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## Society Must Be Ecologised

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**Publication date**  
2024

**Document Version**  
Final published version

**Published in**  
Noetics Without a Mind

### Citation (APA)

Radman, A. (2024). Society Must Be Ecologised. In S. Kousoulas, A. Radman, & H. Sohn (Eds.), *Noetics Without a Mind* (pp. 29-34). TU Delft & Jap Sam Books.

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# NOETICS WITHOUT A MIND

Stavros Kousoulas, Andrej Radman, and Heidi Sohn, editors



Ecologies of Architecture Book Series

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Noetics Without a Mind




Open Book Series

Ecologies of Architecture

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The *Ecologies of Architecture* Book Series is published  
by TU Delft OPEN Publishing and Jap Sam Books in  
collaboration with the Architecture Philosophy and  
Theory Group, Faculty of Architecture and the Built  
Environment, TU Delft, PO Box 5043, 2600 GA Delft,  
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.59490/mg.120>

ISBN: 978-94-93329-24-9

[www.japsambooks.nl](http://www.japsambooks.nl)



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Book Abstract

Addressing the intricate socio-techno-environmental dimension of noesis within the current climate of social and urban challenges necessitates a transdisciplinary approach. In pursuit of this objective, NWM incorporates contributions that delve into sense-making processes involved in the individuation of humans, technologies, and their affective environments. These contributions offer diverse perspectives that critically examine the production of sense and its heterogeneous potentials for transindividuation. Key questions include: What transductive relations emerge in the entanglements between technology, affects, and the production of our (offloaded) memories and desires? How do these relations shape the sensible apprehension of our lives and the lives of our milieus? In what ways can they be expressed beyond the conventional, Western, ocularcentric, and annotational fixations of generic sciences? What new senses are required to navigate the complexity of the present? And, collectively and technologically, how do we sense the effects of our actions? Drawing inspiration from Gregory Bateson, how can we cultivate a different sensory perspective to foster a transformative mode of thinking?

NWM provides a platform for thinkers who boldly traverse disciplinary boundaries, encompassing a diverse range of fields. These include, but are not limited to, affect and affordance theories, architecture, art and cultural studies, philosophy and philosophy of technology, (digital) media studies, feminist theories, film theory, social sciences, and literature.

**Keywords:** Architecture, Affordances, Technicities, Philosophy, Pedagogies

Series Abstract

The *Ecologies of Architecture* Book Series promotes a transdisciplinary approach to architectural thinking and doing by extending its interest to topics that bring together the three ecological registers, namely the environment, the social and the individual. Such an approach accounts for what the built environment will come to be, and speculates about who will become alongside it. The series focuses not only on the why, what and how of architecture, but also on the who, who with and for whom.

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# Society Must Be Ecologised

Andrej Radman

Let us imagine that you have invited a group of friends to dinner, and they are not vegetarians. The example is borrowed from N. Katherine Hayles (who in turn borrowed it from Hans Moravec, whose written source could not be traced). So, you find yourself in a supermarket in front of a meat refrigerator, realising that your choice essentially boils down to poultry, pork, veal, and beef. Who decided to reduce the infinity of possibilities to these four choices? Nobody did, or perhaps everybody did to some extent. Better still, not everybody, but everything. However, even this is not quite right because it keeps us firmly locked in a reified world. So, *what* has decided? The answer is *ecologies*, always plural. It is at least three ecologies – mental, social, and environmental – that have conjointly modulated the attractor landscape to produce the four basins of attraction, while simultaneously ‘pushing alternatives up the hill.’

Let us consider some of the repelling ridges.<sup>2</sup> The choice of carnivore meat is repelled because carnivores feed on carnivores and as such do not present a viable choice. Some choices are strongly repelled on account of social codes (halal, kosher and so on). Vegetarianism strives to remove any meat attractors. There are also those non-carnivore choices that are simply too difficult to breed, as they may be too aggressive or scarce. In any case, the four choices of meat are not logically necessary but only ever contingently obligatory. The emergent yet constructed morphogenetic field is not the cause, but the quasi-cause by virtue of its static genesis. Static genesis, as opposed to dynamic genesis, starts from virtuality, where time is no longer a measurement of movement. The

attractor landscape reverses the subordination of time to movement. As such, it draws ecologies towards the realm of metastability and plasticity, away from mechanicism and facile finalism.

The four basins of attraction are neither eternal nor essential. It could have been otherwise. They are not arbitrary either. This means that the bad ego-logical habit of looking for the doer behind the deed has to be jettisoned in favour of the eco-logical non-entailment. Every singular basin of attraction is to be related to the variables that determine its mutations. The choice of the observables becomes crucial. This is a matter of granularity. Ecologies operate between too-abstract empty generalisations and not-abstract-enough idiosyncratic particulars. It would be utterly uninteresting to subsume all the supermarkets under a universal concept, just as it would make no sense to theorise a unique case from one's own neighbourhood.

Ecologies operate without concern for origins or ultimate goals, instead functioning from the milieu. The four basins of attraction are a result of this process of 'middling', generated by multiple forces acting upon each other to create a temporary resolution within a charged zoe-geo-techno field.<sup>3</sup> This process involves both practical and theoretical actions relaying between the form of content (livestock farming), the substance of content (animals), the substance of expression (logistics) and the form of expression (an unfashionable carnivorous lifestyle). The three ecologies at work across the four ontological domains are mutually determining and irreducible. Félix Guattari's fourfold diagram, developed in *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, offers a nuanced approach to maintaining the heterogeneity of the assemblage along the horizontal axis of reference and vertical axis of consistency.<sup>4</sup> In the example provided, the endo-referential and endo-consistent nutrient is separated from the exo-referential and exo-consistent style by the ontic relay of distribution and refrigeration, as well as the pathic relay of animal rearing and dismemberment. Assigning blame or praise for the limited selection of meat in supermarkets is an ego-logical moralising attitude that fails to address the complexity of the eco-logical system. A woke attitude is similarly insufficient, as reacting against constraints simply reinforces them. To act eco-logically and ethico-aesthetically, one must be attuned to the event in its singularities.

It should be evident that ecologies need to be rescued from the superficiality of greenwashing. It is important to recognise that ecologies are not solely natural or cultural, but both. In the meat diagram, the expressive domains are really distinct from the content domains, not just modally. Most notably, the virtual pathic domains hold a degree of indeterminacy, which in turn allows for novelty. The actual rule and virtual value in material-discursive assemblages are linked by the

process of progressive differentiation. They qualify as 'machinic' because of their productive character that escapes representational mediation – assemblages are like factories rather than theatres. This implies that ecologies have always been machinic, even before the development of advanced digital technologies. To be machinic is not to conflate data with information or collapse values into rules or content into expression. Despite advocating for untainted objectivity, some proponents of artificial intelligence continue to operate on flawed epistemological and ego-logical assumptions. For instance, they may claim that a computer could have discovered Kepler's laws from Tycho Brahe's data.<sup>5</sup> However, what is conveniently overlooked is the shift from the geocentric point of view (Ptolemy) to the heliocentric (Copernicus), facilitated by the geometry of perspective invented by Italian painting. In other words, data alone is insufficient. A change of perspective is a difference that made the difference. The emergent patterns of big data could not have brought about the paradigm shift. Why would someone decide to take the sun's point of view or to become a vegetarian, contrary to lived experience and all previous knowledge? This is inexplicable unless we consider the eco-logical perspective, which changes the framework of understanding by retaining the irreducibility of the ontic and pathic dimensions of existence, the vital asymmetry of the actual and the virtual. It is naive to believe that the workings of ecologies can be formalised and automated, reduced to concrete effects by rule-based thinking grounded on logical deduction mechanisms that can be processed anonymously and objectively.

The heterogeneity of ecologies is a matter of space and time. In the example of the limited meat choices at a supermarket, none of it would be possible without 'instituting', which refers to everything that is invented or artificial in contrast to what is given or natural. 'Instinct' and 'institution' thus essentially refer to different modes of gratification.<sup>6</sup> While an organism instinctively responds to external stimuli, extracting from the environment the elements that will satisfy its tendencies and needs, it may also institute an original world between its tendencies and the external environment, thus developing artificial means of satisfaction. Such evolution through means other than natural liberates an organism from a reactive (and thus reactionary) state, and subjects it to a different mode of existence and a novel environment; for instance, livestock farming frees us from (ad hoc) hunting. Every experience presupposes the existence of a milieu in which that experience is conducted: a species-specific milieu or an institutional milieu. Instinct and institution are thus two distinct modes of possible satisfaction: instant and deferred gratification. Institution is always given as an organised system of mnemonic means. Its operation could thus be further recast as a quasi-subjectivity of flows and their interruption in the quasi-objective forms of a collective, and that is why instituting will be joined at the hip with archiving.

It is essential to emphasise the distinction between institution and law. While law imposes limits on actions, institutions provide a positive model for action. In summary, a tyranny is a regime where there are many laws and few institutions, while a democracy is a regime with many institutions and few laws. Once again, when referring to institutions we are in fact discussing procedures of satisfaction. However, the tendencies satisfied by these procedures do not trigger or determine the procedures themselves. Simply put, tendencies are satisfied through means that are not dependent on them. Therefore, no tendency exists in isolation; all tendencies are constrained, for better or worse.

Consider the catalysis of pictorial perspective mentioned above, which resulted in the creation of trans-spatial and trans-generational enabling constraints as an eco-logical 'remedy' to counteract the negative impacts of ego-logical stupidity and the associated disabling constraints. It is through a speculative pragmatist approach that we can address the issue of how an invention – which offers a tendency a suitable object of satisfaction – can be achieved when its realisation requires a period that exceeds our biological lifespan. In the words of Gilbert Simondon:

The process of invention may be formalized more comprehensively when it produces a detachable object, or a work independent from the subject, that is transmissible, that can be communalized, and that constitutes the basis of a relation of cumulative participation. Without wishing to negate the theoretical possibility or actual existence of cultures within certain animal species, we should note that the main limit of these cultures devolves from the paucity of means of successive transmission, the lack of an object that is constituted as detachable from the living beings that produced it, yet interpretable by other living beings that reuse it by taking the results of the terminal effort of their predecessors as a starting point. In other words, it is not so much the capacity of organizing spontaneity that animal societies lack but the power to create objects, if by creation we mean the constitution of a thing that can exist and have a meaning in a way that is independent from the living activity that made it.

The ability of primates to produce artefacts does not prevent 'animal cultures' from stagnating, because the production is neither 'detachable enough' (epi-genetic) nor 'cumulative enough' (epi-phylo-genetic) to integrate discontinuous successive discoveries as a major precondition for transindividuation.<sup>7</sup> Simondon continues:

The creation of objects enables progress, which is a web of inventions one resting on another, with the latest subsuming the earliest. The organization of a nest or a territory vanishes with the couple or group that formed it; it is, at least, in the most elementary organic forms that the preservation of the object created or secreted by previous generations is the most effective as an organized support for later generations (coral, forest humus, etc.); these effects of cumulative causality resurface after that, in a clear and decisive way, only within the human species in the form of created objects having a meaning for a culture. There is no guaranteed progress so long as culture, on the one hand, and the production of objects, on the other, remain independent of each other; the created object is precisely an element of organized reality that is detachable because it was produced according to a code belonging to a culture enabling it to be used far from the time and place of its creation.<sup>8</sup>

The key lies in conceptualising eco-logical intelligence as something more social than individual and realising that it finds its intermediate milieu in the exo-somatic sphere. This (annexed) milieu, along with the knower and the known, is the third term that makes intelligence possible. The transversal relationship between instituting as protention and archiving as retention is based on integrating circumstances into a system of anticipation and internal factors into a non-anthropocentric mnemonic system that regulates their appearance. Transversality bridges the gap between desire and power, understood in terms of capacity or potentiality. Night occurs because we sleep, not the other way around. There are no social tendencies as such, only social means – the ‘how’, or style – that satisfy tendencies. The ontogenetic entanglements of finite matter and unlimited manner are transindividual.

Every institution or archive imposes constraints, even in its involuntary structures, and thus impacts our knowledge. While we may have lost instincts, we can still build democratic institutions and continue to create sustainable modes of existence. The eco-logical theme of artifice will provide an opening for collectives not to repeat past events identically, but to embrace the transformational possibilities of the present, also known as ‘futura’.



## Notes

- 1 Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Continuum, 2008).
- 2 Conrad Waddington's epigenetic landscape (a.k.a attractor landscape), later to become the Chreod, is a 'figure of time.' As Sanford Kwinter explains, a Chreod refers to an invisible but not imaginary feature in an invisible but not imaginary landscape (with valleys and ridges) on which a developing form gathers the information and influence necessary for it to make itself what it is. See: Sanford Kwinter, 'A Discourse on Method (For the Proper Conduct of Reason and the Search for Efficacy in Design)', in *Explorations in Architecture: Teaching, Design, Research*, ed. Reto Geiser (Basel: Birkhäuser, 2008), 34–47 (40–5). Cf. Conrad Hal Waddington, *The Strategy of the Genes* (New York and London: Routledge, 2014 [1957]), 29.
- 3 Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Feminism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).
- 4 Félix Guattari, *Schizoanalytic Cartographies*, trans. Andrew Goffey (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).
- 5 Andrea Angelini, 'Comparing Artificial, Animal and Scientific Intelligence: A Dialogue with Giuseppe Longo', *Theory, Culture & Society* 39, no. 7–8 (2022): 71–97.
- 6 Gilles Deleuze, 'Instincts and Institutions', in *Desert Islands and Other Texts 1953–1974*, ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2024), 19–21.
- 7 Jean-Hugues Barthélémy, 'Glossary: Fifty key terms in the works of Gilbert Simondon', in *Gilbert Simondon: Being and Technology*, eds. A. De Boever, A. Murray, J. Roffe, & A. Woodward (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), 203–31). Cf. Andrej Radman and Robert A. Gorny, 'From Epiphylogenesis to Generalised Organology', *Footprint* 16, no.1 (Issue 30, ed. R.A. Gorny and A. Radman) (2022): 3–19, <https://doi.org/10.7480/footprint.16.1.6291>.
- 8 Gilbert Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, trans. Joe Hughes and Christophe Wall-Romana (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2023), 163.

Noesis should not be mistakenly identified with cognition. It is essential to steer clear of conflating cognition with re-cognition, which involves a stagnant affirmation of sameness or a repetitive process lacking in heterogeneity. In contrast, noetics shares a common root with noema, translating literally as 'meaning' or, in a broader sense, as 'sense.' However, it is important to note that sense is not pre-existing; its production is inherently embodied, embedded, enactive, extended, and affective (4EA). The transdisciplinary volume 'Noetics without a Mind' (NWM) expands on the 4EA approach of noesis by introducing a crucial technological dimension.

A NWM perspective on generalised noetics delves into sense-making processes shaped by the organisation of bodies, assemblages, and material environments. This includes the involvement of more-than-human entities and technical objects, onto which thought, memory, and desires are increasingly offloaded. The individuation processes, both psychic (personal) and social (collective), are intricately linked with technical evolution. By incorporating the concept of technicity, NWM posits a reciprocal relationship in the individuation of humans, technology, and their affective surroundings. The simultaneous process of transindividuation nurtures an ecological understanding that transcends a purely logo-centric or inter-individual perspective. This evolution, occurring 'by means other than life,' prompts speculations on non-apodictic pedagogies, emphasising sensibility and its potential for significant pre-individual affective amplifications. The volume thus explores both a knowledge of the sensible and a sensible form of knowledge.

NWM provides a platform for thinkers who boldly traverse disciplinary boundaries, encompassing a diverse range of fields. These include, but are not limited to, affect and affordance theories, architecture, art and cultural studies, philosophy and philosophy of technology, (digital) media studies, feminist theories, film theory, social sciences, and literature.



Ecologies of Architecture Book Series



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