

# NOETICS WITHOUT A MIND: Affordances, Technicities, Pedagogies

Colloquium on Friday, 25.11.2022

Organised by the Architecture Philosophy and Theory (APT) academic group /  
Ecologies of Architecture (EoA) research group  
Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment, TU Delft

Het Nieuwe Instituut, Rotterdam



What power do we have over power? This is how one of the most important philosophers of technology in recent times posed the problem of our relationship with technology. Bernard Stiegler wondered if technologies — including the latest digital ones — constitute our acquired ‘power’, then how could we know how to use them? How could we be the ones directing their beneficial results rather than being undermined or overwhelmed by them? Digitalisation literally affects knowledge of every kind: how to live (life-knowledge); how to produce (work-knowledge); and how to think (conceptual-knowledge). It is on this last mode of knowledge that ‘Noetics without a Mind’ (NWM) will focus. The transdisciplinary colloquium will be devoted to an understanding of noesis beyond the conventional approaches. It will constitute the first step towards the establishment of a transdisciplinary consortium that will regularly assemble to examine technologically produced memories and desires.

We will examine how our psychic (personal) and social (collective) individuation are inseparable from technical evolution given that technology produces a series of dynamic constraints which literally determine how we sense the world. These technological constraints — from a table arrangement that conditions a discussion to a handheld device that exteriorises our thoughts — are parts of what Stiegler would call a ‘general organology’. Put simply, the organs of perception become elements of technologically reconfigured sets. For example,

the decision to elevate a portion of the ground by 80-odd centimetres will have profound ethological and hence ethical consequences. To merely codify it as a ‘table’ would amount to a knee-jerk re-cognition. By the time it is pigeon-holed under a neat label, a myriad of affordances have already worked their magic: it’s more or less sit-around-able, more or less lean-against-able, more or less hide-underneath-able, more or less jump-on-able, more or less knock-down-able, more or less weight-sustain-able, etc. The emphasis on the ‘more or less’ as indeterminate, yet capable of determination through activity, is crucial. It points to the primacy of relationality. Neither objective, nor subjective, or perhaps both at once. Next to our noesis, also our potentials for action — what James J. Gibson called affordances — are technologically produced through and through.

The colloquium will bring together Gibson’s thought with that of Stiegler and, crucially, with the thought of Gilbert Simondon. Making Simondon’s concept of technicity central, we start from the assumption that there is a reciprocity in the individuation of humans, technology and their affective environment or associated milieu. Simply put, technicity deals with how humans relate and transform their environment through technology and how these relations transform all of them in turn: humans, technology, and environment. There is no fundamental difference between these terms as everything becomes an effect of power. Sets of affordances constitute an existential environ-

mental niche, which is to say that they are at once constituted and constituting. Continuing with the above example, an oval table is very different from an elongated orthogonal one, not simply in dimensional terms, but as a technicity. The former arguably fashions a different social body from the latter, one that enforces direct perceptual contact opposed to one that allows for the option of disengaging. Thus, it is not an exaggeration to insist on the psycho-social dimension of individuation as dependent on technologically produced memories and desires — what Stiegler would call tertiary retentions and protentions. Put succinctly, the (built) environment as the epi-phylo-genetic memory is the *conditio sine qua non* of transindividuation.

The transindividuation implied when one thinks in terms of technicities, constitutes an evolution that proceeds by means other than life, fostering a kind of ecological apprehension that is neither merely logo-centric nor solely inter-individual. In other words, it calls for a non-apodictic pedagogy that focuses on sensibility and its potential for drastic affective amplifications as prior to any fixed subjecthood. Therefore, the question of a knowledge of the sensible, as well as a sensible form of knowledge, is considered as the central point of the colloquium. We will invite leading scholars to examine how lack of knowledge on the entanglements between technology, affordances and the production of our (exo-somatized) memories and desires leads to an impediment in understanding how our life

and the life of our milieu is crucially dependent on technologically imposed constraints. Concretely, we will examine how technological literacy — especially in its digital variations — can produce a form of environmental literacy — in the broadest sense of the term environment.

Such a task is even more pertinent due to our current climate, social and urban challenges that necessarily demand a transdisciplinary approach in order to problematise issues in their full complexity. Therefore, the colloquium will bring together a cohort of thinkers who dare to cross disciplinary borders: from affect and affordance theories to architecture, art and cultural studies, from philosophy and philosophy of technology to (digital) media studies, from feminist theories to film theory, from social sciences to literature. The invited speakers and participants will tackle the broad and complex spectrum of a contemporary, technologically invested understanding of noesis. Aiming at exteriorisation of its findings as well, the colloquium will result in the publication of an edited volume that will include extended versions of the speakers presentations, providing a cutting edge and truly transdisciplinary contribution that manages to initiate an in-depth discussion and re-evaluation of our (formal and informal, institutionalised and radical) pedagogies, with the aim of enhancing our (affective) power over (technological) power through new forms of acquiring and disseminating knowledge.

## PROGRAM / SCHEDULE

10:45–11:00 Welcome by Heidi Sohn, Andrej Radman, Stavros Kousoulas, and Robert Gorny

11:00–12:00

### SESSION ONE: AFFORDANCES

Gregory Seigworth

Professor of Communication Studies,  
Millersville University

Marc Boumeester

Senior Researcher and Lecturer,  
AKI Academy of the Arts and Design, ArtEZ

John Protevi

Professor of Philosophy,  
Louisiana State University

12:00–12:45

Collective Diagramming One

[LunchBreak]

14:00–15:00

### SESSION TWO: TECHNICITIES

Susanna Paasonen

Professor of Media Studies,  
University of Turku

Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen

Professor of Communication and Culture,  
Aarhus University

Setareh Noorani

Architect and Researcher,  
Het Nieuwe Instituut

15:00–15:45

Collective Diagramming Two

[Coffee Break]

16:00–17:00

### SESSION THREE: PEDAGOGIES

Libe García Zarranz

Associate Professor of Literature,  
Norwegian University of Science and Technology

Alina Paais

Architect and Researcher,  
Delft University of Technology

Valdimar J. Halldórsson

Director of Jón Sigurðsson Museum

17:00–17:45

Collective Diagramming Three

17:45–18:00 Closing Remarks by  
Heidi Sohn, Andrej Radman,  
Stavros Kousoulas, and Robert Gorny

[Reception]

# SESSION ONE: Affordances



# Gregory Seigworth

## “Affordances, Affects, Inconveniences, or, Flailing about the (not-really-post) Pandemic Classroom”

*Can we bear to see the good of education neither as citizen-building toward mono-culture nor as engineering vocational allegories of self-worth, but as a space for the kinds of creativity and improvised interest that cultivate a curiosity about living (how it's been and how it might be) that's genuine and genuinely experimental and not aspiring to an unbreachable rational space? If we were educated in experimentality and curiosity... then we diminish our fear of the stranger and of the stranger in ourselves, the place where we don't make any more sense than the world does, in all of our tenderness and aggression. (Lauren Berlant, “Affect and the Politics of Austerity”)*

In Fall 2021, we had returned to face-to-face (actually mask-to-mask) classroom instruction at my institution for the first time in almost two years since the emergence of Corona. The classroom (the student body) was clearly broken, not irretrievably so but capacities to affect and be affected were decidedly altered. In this talk, I will share the experience of wrangling with my *Introduction to Commu-*

*nication* first year students (100 students total): a course that included, among other readings: Jenny Davis' book *How Artifacts Afford*, Sara Hendren's book on disability and design *What Can a Body Do?*, Alva Noë's extended cognition primer *Out of Our Heads*, and MT Anderson's young adult dystopian sci-fi novel *Feed*. When the class fell into crisis mode — anxiety! blankness! vacancy! vacuum/suck! panic attack! — about mid-semester (what Berlant would call ‘crisis-ordinariness’ — it crept upon us so slowly), I turned to the texts of the course in an attempt (half-successful?) to get the students to engage in an immanent critique of our own situatedness, our intertwined embodiment, our artifactual affordances, and our mutually imbricated debilities. I will share one of exam questions that I prepared for the course, and give a post-event rundown of what I learned/unlearned in the process of adjustment and the ways that the re-visceralization of my pedagogy continues to reverberate.



# Marc Boumeester

## “The Image by Proxy; Hollow Noetics of the Exo-Identity”

Defining the Image by Proxy is a way of unfolding this interplay between the collective expectancy and the individual imaging, focusing on the mechanisms that provoke the process of imaging, rather than on the individually produced images. The Image by Proxy is itself not material, yet it produces many material outcomes in its process of imaging. This process aids the construction of the reality of the individual, set against an unprecedented volume of production/distribution of images which comes with an unknown yet palpable dynamic. Aside from the obvious visual output (the image) the image by proxy produces also an expectancy of a certain collective spatial awareness by the pre-formation of angles, frames and vantage-points. The exo-identity is- in short - the image and imago of a place that has been created over time and is kept vivid and stimulated or even been (re)created for a variety of – mostly commercial – purposes. Exo-identities are feeding into and are being fed by event-locations as they have a mutual goal and ground: the image made possible by the event-location is feeding the exo-identity, and the exo-identity

makes the existence of the event-location possible. From that point it is rather arbitrary what the exact nature or physique of the event-location is, as it is (the shadow of) the situation that governs its value. The affordance of the “hollowness” of its knowing is only shown and in fact enforced when an attempt is made to reappropriate its denotation. By this circumvention, the force of its image comes truly to light: no longer does it have to be situated, its exo-genetic aura could carry both the original statement and its arrogation. Later appropriations will underline this even more, as the event-space has detaches itself from both the original intend and its viral application and will become a place of action pur sang in which it functions as a placeholder for “imaging context”, making it a near perfect example of an image by proxy: the image that knows us better than we know it.

John Protevi

## “Thinking On and With Your Feet: Football as a Game of Affordances”

In this presentation, I'll discuss football as a sport which can be analyzed in terms of a dynamic field of affordances. I'll review current thinking on “social affordances” by Erik Rietveld, Julian Kiverstein, and others, then review some current sport science work on football and dynamic systems theory. The last move will be to connect the two discourses with regard to the act of passing the ball, which can be seen as allowing the receiving teammate to enter a new affordance field, i.e., a new set of attractors and bifurcators.

## COLLECTIVE DIAGRAMMING

# SESSION TWO: Technicities



# Susanna Paasonen

## “Ambiguous Affect: Excitements that Make the Self”

This talk builds on the premise that working with affect in cultural and social inquiry not only allows for but necessitates examinations of ambiguity for the reason that intensities registered in bodies refuse to be contained in neat taxonomies, despite the extent of efforts to achieve this. Ambiguity means that things are simultaneously both and so that they refuse to be pinned down to a singular perspective or outcome: it emerges in how intensities become differently registered in different bodies, and in how they consequently impact available ways of being in and making sense of the world. The unfixity, incongruity, and contingency of meaning that ambiguity entails, I suggest, crucially impacts the possibilities of interpreting and knowing in academic, corporate, and vernacular contexts alike. Addressing data capitalism's polarizing and generalizing affective epistemologies, this talk explores the critical edge of ambiguity.

# Bodil Marie Stavning Thomsen

## “The Mattering of Signaletic Modulation”

The ‘signaletic material’ of film, electronic and digital media designates to Gilles Deleuze modulation features generating a “plastic mass, an a-signifying and a-syntactic material, a material not formed linguistically even though it is not amorphous and is formed semiotically, aesthetically and pragmatically.” (Cinema 2: The Time-Image 1989, 29). Recession of classical narration and representation in favor of endless information made the affective impact of signal noise and pixelation in image- and sound composition noticeable. This potential “utterable” (op.cit.) underscored the thinking sensation within time-image compositions.

Today, affective potentials of digital experience are most often discarded in favor of bare operation. Even if emphasis is put on ‘the feel’ of interfaces, the potential for individuation is minimized by data-measure owned by global stakeholders. This pitch presents diagrammatic readings of semiotic and aesthetic forms of composition in contemporary film and performance art. Artists like Lars von Trier (*Nymphomaniac* 2014), Anne Imhof (*Faust* 2017), and Jesper Just (*Cadavre Esquis*

2019) display how affective powers are key to interfacial modulation. Diagrammatic readings might also provide new approaches to the current media situation in which ‘content’ is both treated as exchangeable (‘fake’ or not) and as key to increased data traffic. Thus, a contemporary understanding of how signals matter and modulate must begin with how affected bodies often unaware bring intensity to interfacial production of what is utterable. If this contribution is concealed as ‘data’ belonging to software providers, the most valuable key to collective individuation is endangered.

# Setareh Noorani

## “Navigating Memory-Work from (the Threshold of) the Institution: the Archive, the Matrix, the Cell, the Gap”

Institutions are environments shaped and driven by desire, mediating human inner and outer conditions (Deleuze). Institutions, specifically public, memory institutions as museums and heritage organisations, are involved in exosomatising memory, through keeping, measuring, and forging (new) knowledges into normalised models for society. These acts of remembrance entail the curatorial gesture of putting-to-rest, or more broadly thinking of life and death through the institutional milieu as the threshold of in-and outside. As the institutional technologies of memory-making, i.e. keeping archives, follow lines of desire they are generally tools of subjective selection. In tandem, these tools remain at the disposal of those in the position to manoeuvre the outcomes of these tools into policies and models, further shaping and entrenching common modes of being and behaving.

Institutionally consolidated technologies of acquiring, keeping, and externalising memory in turn further ingrain institutional amnesia. In such a way gaps come into existence. The (knowledge, archive, matrix) gap situated in the institution is and

becomes a biased orientation device: a locus from where knowledge is to be extracted and valorised, a messy entrance point to research the ‘unknown’, and, for the institution, an uncomfortable pause, silence, or ‘breach’ of the net-work. The ‘gap’ thus poses a problem to the institution, linked to a knee-jerk response to ‘knowing’ and desiring what it does not know yet. How can the gap (le décalage) be narrated, following a more ethical approach of memory-work (Derrida)? How to reclaim the gap in institutional memory-technologies? Can we listen to the void in the archives? Can the gap, the sac, afford a gestational space for life, if not all?



## COLLECTIVE DIAGRAMMING

# SESSION THREE:

## Pedagogies



Libe García Zarranz

## “Willful Pedagogies: Aesthetics of Exposure through Trans Visual Art”

In a 2022 piece for *Capacious: Journal for Emerging Affect Inquiry*, Jennifer Duggan and I share a conversation around affect and/as pedagogy, bringing together our commitment to feminist, queer and trans knowledges. In our dialogue, we engage with affect scholar Bessie P. Dernikos whose research rethinks normative literacy practices to cultivate cultural, linguistic, and gender diversity. Writing within the textures of US classrooms, Dernikos advocates for a pedagogy of exposure that “seeks to not only expose but also recover traumatic wounds by reimagining an affective, albeit risky, relationship to past and present histories of violence” (2018, 3). In this pitch, I seek to translate her formulation into the world of trans visual art and ask how this genre’s aesthetics of exposure may enact what I call willful pedagogies (Ahmed 2014) that are collective, relational, and ethico-affective. I engage with Black trans queer artist Syrus Marcus Ware and his installation *Radical Love* (2020) as a case study. His work centres Black and Afro-Indigenous trans women and non-binary people, which, in my feminist view, counters cis-centric necropolitical

impulses while cultivating “arts of living” (Malatino 2020, 5). By re-making public space as an embodied relational site of Black aliveness (Quashie 2021), Ware exposes viewers to willful subjects and objects as a way to respond affectively, ethically, and aesthetically to historical and current sociocultural and technological realities.

Alina Paias

## “The Forest as Many Things: Encounters Between Native and Non-Native Technologies and New Ways of Sensing the Environment”

The pitch frames three cases of cross-cultural interaction as moments where an exchange of technology takes place. The first is Bruce Albert's translation and publishing of shaman Davi Kopenawa Yanomami's reflections and recollections of the Yanomami body of knowledge. The second is the work by members of the Xavante indigenous nation, the Brazilian Federal Prosecutors Office and the architect Paulo Tavares to legitimize sections of the forest around the Marãiwatsédé Indigenous Land as architectural monuments. The third is the confrontation between the inhabitants of planet Athshe and the Earthlings as colonizers in Ursula K. Le Guin's *The Word for World is Forest*. Even as these encounters constitute moments of mutual transformation, underlying power imbalances inform the varying extents of the changes that happen on each side. In the three cases presented, the threat or completion of genocide is entwined with the dismissal of the native forms of understanding one's environment as unscientific, excessively local and thus unworthy of examination outside of an anthropological context. In response to

that, the pitch carefully positions Davi Kopenawa's framing of the world as forest in relationship to the native cultures in the fictitious planet described by Le Guin and the forest cultures of the Amazon exemplified by the Xavante nation, making a case for the mobile, adaptable and embodied technologies that already exist for sensing and then interacting with the forest as ruin, as garden, as built environment and, ultimately, as the world.

# Valdimar J. Halldórsson

## “Affordance and Affect in an Ethnographic, Collaborative and Coproduced Research.”

The task of social anthropology was usually regarded as a translation and an interpretation of the social and cultural behaviour of people in other societies. The criticism of the ethnographic method (participation-observation) which anthropologists used in their research emerged in the 1970s and 1980s and led to various experiments within anthropology in subsequent years. One of these experiments came to be called ‘collaborative anthropology’, which emphasized collaboration at every point in the ethnographic process, thus shifting the control of the research process out of the hands of the ethnographer and into the collective hands of the ethnographer and the community with which they are working.

Another experimental theory that appeared during this time within ecological psychology was James Gibson’s theory of affordance. Some anthropologists used this theory in their research and suggested that instead of focusing primarily on how to translate and represent ideas and actions of other people, we should join them in a common practical and daily task, because we then would bond with

them without any categorical division between “us” and “them”. Furthermore, by doing so, we would create together possibilities, or affordances for various actions that are affectively perceived, and precedes and facilitates our interpretation and representation.

How can affordance and affect facilitate, illuminate and enrich the ethnographic, collaborative and coproduced research which I am going to carry out next year in Southern England, together with user led groups of people with various disabilities?

## COLLECTIVE DIAGRAMMING

