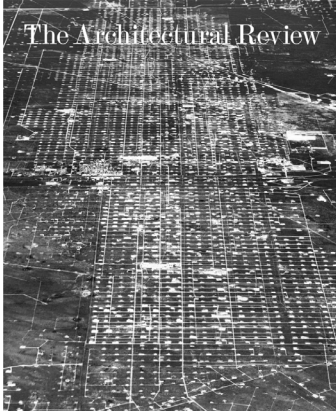


Ecology & Aesthetics, “OASE. Journal for architecture”, Issue 112, 128 pp. – April 2022. Paperback: € 22,95 – ISBN 9789462086838

Energy, “The Architectural Review”, n. 1495, 110 pp. – October 2022. Paperback: € 22,95 – ISSN 0003861X



This review contributes to the collective discussion on the keywords *beautiful, sustainable, together* by examining two very different recently published works: issue n. 112 of “OASE,” published in April 2022, entitled *Ecology & Aesthetics*, and issue n. 1495 of “The Architectural Review,” published a few months later, entitled *Energy*.

Both journals place projects, either speculative or built, alongside critical discourse. By doing so, both journals propose lenses of inquiry to discuss the different relationships between the proposed keywords and exemplar projects. The international Dutch-based architectural journal OASE, in its English and Dutch editions, provides an overview of the complex intersection between ecology and aesthetics in architecture, as the title suggests from the outset. This relationship is articulated in the opening text by Bart Decroos, Kornelia Dimitrova, Sereh Mandias, and Elsbeth Ronner, the editors of this issue (pp. 2-10). They recollect that initial reactions to the proposed combo were such as: “Ecology and aesthetics might have nothing to say to each other.” Therefore they embarked on further investigations into the topic, highlighting some clear points about the common perception of the two words: *ecology* is generally associated with the concept of relations, while *aesthetics* recalls the concept of form; both words operate as *container terms*. Afterwards, the editors introduce three key concepts for reading the issue. First: “*The rather recent discourse on ecology in architecture – in its widest sense perhaps best described as the realisation that our actions here have an impact elsewhere – can no longer be seen as unrelated to perhaps one of the oldest questions in architecture – how to give form to a complex set of often contradicting questions and expectations.*”

Second: tackling environmental problems means rethinking our relationship with the environment and the practices and values on which an ecological culture is built,

not limited to solving problems and finding technological solutions. Third: ecological thinking invites us to think about the relationships between things rather than seeing the world in terms of separate categories, pointing out that “the distinction between form and relations, between ‘how things look’ and ‘how things work,’ is difficult to draw.”

Each author interprets these statements within the issue using their own key, but always with a concrete example. Some propose reinterpretations of twentieth-century projects, such as the MIT Solar I and the Solar-Do-Nothing Machine in the contribution by Nives Mestre and Eduardo Roig (pp. 11-23); Françoise Fromonot reasons on the paradoxical legacy of Mies’s Farnsworth House in Plano in the contemporary debate on the aesthetics of *ecological* architecture (pp. 24-44); Osamu Ishiyama’s Farmer’s House is discussed by Alice Paris (pp. 45-57); finally, Oswald Mathias Ungers’s projects for solar housing are illustrated in the essay by Cornelia Escher and Lars Fischer (pp. 58-73).

The second part focuses on more recent research, among which those by Rodrigo Delso Gutiérrez and Antonio Giráldez López (pp. 94-112), and the one by Eliza Culea-Hong (pp. 74-93), examine case studies in which a new aesthetics of sustainability (presenting *green* as always beautiful and good) masks controversial interventions from an environmental and social point of view, in which a variety of concepts are addressed such as the aesthetic notion of authenticity, the idealisation of what is authentic, the aesthetic conflict of new forms of energy, the aesthetic fiction of the autochthonous, and

the glitch as an element of aesthetic critique.

The third and final part of the magazine is dedicated to hairy materials and green walls, with articles by Pauline Lefebvre (pp. 113-126) and Beatriz Van Houtte Alonso (pp. 127-139). With materials and construction techniques at the core of the debate through two specific foci, a broader reflection opens on the integration of *beautiful, sustainable, and together*.

On the other hand, the issue of "The Architectural Review" is entirely devoted to the topic of energy. Its three assumptions are explained in the editorial and the keynote by Barnabas Calder (pp. 6-14): first, "energy takes up space;" second, "architecture is made of fuel – and our current reserves are running dry;" third, "re-examining the history of architecture through the lens of energy changes our reading of buildings and helps us imagine alternative futures." The issue offers a selection of essays, architectural projects, and biographical reviews, all of which seek to "make visible the often-obscured links between buildings and the energy sources they are built from, and around" as announced in the abstract on the website.

The first assumption is well expressed in the essays by Sahar Shah (pp. 26-30) and Marina Otero Verzier (pp. 88-93). Shah writes about Canadian pipelines and railways, described as the tangible traces of settler-imposed transformations. The transit and construction of these two infrastructures, which now seem indispensable and fully integrated into the landscape, have faced fierce resistance from the indigenous peoples of the Alberta tar

sands. Shah clarifies that "in the architecture of the pipeline, materiality becomes subordinated to the 'idea,' the image, the blueprint, the plan, the end, but the bloody process of constructing things – the means – matters." Otero Verzier, on the other hand, writes about the environmental impact of battery production and the construction of a data centre, presented as both a site of investment and controversy. The essay discusses the gap between the intention to reduce the impact – and make these highly energy-intensive constructions sustainable – and the fact that ever larger and more powerful constructions are needed to guarantee the desired technological progress in all latitudes. The author highlights in concluding her essay the paradox of needing more energy and new remedies, despite the evidence of climate catastrophe, rather than experimenting with new forms of life. Sustainability, inclusivity, and aesthetics take on an impressive weight in these contexts. What emerges from reading this issue, with all articles focusing on buildings, is that the tension of contemporary design lies not only in the reciprocal relationship, balancing these three keywords, but above all in the correlation between them and other instances that have become essential: technological progress, tourism development (see the article by Holger Dahl, pp. 98-106), waste reduction and nuclear waste facility (see articles by Danielle Demetriou and by Anna Winston, at pp. 58-67 and pp. 16-24), integration of energy production and the dynamics of the city (see articles by Tom Wilkinson and by Ellen Peirson, at pp. 32-39 and pp. 72-82), to mention but a few.

Across the collected essays and project reviews, the Energy issue of "The Architectural Review" proposes an unusual and peculiar reading of a sand golf course. In "Oil in one" (pp. 94-97), Ali Karimi tells us about the valuable lesson of a sand course, a virtuous ancestor of the unrealistic grass courses built, for example, in the desert in Qatar and Bahrain. In this case, the difficult conditions at the outset – in particular water scarcity – changed the expected outcome of the project: setting up the court using sand mixed with oil, instead of grass, preserves the desert landscape and draws a cheap and easy-to-maintain alternative. "The imaginary of golf had to change, not the landscape," as the author points out. Even if sand greens are not entirely sustainable, the Awali Golf Club "demonstrates attitudes to landscape that the region would do well to adopt." Working with what is there, turning even a seemingly hostile context into a challenge and an opportunity is an approach expressed by many contemporary landscape projects: when faced with the transition from risk scenarios to uncertainty scenarios, they turn risk factors into opportunities to develop brilliant new design solutions and embrace uncertainty as a design theme. Today's beautiful, sustainable, and inclusive project should perhaps be uncertain or open. Open to unforeseen outcomes, unexpected disruptions, and unpredictable transformations.

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