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## Definitions

### Media ecology, Information ecology

"Media ecology is a very slippery term. It is often used to refer to both an interlaced topological analysis of media objects, as an environ, as well as an accounting of their function. It can also be an address of the materiality and immateriality of media objects, devices, and systems in terms of their form as both pattern and presence including the relative nature of their function. The term also refers to the multiplicity of meanings associative to the constituent binding relations of information objects contained within the ecology, its language. And, as Matthew Fuller illuminates, media ecology is also a descriptor of the parallel histories and affordances of context. Within the multiplicities of these ecologies, complexity reigns supreme. Nonlinear, selforganizational, and transpositional systems behavior combine autopoietically at the intersection of media collisions.

Complementing Manuel De Landa's reading of the *phase space* model and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's poetics of the *machinic phylum*, Fuller directs our attention toward aesthetics of layering composed of multiple relations of media dimensionality. These are dimensionalities operating as self-referencing structures that cooperate to produce something in excess of themselves and emerge in new structures of political, material, and aesthetic combination." (from Joel Slayton's foreword to Matt Fuller's *Media Ecologies*)

"The term *media ecology* is used and in circulation in a number of ways [..earliest use of the term that I have noticed is an intriguing short article in the form of a set of notes in a magazine of experimental video, *Radical Software* [1]. Raymond Arlo, "Media Ecology," *Radical Software*, vol. 1, no. 3, spring 1971, p. 19.] [..]

"Media ecology," or more often "information ecology," is deployed as a euphemism for the **allocation of informational roles in organizations and in computer-supported collaborative work. Commonly, it is used as a saccharine term for the "natural" structuring of the microscopic to macroscopic dimensions of class composition and command in a workforce.**

On the one hand, this is done on a mundane level, such as in the ordering and management of reception staff within an organization, making sure they have the location, communications filter-rating, and availability of all other staff at their fingertips. Of keen interest too in such contexts is how information flows are routed within an organization. So the term often also implies an interrelationship with knowledge and time management processes, intellectual property regimes, database and software design, content control, access structuring, metadata, archiving, and the use and generation of new document and information types. A third, and related current is how auditing processes and "quality control" extend through

informationalization into greater parts of contemporary work-patterns. In other words, the terms 'media ecology' and 'information ecology' are highly susceptible to interpretation as part of the jargon effluvia of the early twenty-first century. Underlying these terms, however, are key discussions about the development, contestation, and invention of life in the present day. Some of these issues will be discussed here, but somewhat at a tangent to the refrain of life, as a subset of a larger enterprise opportunity in which they are often found.

In a related sense, in that there is something of a shared predisposition to an uncomplicated but rather more spiritually troubled technological determinism, is another use of the term by a current surrounding media commentator and educationalist [Neil Postman \[2\]](#). Here, 'media ecology' describes **a kind of environmentalism: using a study of media to sustain a relatively stable notion of human culture. The intellectual background of this current includes [Marshall McLuhan](#), [Lewis Mumford](#), [Harold Innis](#), [Walter Ong](#), and [Jacques Ellul](#)—a vivid set of resources. Here, 'ecology' is more usually replaced with the term 'environment'** or is used as a cognate term where the fundamental difference between the two concepts is glossed over. Echoing differences in life sciences and in various Green political movements, 'environmentalism' possesses a sustaining vision of the human and wants to make the world safe for it. Such environmentalism also often suggests that there has passed, or that there will be reached, a state of equilibrium: that there is a resilient and harmonic balance to be achieved with some ingenious and beneficent mix of media. Ecologists focus rather more on dynamic systems in which any one part is always multiply connected, acting by virtue of those connections, and always variable, such that it can be regarded as a pattern rather than simply as an object. At times there is certainly an overlap of interests between this book and this current, particularly in attempts to investigate how media can be said to have certain kinds of causality. However, as with the business-oriented discussions of media and information management, much of the work in this second current is rather too often symptomatic of other, more fundamental shifts in cultural modes: how much longer until the ever-awaited fall of the book? Instead of providing a sing-along chorus to these changes, as the first current does for those parts of life falling under the regime of economics, the latter seeks too often only to trace them with the properly cultivated kind of detached horror. Their conceptual resources, however, have more to offer.

A third strand of use of the term is discernible in some of the most interesting parts of **literary studies in recent decades in, for instance, the writings of [Katherine Hayles](#) [*How We Became Posthuman*, 1999; *Writing Machines*, 2002], [Friedrich Kittler](#) [*Discourse Networks 1800/1900*, 1990], and others such as the critic and editor [Joseph Tabbi \[3\]](#). These representatives of a thread of study in which literature becomes a part of a subset of media**, and thus of discursive storage, calculation, and transmission systems, have fundamental insights to offer. Such work makes electronic or code-based logical composition and a developed theorization of interaction come into play with cultural analysis and production. Of particular use too is such work's discussion of domains usually roped off as science, its varied histories and philosophies. Such work also often serves to complicate and open up the possibilities to be found in the second thread. The interrelation of Kittler and McLuhan—despite the former's amused anticipation of the moment when man is occluded and finally ignored by his 'extensions'—is clear, for instance. Where these thinkers gain perceptual and methodological power is in the introduction of, broadly speaking, **poststructuralist concerns to the fundamentally humanistic, or even intrinsically religious, concerns of the 'environmental' approach. It must be said, however, that here the specific term 'media ecologies' is used largely either as an aside, or more precisely as something already accessible as a known object of reference.**

The context of this writing is to take this named thing, to take advantages of this reference in circulation, a scrap of phrase or conceptwrapper, and to make use of it, but also to test it and, one hopes, to extend its precision.

A key reference in doing so will be to make use of a sense in which the term ecology has also been extended in texts by [Félix Guattari](#) working among social movements that have themselves made such links. It will be clear from a scan of this book that Guattari, his serial collaborator [Gilles Deleuze](#), as well as writers who have made their own uses of their work, such as [Manuel De Landa](#) and [Howard Slater](#), provide a persistent thread of reference. Guattari himself derives a great deal of conceptual ground from the cybernetician and anthropologist [Gregory Bateson](#).

**Guattari's use of the term ecology is worth noting here, first, because the stakes he assigns to media are rightly perceived as being profoundly political or ethico-aesthetic at all scales. Aligning such political processes with creative powers of invention that demand ?laboratories of thought and experimentation for future forms of subjectivation? also poses a demand for the inventive rigor with which life among media must be taken up. Equally, Guattari's repeated linkage and cross-fertilization of the three modes, ?mental,? ?natural,? and ?social? of ecology within ?ecosophy? provides insight into the way that any of these or other modes of an ecology always demand carrying over into another mode, another universe of reference, and always another, in order for these laboratories, whether in texts, persons, movements, or at other scales, to have any function."**

(from Matt Fuller's introduction to his *Media Ecologies*)

## Literature

- [Matthew Fuller](#), *Media Ecologies: Materialist Energies in Art and Technoculture*, 2005 [full book](#)
- Armstrong, Keith M. (2008) "'Grounded media' : expanding the scope of ecological art practices within new media arts culture." *Media-Space Journal* (1 - New Media Art - Past, Present, Futures). [\[4\]](#)
- Nohra Corredor, "What is Ecological Video Art?" (2006) [\[5\]](#)
- Sam Bower, "A Profusion of Terms" [\[6\]](#)

## Resources

- [Stephen Wilson](#), art projects categorised under (biological aspects of) "Ecology" [\[7\]](#) and "Natural Phenomena - Non-linear Dynamic Systems, Water, Weather, Solar Energy, Geology, Mechanical Motion" [\[8\]](#)
- <http://www.greenmuseum.org/> - Greenmuseum.org uses "environmental art" as an umbrella term to encompass "eco-art" / "ecological art", "ecoventions", "land art", "earth art", "earthworks", "art in nature" and even a few other less-common terms.
- Furtherfield Media Art Ecologies, [\[9\]](#)

### Media art and culture

**Cultures** [Constructivism](#), [Sound art](#), [Experimental film](#), [Radio art](#), [Field recording](#), [Electroacoustic music](#), [Mail art](#), [Neoism](#), [Kinetic art](#), [Robotic art](#), [Urban practices](#), [Multimedia environments](#), [Computer art](#), [Computer music](#), [Light art](#), [Video](#), [Commons](#), [Noise](#), [Cassette culture](#), [Zine culture](#), [Demoscene](#), [VJing](#), [Media archaeology](#), [Live cinema](#), [FLOSS](#), [Max/MSP](#), [Privacy](#), [Tactical media](#), [Community television](#), [Net art](#), [Hacktivism](#), [Streaming media](#), [Software art](#), [Code poetry](#), [Art servers](#), [CD-ROM art](#), [Game art](#), [Circuit bending](#), [Pure Data](#), [SuperCollider](#), [Filesharing](#), [Media archives](#), [Internet of things](#), [VVVV](#), [Bio art](#), [Digital humanities](#), [Glitch art](#), [Internet activism](#), [Copyright activism](#), [3D printing](#), [Data activism](#), [Live coding](#), [Social media](#), **Media ecology**, [Locative media](#), [Electromagnetism](#), [Surf clubs](#), [Networked education](#), [Open spectrum](#), [DIY biology](#), [Software studies](#), [Open design](#), [Open hardware](#), [Sensory ethnography](#), [Postmedia](#), [Post-digital](#), [Evil media](#). **Theory and writings** [Theories and definitions of media art](#), [Writers](#), [Mailing lists](#). **Events** [Festivals](#), [Conferences](#). **Spaces** [Labs](#), [Hackerspaces](#), [Fab labs](#), [Film labs](#). **Education** [MA programs](#), [PhD programs](#).