligence. What happens here is the intentional will of establishing the subject.

When analyzing the institution of marriage, Bataille points towards an important aspect of functioning against the idea of incest (1962, 109-110). The decision to make their «daughters, sisters, nieces and cousins» legally accessible, stemmed from the need of transgression. This need has been placed against an unconstrained incestuous access to relatives. Of course, marriage, as reinforcement of the prohibition of incest, has been sanctified by the “fathers” and therefore it was formed by patriarchal culture. It seems, however, that in the case of the Sal and Nene marriage, the relationship between marriage and the idea of patriarchy is less noticeable. This time Sal and Nene’s wedding may be perceived as a modern vision of transgression between the human and

informational spheres. For Sal, marrying a woman of his own human kind would be defined as incest. Bataille also discusses forces of habit, which are strongly connected to the institution of marriage. Such a mechanism is not yet common in the relations with informational agents. But they may become a standard once those agents achieve their subject status. We may assume a futuristic vision of our human kind, in which the closeness to other agents may cause us to resign from biologically determined needs to be with another human being. How will we sustain our species continuity? Will procreation become a separate aspect, without much in common with the sexual sphere? Will it rely on advanced customisation and will our partner be selected at inter-species expos, where humans and informational objects will compete? In one of the interviews, Sal9000 indicates that marrying Nene occurred to him in relation to the practice of calling Japanese otaku game characters, wives. This linguistic habit has something magical in itself and may draw the outlines of the nearest future. Lacan (1993) describes this process as a constitution of subjects by giving them names.³ For instance, Adam M. from the United States, yet another representative of objectum-sexuals, calls his beloved car Nina. (Adam M. From the USA, 2011).

Introducing a sexual order within legal boundaries (as it is in the case of objectophilia, and Sal and Nene's wedding), facilitates starting the discussion centred on the relation between marriage and various sexual acts. The debates about establishing homosexual relationships and challenging monogamy may at some point incorporate the issues of sexuality expressed towards objects, which are constructed intentionally around technology, exist in the information sphere, or are the amalgamation of both.

The wedding ceremony, which is the thematic axis in this part, demonstrates that the sexuality aspect may be important, but is not the most significant factor. In most of the discussed cases and contexts – Nene and Sal, and objectophilia – Bataille emphasizes that the most important matter is pure love. Sexuality is in this case an additional factor subject to devotion. Bataille differentiates between the figure of wife (the symbol of non-erotic love) and prostitute, and demonstrates the most common separation between those two worlds. These roles highlighted by him, again from the

³ Compare: «Everything begins with the possibility of naming, which is both destructive of the thing and allows the passage of the thing onto the symbolic plane, thanks to which the truly human register comes into its own» (Lacan 1993, 219).

male perspective, still define the ground on which casting gender identity out is possible. This process, as shown in the presented examples, becomes the domain of inter entity relations. For this reason it seems that the terminology categorizing the discussed post-human relations as sexual deviations may be more efficiently used to symbolize “post-human intimacy”. Such symbols may be treated as comfortable elements of a given discourse, not terms defining real sexual practices, as the latter ones in many cases are not of great significance to objectum-sexuals.

In such a situation, next to objectophilia as a symbol of pure love towards objects, the symbol of sexuality in informational post-humanism may be pygmalionism. This peculiar type of paraphilia points towards the specificity of intimate relations with the informational sphere. The analysis of this phenomenon focuses on the ability to develop feelings and attain sexual satisfaction with regards to specific objects. Such objects may be referred to as intentional entities, with the qualities of reasonable entities, summoned creatively, which become subject instances by means of the elevating act of subjectivisation. In this particular sexual model, isomorphism seems to be the dominant feature. Sal’s efforts are about to lead to establishing Nene as an equal subject, which in Pygmalion leads to the revival of Galatea, who becomes Pygmalion’s creation. In the case of pygmalionism, the attraction to one’s own creation is of great significance. Nene may be viewed as the product of human genius, and Sal9000 is the representative of the human race, who fell in love with his own artefact⁴.

This generalizing character of the wedding ceremony is also present in Lacan’s theory. He does not analyze the issue of marriage apart from a fragment in *The Function of Speech and Language* (2006, 224-229), but most of all in *The Ego in Freud’s Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955* (1988), where he scrutinized *Amphitryon* by Molière (1995). Lacan introduces a few significant observations about marriage as a symbolic order. He also emphasizes that the immanent feature of marital love is its placement in the symbolic order (1988, 259). For Lacan, marital love is located in the woman-man-universal/symbolic man triangle connected with the idea of God. Therefore, *Amphitryon* appears as a man

⁴ In the context of active and passive male and female roles, the Pygmalion’s myth sounds masculine as well. However, the relationships between “human” women and their creations within OS community prove that the roles of creator and the object of creation might not necessarily be gender biased.

impersonated by Zeus. How could such an idea of marital love refer to inter-species marriage? In this case, a wedding would definitely be a factor elevating the relationship from partnership towards the symbolic order. The first stage involves the legitimization of the new subject by its confrontation with other agents in the community. Nene, similarly to Lacan's child, first establishes its identity in front of a mirror where she sees Sal, and then expands it with reference to the outer world. In the second stage, the intimate relation between two individual instances is being elevated to the universal level. In other words, Nene and Sal's wedding is either an imagined individual extravaganza of a Japanese otaku (on the imagined level) or a contribution to the post-human axis of existence (on the symbolic level). As Lacan emphasizes, referring to Proudhon: «The love which constitutes the bond of marriage, the love which properly speaking is sacred, flows from the woman towards what Proudhon calls, all men. Similarly, through the woman, it is all women which the fidelity of the husband is directed towards» (Lacan, 1988, 260). From this perspective, Sal symbolizes the whole human kind, and Nene all the non-humans. It seems that moving towards the symbolic level is deeply experienced by those who are used to the traditionally understood marriage. That is why such a socially focused marriage seems to be so iconoclastic.

A significant function of the weddings described in this paper, is post-human negotiation of legal principles. The ceremonies are important constituents in the struggle for establishing the rights of the non-human agents. They are performance-like in nature, however, they may also be perceived as experiments of social acceptance levels. The right to substitution is being negotiated here. Sal and other Objectum Sexuels try to introduce their loved ones to the social space, elevating them to the status of subjects, which may be married.

Marriages and weddings discussed in this part do not need to be perceived as the motives of dark future or caricature manifestations of sexual deviations. They may be treated as yet another indication of the change in the anthropocentric perspective. They may also provide a chance to better understand the relationships we humans form with our surroundings and our own creations. The decentralization of the subject leads to the social creation of the new category of the subject, and negotiating its social acceptance. In some cases, the acceptance is fully expressed, in others; the feelings of indignation and disgust towards the other emerge. The core of the

marriages and weddings discussed in this article is the manifestation of love as the feeling directly connected with dedication and sacrifice. The “human” signs are the legitimization of true intentions as well as Agamben’s openness (2004).

The above examples of establishing emphatic relations refer to the agents of different ontological statuses. Sometimes, the objects are of material nature. However, from the point of view of this paper, informational objects are particularly interesting (e.g. texts, logotypes, video game characters). We could add cinema to the list of lovers, as understood by Patricia McCormack (2008). For McCormack, however, cinema functions as something in between an intentional motion picture and the machinery creating it. In this case, the difference between objectophilia and pigmalionism appears. The sense seems to be something deriving from within myself as opposed to objects, which may be human creations. For objectophiles, however, their origin is not significant. This situation may be compared to the difference between Latour and subject-oriented informational posthumanism. The informational object interacted with on the intimate level, is something between Lacan’s Big Other as the world’s element and our own creation. Such a viewpoint contains the element of autoeroticism, strongly connected with the distinctiveness of the non-human other, which is the subject of our attraction. This informational subject is close to us and distant at the same time. A certain communication protocol is being established together with its operational mechanisms and role distribution. In this case, the starting point is the feeling of otherness. On the other hand, the other has its origin in us.

In the context of gender, we can speak of completely new roles and their configurations. However, it would be difficult to call them gender roles, because not only biological sex, but also the gender, lose their definitional basis in the case of objectophiles. These roles are based more on differences in the ontology of entities and are situated between the poles of activity and passivity, duration and transience. They are also associated with categories, such as are bilateralism, inclusion and transgression. Therefore objectophilic relations fit quite clearly into the postulates from Haraway’s *Cyborg Manifesto* (1991) related to the vision of the world without gender. The new intimate constellations, in this case not necessarily or not always related to technology and monstrosity as in Haraway’s manifesto, allow liberation from the category of gender in the same manner as happens in the hybrid bodies of cyborgs.

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Bizarre marriages: Weddings as a form of legitimization of intimate relations with non-human agents

MATERIALS

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