

Graduate Symposium Erasmus School of Philosophy
Ecology in Liminal Times

Polak 1-20, Woudestein Campus, May 25th 2023

Conference Program

9.45-10.00 Walk in and coffee

10.00-10.15 Welcome
Georgios Tsagdis

10.15-11.00
Yogi Hendlin
Can a Crisis be Singular?

11.00-11.45
Anna Zoë Moritz
The Self in the Smart Home

11.45-12.00 Break

12.00-12.45
Levi van den Bogaard
Perennially Liminal: Re-Enchanting the Anthropocene Through an Ecology of Sapiential and Spiritual Practices

12.45-14.00 Lunch break

14.00-14.15
Tim de Mey
Interlude – MOOC Presentation

14.15-15.00
Carolina Sánchez
Moving beyond the Anthropocene: Reenacting the pluriverse in liminal times with the Pachamama, the Mapu and the Gaia

15.00-15.15 Break

15.15-16.00
Johan May
For a General Ecological Thinking in the Anthropocene after Stiegler

16.00-16.45

Rick Dolphijn

The Land and Us: A Diffractive reading of Marx and Serres on 'Sense' and 'the Common'

16.45 Closing and drinks

18:00 Conference Dinner – Bazar (Witte de Withstraat 16, Rotterdam)

Book of Abstracts

Levi van den Bogaard

Perennially Liminal: Re-Enchanting the Anthropocene Through an Ecology of Sapiential and Spiritual Practices

Abstract: An ecological perspective on meaning-making raises important philosophical questions about meaning in life in the age of the Anthropocene within contexts that encompass many different forms of life. Ecology, as the *logos* of the *oikos*, is not about the study of material processes in a reductive sense, but about understanding the ways in which the world's complex adaptive systems develop and express meaning. Biosemiotics (Uexküll, Hoffmeyer, Wheeler) provides a framework for recognizing ecology as a series of dialogues between different meaning-making systems, in which the semiosis of human culture is a sophisticated expression of embodied, embedded processes of perpetual emergence of meaning through signs between all living things. Through the biosemiotic lens, modern culture's meaning-making systems show a lack of participation in wider meaning emergence, a failure expressed through the mutually reinforcing negative feedback loops of a) urbanization, polluting practices and other kinds of large scale environmental harm which are anti-ecological (*anti/logos*, in fact, as per Marder) because, not only do they not participate, they actively destroy ecosystems and their meaning-making processes; and b) an increase in the experience of loss of meaning in life in the age of the Anthropocene (e.g. mental health crisis, eco-anxiety, disenchantment). This paper argues, therefore, that modernity's ecological crisis is deeply bound to this existential loss and ontological disintegration and can only be solved through sapiential and spiritual practices of reintegration. The twofold non-Cartesian route into re-enchantment that is proposed in this paper extends Vervaeke's solution to the meaning crisis as developing an ecology of practices to ecology more broadly, stressing both the need for the cultivation of wisdom to enhance relevance realization and afford personal and cultural transformation, as well as the limit posed to it by the phenomenologically mysterious world of the more-than-human (drawing on insights from Abram and Morton (OOO)). Meaningful reintegration, then, is rooted in the perennially liminal space between these two dynamically coupled modes of enchantment, neither of which are fully self-sustaining, but require each other as reciprocally constraining and affording opponent processes.

Keywords: Meaning crisis, re-enchantment, Anthropocene, biosemiotics, object oriented ontology, wisdom, embodiment.

Ecology



Rick Dolphijn

The Land and Us: A Diffractive reading of Marx and Serres on 'Sense' and 'the Common'

“Our sense of smell slides from knowledge to memory and from space to time – no doubt from things to beings.” (Michel Serres, *The Five Senses*, 170)

Abstract: In *The Five Senses*, Serres reminds us of the fact that although sapiens may refer to wisdom, the word sapere in the first place refers to taste, to having a taste, and then to be wise. We are savouring animals, animals to whom the sense of taste matters, before we speak. Through our sense of taste and smell, we turn the public into private (see also *The Parasite*, 144). The necessity of the connection to the land that feeds us can also be read in Marx and especially in his *Grundrisse*. Speaking of ‘the common’ (not as the *ager publicus*, but as the land that serves as the condition for life), Marx speaks of nature and of the ‘inorganic’ parts of our bodies (as he calls it), Marx, like Serres, searches for what makes us possible by turning to the earth and by stressing the need for a new ‘contract’ with nature. In this presentation I want to explore the importance of sharing a meal, with Serres, and what this means for establishing the common? What does Serres mean when he concludes that the habits of taste are ‘continuous with a culture’ (169)? What does it mean to share the land with others?

Yogi Hendlin

Can a Crisis be Singular?

Abstract: Polycrisis, metacrisis, the great reckoning. There are many names for our age of separation where the totality of our tactics of delay and denial come to a head. As compelling as it is to give into doomerism, this is but the other side of denial. Rather, what we’re seeing right now is a proliferation of new technologies promising to save us from ourselves - electric cars, new fuels, geoengineering, AI - and the appropriate mature response by scholars, entrepreneurs, and activists who realize that such *deus ex machina* solutions amount to (as they have historically) to little more than snake oil. Given the imprudence of betting the future of our species and planet on razor thin margins of error and minimal possible buffer zones in order to maximize the extractive power of existing oligopolies and their bottom lines, the questions we face now in this ecological crisis are not choosing between A or B, but instead how do we prioritize appropriately for life and our relations? This talk will survey the current trends in the ecological crisis and attempts to address them, suggesting that examining the degrowth model which aims at voluntary, coordinated degrowth (‘soft landing’) rather than involuntary, forced upon us degrowth causing massive suffering, provides a strategy to justly and comprehensively deal with the interpolating crises we face.

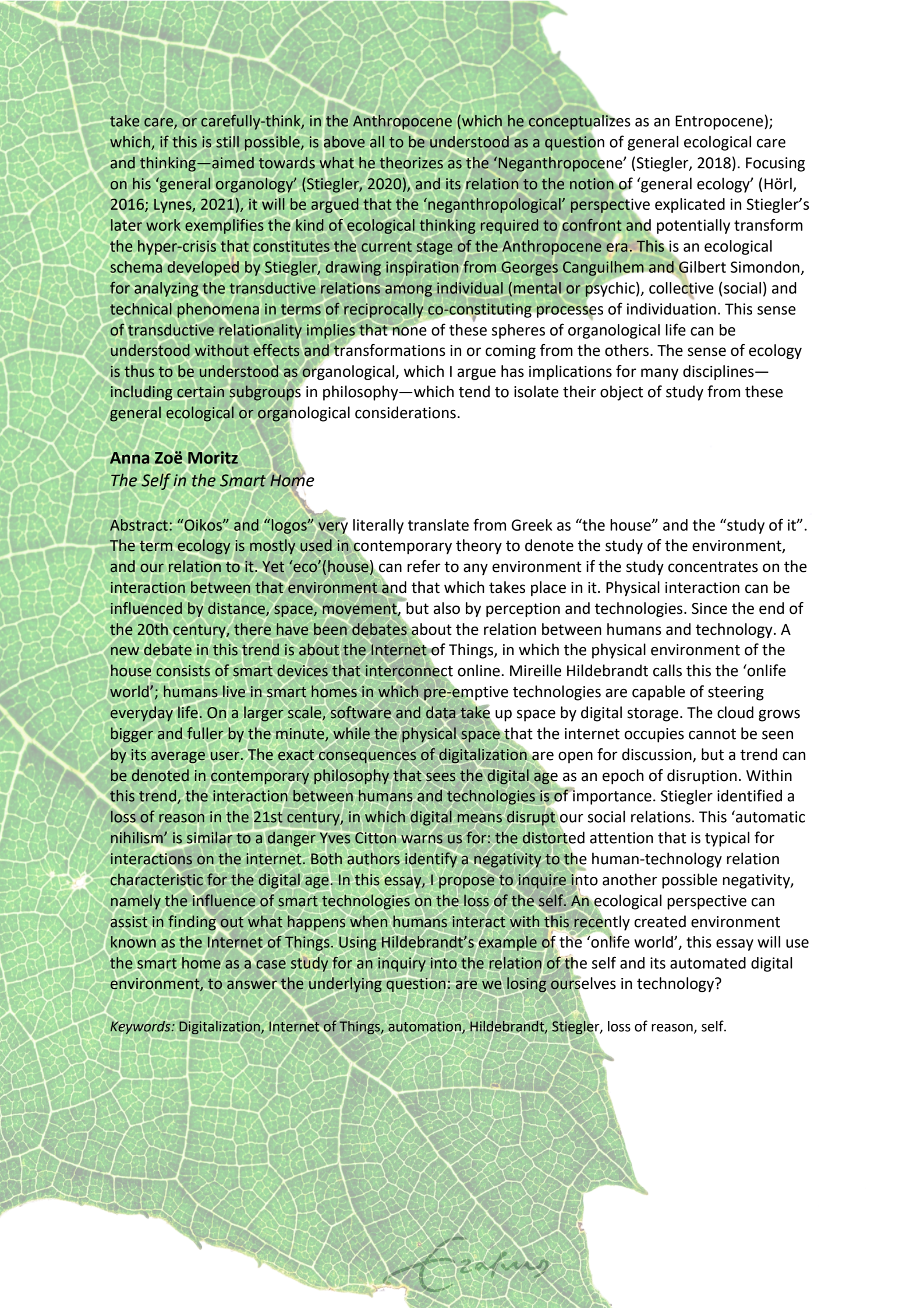
Keywords: Crisis of meaning; intersectional; coordination; nonzero-sum games; dysfunctional Nash Equilibrium; ecology.

Johan May

For a General Ecological Thinking in the Anthropocene after Stiegler

Abstract: The latest stage of the Anthropocene, which is that of “planetary computational capitalism” and the increasing tendency towards “generalized automatization” (Stiegler, 2021), consists in a general ecological crisis of environmental and psycho-social ecologies, and has recently been characterized as constituting a “hyper-crisis” (Ross and Stiegler, 2022). If a crisis in general demands a critique, then, according to Bernard Stiegler, we are confronted with a hyper-crisis insofar as the very possibility for critique is thrown into question—as are our noetic capacities for attention, knowledge and careful thinking (or reasoning) in general. This paper considers this general ecological context in light of Bernard Stiegler’s late concern with the question of what it means to think and

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take care, or carefully-think, in the Anthropocene (which he conceptualizes as an Entropocene); which, if this is still possible, is above all to be understood as a question of general ecological care and thinking—aimed towards what he theorizes as the ‘Neganthropocene’ (Stiegler, 2018). Focusing on his ‘general organology’ (Stiegler, 2020), and its relation to the notion of ‘general ecology’ (Hörl, 2016; Lynes, 2021), it will be argued that the ‘neganthropological’ perspective explicated in Stiegler’s later work exemplifies the kind of ecological thinking required to confront and potentially transform the hyper-crisis that constitutes the current stage of the Anthropocene era. This is an ecological schema developed by Stiegler, drawing inspiration from Georges Canguilhem and Gilbert Simondon, for analyzing the transductive relations among individual (mental or psychic), collective (social) and technical phenomena in terms of reciprocally co-constituting processes of individuation. This sense of transductive relationality implies that none of these spheres of organological life can be understood without effects and transformations in or coming from the others. The sense of ecology is thus to be understood as organological, which I argue has implications for many disciplines—including certain subgroups in philosophy—which tend to isolate their object of study from these general ecological or organological considerations.

Anna Zoë Moritz

The Self in the Smart Home

Abstract: “Oikos” and “logos” very literally translate from Greek as “the house” and the “study of it”. The term ecology is mostly used in contemporary theory to denote the study of the environment, and our relation to it. Yet ‘eco’ (house) can refer to any environment if the study concentrates on the interaction between that environment and that which takes place in it. Physical interaction can be influenced by distance, space, movement, but also by perception and technologies. Since the end of the 20th century, there have been debates about the relation between humans and technology. A new debate in this trend is about the Internet of Things, in which the physical environment of the house consists of smart devices that interconnect online. Mireille Hildebrandt calls this the ‘onlife world’; humans live in smart homes in which pre-emptive technologies are capable of steering everyday life. On a larger scale, software and data take up space by digital storage. The cloud grows bigger and fuller by the minute, while the physical space that the internet occupies cannot be seen by its average user. The exact consequences of digitalization are open for discussion, but a trend can be denoted in contemporary philosophy that sees the digital age as an epoch of disruption. Within this trend, the interaction between humans and technologies is of importance. Stiegler identified a loss of reason in the 21st century, in which digital means disrupt our social relations. This ‘automatic nihilism’ is similar to a danger Yves Citton warns us for: the distorted attention that is typical for interactions on the internet. Both authors identify a negativity to the human-technology relation characteristic for the digital age. In this essay, I propose to inquire into another possible negativity, namely the influence of smart technologies on the loss of the self. An ecological perspective can assist in finding out what happens when humans interact with this recently created environment known as the Internet of Things. Using Hildebrandt’s example of the ‘onlife world’, this essay will use the smart home as a case study for an inquiry into the relation of the self and its automated digital environment, to answer the underlying question: are we losing ourselves in technology?

Keywords: Digitalization, Internet of Things, automation, Hildebrandt, Stiegler, loss of reason, self.

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Carolina Sánchez

Moving beyond the Anthropocene: Reenacting the pluriverse in liminal times with the Pachamama, the Mapu and the Gaia

Abstract: Earth embodied in the Pachamama, the Mapu, and the Gaia emphasize the essential interconnectedness of all living beings, without exceptions, and offer more nuanced perspectives on the current environmental crisis than the Anthropocene theory. These perspectives consider not only objectively harmful environmental conditions but also cultural relationships, attitudes, and historical processes that shape certain ways of inhabiting and relating to the land. Coined by biologist Eugene Storer and chemist Paul Crutzen in 2000, the Anthropocene theory posits that human activities are primarily responsible for global environmental changes. However, critics argue that this theory assigns disproportionate blame to a single species for the extinction of others, thereby overlooking the agency of specific ways of inhabiting the Earth and their role in the crisis. It is in this context that the Anthropocene has faced critiques concerning its limitations in considering time and historical hermeneutics. In response to these analytical shortcomings, the concepts of the capitalocene and plantationocene have been proposed as alternatives. The capitalocene highlights the interconnections between mercantilism, the discovery of the Americas, the accumulation of capital over the last five centuries, the renaissance, and the current environmental crisis. Meanwhile, the plantationocene emphasizes the impact of the plantation 'as system of multispecies forced labor' in disrupting multiple ecological times and processes necessary to maintain life on Earth (Harraway, 2008, 2019, Mitchel, 2014/2016; Mitman, 2018, 2019; A. Tsing, 2019; K. Whyte, 2017; J. Zeigler, 2015).

Drawing on these insights from environmental humanities and critical Indigenous philosophies, this paper contends that the Anthropocene has given rise to a diverse range of critical subjects that serve to stimulate discussions aimed at revitalizing Earth as the primary source of all life and order. By highlighting the limitations of the Anthropocene, these subjects facilitate interdisciplinary conversations with philosophy, ethics, science, and Indigenous perspectives on the environmental crisis, and help generate new conceptual tools to better comprehend the complexity of the crisis on the grounds of epistemic justice.

This paper delves into the limitations of the Anthropocene concept by exploring the interconnectedness of the plantationocene and hydrocene taking as reference particular geographies of the global south. The argument put forth is that in order to revive a sense of wonder and awe for the more-than-human which is not 'nature', it is necessary to revisit stories of environmental destruction to open up processes of healing across multiple times. By amplifying the voices that seek to restore relationships with the more-than-human, this approach goes beyond traditional nature conservation and fosters a restorative process that draws on the wisdom and knowledge of the land.

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