

OASE #112

Ecological  
Aesthetics

Ecologische  
esthetiek

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**Ecological Aesthetics**  
**Call for Abstracts**

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While issues concerning the ‘milieu’ in Western architecture can be traced back to at least the end of the nineteenth century, explicitly ecological debates largely originated in the environmentalist movements of the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Two decades later, and heavily influenced by the publication of *Limits to Growth* (1972) and the Brundtland Report (1987), environmental questions became generally understood in terms of sustainability, as quantifiable problems to be solved through engineering and technology. Meanwhile, more alternative experiments in eco-architecture and vernacular building practices disappeared to the margins.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, however, the architecture culture of the late twentieth century increasingly focused on architecture *an sich*, insisting on autonomy for the architectural project. This culture was suspicious of ‘solving’ any external problems, reinforcing the idea that environmental questions were indeed merely a matter of technological solutions to be added afterwards.

Over the past decades, in line with societal tendencies, ecological concerns have inevitably become more central to the field of architecture. In addition, the discourse of sustainability seems to have expanded towards more relational perspectives on the built environment. These relational approaches are generally characterised by a shift away from the architectural object as such and instead focus on the processes through which this object is procured, designed, produced, constructed, maintained, renovated, recycled and demolished. From this perspective, it also becomes apparent how ecological issues intersect with the social, economic and political frameworks through which the making of architecture operates. While such relational approaches can be seen as a much needed reconsideration of understanding ecological issues also as an architectural concern, more often than not, they reduce the building itself to a by-product of the entire process. The question of aesthetics disappears in the flow of actors, materials and technologies.

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<sup>1</sup> See: Daniel M. Abramson, *Obsolescence: An Architectural History* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> See: Peg Rawes (ed.), *Relational Architectural Ecologies* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

Yet, to ignore the question of aesthetics is to underestimate the importance of a visual, tactile and bodily engagement with ecological issues—for architects and inhabitants alike. Here, we use the term aesthetics to not only describe how the physical appearance of architecture results from underlying practices that can be understood as ecological. But also to describe how these underlying practices can become perceived through their aesthetic articulation in works of architecture. In questions of ecology, architecture seems to oscillate between the invisibility of technological solutions and the ephemerality of relational flows, while it is the lived experience of a building that shapes an embodied understanding of ecological relations. How, then, do questions of ecology materialise in the construction of architecture? And which aesthetic practices are able to shape the perception of these ecological questions? Ecological practices in architecture must not only be effective in proposing solutions to environmental problems, they also inevitably entail questions of beauty, affection and perception.

This issue of *OASE* is interested in contributions that investigate the role of aesthetics in contemporary ecological practices and discourses in architecture. We are primarily interested in contributions that arrive at or depart from specific cases, both historical and contemporary, and linked to one or more of the themes below.

**1 Aesthetics of technology.** The foregrounding of ecological issues has resulted in the presence of advanced technologies to regulate a building's energetic performance. In addition, such technologies are often embedded in regulatory frameworks based on the abstraction of calculation and quantification, which in themselves might be argued to propose an aesthetic project. But while these technologies seem to have become excluded from architectural design as such, they hold the potential for a more meaningful intertwinement of the life of a building with those that inhabit it. Through what aesthetic practices might such technologies become part of the social and cultural question of what it means to inhabit a building?

**2 Aesthetics of materiality.** The conceptualisation of a building as a mere moment within a changing flow of materials can mislead the designer to underestimate the importance of designing it as an autonomous object. Yet it is precisely the appearance of a building that becomes the site for a visual, tactile and bodily engagement with those flows of materials through which it is constructed – virgin, recycled or otherwise. What aesthetic codes have developed from the use and reuse of new types of materials, and which of these aesthetic codes further develop an ecological awareness of the material lives that buildings live?

**3 Aesthetics and typology.** Beyond a building's internal logic, architectural typologies also express a specific attitude towards their environment. When approached from a situated perspective, they can be seen to shape and organise the relation between their inhabitants and the environment, anchored within specific and culturally defined systems of value. As both climatic conditions and environmental attitudes change, how does or will this affect the (re)invention of certain architectural typologies?

Abstracts of maximum 500 words must be submitted via **info@oasejournal.nl** by **15/06/2021** along with the author's name(s), e-mail address, professional affiliation and a bio of maximum 150 words. Proposals can be submitted in Dutch or English.