

CPCIL

EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF
CREATIVE PRACTICES
IN CITIES AND LANDSCAPES

EDITORIAL / ECOSOPHY

What is Ecosophy?

Manola Antonioli, LAA - UMR 7218 LAVUE CNRS, ENSA Paris La Villette, France
antonioli.manola@wanadoo.fr

Copyright © 2018 Manola Antonioli
This work is licensed under the Creative Commons BY License.
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Parts of this article were published in Manola Antonioli, "What is Ecosophy?", in Constantin V. Boundas, *Schizoanalysis and Ecosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

The term "ecosophy" appears almost at the same time (without precise knowledge of the influence between the two schools of thought) in the work of the Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess and Félix Guattari¹:

"Ecosophie" est composé du préfixe "éco-" que l'on trouve dans "économie" et dans "écologie", et du suffixe "-sophie" que l'on trouve dans "philosophie"[...] La sophia n'a aucune prétention scientifique spécifique, contrairement aux mots composés de logos ("biologie", "anthropologie", "géologie", etc.), mais toute vue de l'esprit dite "sophique" doit être directement pertinente pour l'action [...] La sophia signifie le savoir intuitif (acquaintance) et

1. Arne Naess, *Écologie, communauté et style de vie* (Paris: Dehors, 1989); Félix Guattari, *Les Trois écologies* (Paris: Galilée, 1989) and *Qu'est-ce que l'écosophie? Textes agencés et présentés par Stéphane Nadaud* (Paris: Lignes/IMEC, 2013). [Available in English: Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies* (London and New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 2000).

la compréhension, plutôt que la connaissance impersonnelle et abstraite². [“Ecosophy” is composed of the prefix “eco-” that is found in “economy” and “ecology”, and of the suffix “-sophy” that is found in “philosophy”[...]. The sophia has no particular scientific claim, unlike logos compound words (“biology”, “anthropology”, “geology”, etc.), but any “sophic” standpoint must be directly relevant to action [...] Sophia indicates intuitive knowledge (acquaintance) and understanding, rather than impersonal and abstract knowledge.]

The prefix “eco” also refers to the Greek *oikos*, which stands for house, household, habitat and, by extension, our environments. Based on the suffix *sophia*, Guattari then described ecosophy as a complex ethico-political articulation (one might add, as we will see, aesthetico-philosophical) “between the three ecological registers (the environment, social relations and human subjectivity)³”. In a recent book, entitled *Pour une écologie de l’attention*, the Swiss intellectual Yves Citton deserves credit for drawing attention to the common fundamental orientation of these two approaches to ecosophy: “the necessary concatenation of several primarily interdependent levels” and the “core understanding that individuals do not pre-exist the relations that shape them⁴”, which is also a fundamental statement of the Deleuze-Guattari philosophy:

“Relationism has an ecosophical value because it dispels the belief that entities or people can be isolated from their environment. Talking about interaction between entities and their environment leads to misconceptions, because an entity is an interaction⁵”.

In opposition to the standardized discourse about “sustainable development”, which emphasizes (often in a sanctimonious and guilt inducing manner) the relations between “individuals” and their environment, ecosophy (especially in its Guattarian variant, which I specifically refer to here) draws our attention to the plurality of ecologies, environments, habitats, that do not “surround” us as a container would envelop its contents, but that define us and that we constantly define and reconfigure in a network of relations.

First of all, we need to emphasize the plurality of ecologies. On the one hand, there is a “managerial⁶” ecology that aims to save our resources and

2. Arne Naess, *Écologie, communauté et style de vie*, p. 72. (quotes translated from the French edition).

3. Félix Guattari, *Les Trois écologies*, p. 12-13. / Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, p. 28.

4. Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention* (Paris: Seuil, 2014), p. 45. (quotes translated from the French edition).

5. Félix Guattari, *Qu’est-ce que l’écosophie ?*, p. 33 and p. 66. (quotes translated from the French edition).

6. Yves Citton, *Pour une écologie de l’attention*, p. 156. (quotes translated from the French edition).

reduce the environmental impact of our modes of production and consumption. Its purpose is to extend (in a supposedly more “durable” and “sustainable” way) the same lifestyles and modes of production adopted by the western world since the successive industrial revolutions, with the goal of spreading them to so-called “emerging” countries. In this “green capitalism” or “eco-business” we can see no questioning of the purpose and need for the market production of material or immaterial goods (such as knowledge and culture), no real environmental *wisdom (sophia)*, but rather a last attempt (that we now know is inevitably doomed to failure) to save the economic system and the values associated with the ideals of “development” (regardless of whether they are sustainable or not), “growth”, “consumption”. Another ecology, more radical, from which ecosophy stems, considers that “the ecological crisis refers to a more generalized social, political and existential crisis” and that it cannot be solved by ad-hoc measures to safeguard natural environments. According to Guattari, the political, social and economic issues today, elude more and more “party politics” and require the reforming of social practices that are better suited to local based and global planetary problems. This perspective is not only about transforming the context of traditional capitalist economy in a “sustainable” way, but also about developing alternative “life conditions” that allow us to escape the “not only unsustainable, but also unwanted nature of a development system that encourages the ‘fabrique de l’infélicité’ [manufacture of infelicity]”⁷. This project, on a global scale, implies promoting any new practices (slowing down, short cycles, pooling knowledge and creativity, downsizing, new production and consumption paradigms) that allow us to “enhance the links to each other and to our environment”⁸.

According to Guattari, environmental awareness does not only concern natural environments, built areas or physical territories, but also the reinvention of individual or collective “existential territories”, in accordance with the intrinsic link between humanity and the biosphere, both depending on the increasingly more complex “technosphere” which surrounds them. This global shift in the purposes of human activities largely depends on the evolution of cities (where a large percentage of the global population is living), as Guattari tries to demonstrate in his essay entitled “Pratiques écosophiques et restauration de la cité subjective [Ecosophic Practices and Restoration of the Subjective City]”⁹.

Around the world, urban areas look more and more like an “archipelago of cities”, whose components are connected by all kinds of flows and networks, a scattering of deterritorialized world-cities. This global net-

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 157. Yves Citton borrows the expression “fabrique de l’infélicité” from an article bearing this title by Franco Berardi (Bifo) published in issue 8 of the *Multitudes* periodical (March-April 2002).

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 31-58.

working of urban areas has, on the one hand, homogenised the equipment, communication and transportation means, lifestyles and mindsets of globalised elites, on the other hand, it has exacerbated differences between habitat areas. The old centre-suburb structure has been deeply transformed and gave rise to a three-way segmentation between over-equipped and over-connected urban areas, lacklustre middle-class residential areas, and increasingly more prevalent poverty belts all over the world (Major European cities suburbs, slums or favelas in South America and Asia, homeless people found in the streets and parks all over cities in so-called "rich" countries). Deterritorialization of advanced capitalism has produced, at the urban level, a generalized reterritorialization based on polarization: rich/poor, integration/disintegration.

According to Guattari, the answer to these problems goes far beyond the fields traditionally assigned to architecture, urban planning, economy, to engage a large number of socio-political, ecological, ethical and aesthetic practices and reflexions. Therefore we cannot separate the problems related to physical infrastructure, communication, transportation and services provided by "existential" functions in urban environments. The urban phenomenon is at the heart of economic, social, ecological and cultural issues, and, as such, cannot be reduced to the matter (though still essential) of new construction techniques and the introduction of new materials that help combat all forms of pollution and nuisances.

Guattari then suggests that future urban renovation programs systematically involve, for the purposes of research contracts and social experimentation, not only architects, urban planners, politicians, but also social sciences researchers and more importantly future inhabitants and site users. The goal is then to anticipate, by a collective approach, the evolution of the built framework, but also new lifestyles (neighbourhood practices, education, culture, sports activities, transportation, children or elderly care, etc.):

"Ce n'est que dans un climat de liberté et d'émulation que pourront être expérimentées les voies nouvelles de l'habitat, et pas à coups de lois et de circulaires technocratiques¹⁰ [Only in a climate of freedom and emulation can new habitat approaches be experimented, and not through laws and technocratic bulletins]."

Architects and urban planners are thus asked to become "polysemic and polyphonic artists", not working in universal contexts, intended to be reconfigured in response to so-called basic needs that are defined once and for all (as in urbanism and modernist architecture), even if these needs are now expanded to integrate the requirements for environment preservation, "comfort", "well-being" or inhabitants' health. Projects that wish to initiate an ecospherical reconversion will have to push for the development

10. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

of new aesthetical, ecological and social living paradigms, based on singularities defined by collective procedures of analysis and dialogue.

Still within the framework of French political and philosophical ecology, André Gorz repeatedly uses the adjective “ecosophical”, in his book *Misère du présent. Richesse du possible*¹¹, referring explicitly to Félix Guattari in a chapter devoted to the necessary mutations of the city of the future and by mentioning the Guattarian proposal of “Cité subjective [subjective City]”. According to Gorz¹² a new urban policy is also necessary for an alternative society project to take hold: through the organization of social space and activities, landscaping, equipment, sites that can be made available to the inhabitants, “la politique de la ville appelle les auto-activités à se développer, leur en donne les moyens, les reflète à elles-mêmes comme étant non pas des improvisations éphémères ni des palliatifs subalternes adoptés faute de mieux, mais bien ce qu’une société qui demande à naître attend de tous et de chacun : projet commun proposé à tous, porteur de liens sociaux nouveaux¹³. [city policy calls for auto-activities to grow, gives them the means to do so, reflects them back not as ephemeral improvisations or sub-par palliatives used for lack of a better solution, but as what an emerging society expects from each and everyone: a common project for all, ready to create new social connections.]”

Strangely enough, most current urban conversion projects seem to ignore or underestimate the importance of the collective demand for a new “urban nature” which is expressed in practices as diverse as the proliferation of public parks and shared vegetable gardens, *guerilla gardening*, permaculture or urban culture, the function of landscape, artistry, research on urban biodiversity¹⁴. The introduction of living organisms is generally limited to plants, more for their aesthetical function than for their ethical, social and political importance, whereas the presence of animals in the city¹⁵ is rarely taken into account.

In many works, the geographer Nathalie Blanc emphasized on several occasions the need to rethink urban and rural, city and nature categories in regards to their role in the built and non-built environment, in our social and political performances and to renounce the ingrained environmental notion of “rural”, “virgin” or “untamed” nature, when our lives are ever more rooted in cities:

“C’est là qu’il y a besoin d’un réaménagement des catégories.
[this is where categories need to be redesigned]. Ce qui ne veut

11. André Gorz, *Misères du présent. Richesse du possible* (Paris: Galilée, 1996).

12. *Ibid.*, p. 161-165.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 162.

14 Cf. Manola Antonioli (ed.), *Machines de guerre urbaines* (Paris: Editions Loco, 2015).

15 Cf. Nathalie Blanc, *Les animaux et la ville* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000). (quotes translated from the French edition)

pas dire faire l'impasse sur la "nature rurale" ou la "nature sauvage", bien sûr, mais repenser leur place en l'articulant avec celle de "nature urbaine"[...] Et c'est là un vrai enjeu intellectuel. Il faut l'affirmer avec force¹⁶. [Which, of course, does not mean overlooking "rural nature" or "untamed nature", but to rethink their place together with "urban nature"[...] That is the true intellectual issue. It needs to be strongly stated].

Calls for "urban nature" and real "landscaping projects", a search for new common spaces, participatory approaches, based on dialogue and appropriation (not reducible to the concept of "property") now emerge as some of many leads to an "ecosophical" city and the assertion of the need for a sharing of the sensitive, where environmental criteria are taken into account as part of a political and wider aesthetical project.

¹⁶ Nathalie Blanc, "Environnements naturels et construits : une liaison durable", in Afeissa, H.S. (ed.), *Ecosophies, la philosophie à l'épreuve de l'écologie* (Bellevaux: Editions MF Dehors, 2009), p. 229. (quotes translated from the French edition).

Topics

The section *Écosophies* of the *European Journal of Creative Practices in cities and Landscapes*, looks for contributions that challenge the speculative and practical dichotomy, approaching the issue of the city, its environment and the mental life of its inhabitant as a “nomad science”. A nomad science does not proceed through universal assumptions, nor through practical bureaucratic or policy-oriented prescriptions. Rather, Ecosophy follows an ethico-aesthetic paradigm, based on a sensitive dimension, operating by affects and singularities.

The section calls for contributions in the following topics

Non-managerial practices and alternative life conditions. Beyond the paradigm of the “sustainable development” that wishes to salvage the existing model of production and consumption, what are the practices that truly challenge it? Beyond the universally valid concepts of “innovative”, “sustainable” or “participative”, can we think of practices that produce alternative forms of organisation and territorialisation?

Culture and the aesthetic paradigm. Ecosophy calls for what Félix Guattari has defined an ‘aesthetic paradigm’. In this case, ‘aesthetic’ should not be understood as the specific field of art, reserved to a select few, but more generally in the etymological sense of aesthesis, sensitivity, sensitive dimension, operating by affects and singularities, a basis for any *minor* science. In a broader sense, is it possible to understand culture as a set of aesthetic practices through which we express individual and collective subjectivities?

Technologies for the subjective city. Félix Guattari opposed the utopia of the “Celestial Jerusalem” with the possibilities of the “subjective City”, in which the sad deterritorialisation of life under capitalism, and its false antidotes in nationalism and religious fundamentalism are challenged by an existential nomadism in which we reappropriate different lines of “machinic, communicational and aesthetic deterritorialisations.” What are the tools to activate these processes of subjectivation? How does the role of professional figures—architects, urbanists, psychologists, sociologists, etc.—change vis-à-vis the challenges posed by the subjective city?

Écosophies, power and knowledge. Guattari’s *Three ecologies* was published posthumous in 1995. Today, some of the radical ideas contained in it such as participation, urban nature, common space, gender inclusiveness, etc., have become—at least formally—integral part of many cities’ policy guidelines, and incorporated in research project and university courses. What is the relation between Ecosophy and the other “royal sciences”? What are the power relations involved in the capture of Ecosophy by the apparatuses of city government?

References

- Antonioni, Manola (ed.). *Machines de guerre urbaines*. Paris: Editions Loco, 2015.
- Berardi, Franco. "La fabrique de l'infelicit ." *Multitudes*, 8 (March-April 2002).
- Blanc, Nathalie. *Les animaux et la ville*. Paris: Odile Jacob, 2000.
- Blanc, Nathalie, "Environnements naturels et construits : une liaison durable", in Afeissa, H.S. (ed.), *Ecosophies, la philosophie   l' preuve de l' cologie*. Bellevaux: Editions MF Dehors, 2009.
- Citton, Yves. *Pour une  cologie de l'attention*. Paris: Seuil, 2014.
- Gorz, Andr . *Mis res du pr sent. Richesse du possible*. Paris: Galil e, 1996.
- Guattari, F lix. *Les Trois  cologies*. Paris: Galil e, 1989.
- Guattari, F lix. *The Three Ecologies*. London and New Brunswick, NJ: The Athlone Press, 2000.
- Guattari, F lix. *Qu'est-ce que l' cosophie? Textes agenc s et pr sent s par St phane Nadaud*. Paris: Lignes/IMEC, 2013.
- Naess, Arne. * cologie, communaut  et style de vie*. Paris: Dehors, 1989.
- Guattari, F lix. *Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.