

ACEPS PRESENTS



ACEPS
THE AFRICAN CENTRE
FOR EPISTEMOLOGY AND
PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE

WHO'S AFRAID OF AN ORGANOLOGY?

Prof. Chantelle Gray

11 MARCH 2025 @ 11:00-13:00 SAST (UTC+2)

In his 1947 lecture, "Machine and Organism," the French philosopher George Canguilhem remarks on two tendencies in philosophy. The first, which he traces back to Descartes's *Treatise on Man* (1667), is the machine ontology of the organism – a legacy that continues to permeate many areas of biological and biophilosophical inquiry. The second is organicism, which is itself divided into two strains, the first of which comprises philosophies of nature, such as is found in the work of Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling and Alfred North Whitehead; and the second of which is what the philosopher of technology, Yuk Hui, refers to as a "mechano-organicism" for the reason that organisms are endowed with an original technicity. Paradigmatic of this strain is the work of Henri Bergson, Ernst Kapp, and André Leroi-Gourhan.

For Canguilhem, neither of these traditions provide a general organology or theory of technical life that includes (1) an outline of the relations between the organic and inorganic, as well as (2) at least some theorisation of the effects of predicted and unanticipated modifications occurring at the social and bio-psychical levels. Although Canguilhem's theory remains a proto-organology, the task described by him is taken up by his student, Gilbert Simondon, and the late Bernard Stiegler, as theorised extensively by Hui in his book, *Recursivity and Contingency* (2019). What seems strange to me is that Hui, rather than continuing down the path of this lineage of these thinkers to ask whether Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – who were deeply influenced by Whitehead, Bergson, Leroi-Gourhan, Canguilhem, and Simondon – have an organology, instead tries to "marry" Simondon to Heidegger.

Given the deep imbrication between organisms and machines in the digital ecologies we find ourselves in, it seems to me that Canguilhem's call for an organology is more apposite than ever. That being said, I remain unconvinced by Hui's direction, arguing that Deleuze and Guattari, despite never having used the term, nevertheless have an organology, and that it both fulfils and exceeds Canguilhem and Stiegler's – and indeed Hui's – requirements thereof.



Chantelle Gray is a Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Johannesburg. Her interests span philosophy, anarchism and political theory, critical algorithm studies, and queer and critical feminist theories. The interdisciplinary nature of her research allows her to ask questions about how to take care of humans and ecologies in the digital age. Chantelle is the co-convenor of the South African Deleuze & Guattari Studies Conference, and an editorial board member of *Somatechnics*. Her books include *Deleuze and Anarchism* (2019, Edinburgh University Press), and *Anarchism after Deleuze and Guattari: Fabulating Futures* (2022, Bloomsbury).

**African Centre for Epistemology
and Philosophy of Science**
4th Floor Boardroom @ UJ on Empire
University of Johannesburg

Inquiries: dimphom@uj.ac.za / shened@uj.ac.za
ACEPS: <https://www.uj.ac.za/aceps>
Organisers: Dimpho Moletsane, Shené de Rijk, Veli Mitova

The University of Johannesburg encourages academic debate and discussion that are conducted in a manner that upholds respectful interaction, safety of all involved, and freedom of association as enshrined in the law, the Constitution, and within the boundaries of the University policies. The views expressed during events are expressed in a personal capacity and do not necessarily reflect the views of the University of Johannesburg.



20 YEARS
— 2005-2025 —

Our Future. Reimagined.