

Editorial

Renata Tyszczyk and Stephen Walker

*There is an ecology of bad ideas, just as there is an ecology of weeds, and it is characteristic that basic error propagates itself.*¹

¹ Gregory Bateson, 'Pathologies of Epistemology' in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, cf. Félix Guattari, *The Three Ecologies*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Continuum, 2008); p. 19.

The epigraph to Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* was taken from Gregory Bateson's *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* and draws attention to the narrowing down or pathology of epistemology that acts on the premise: 'what interests me is me, or my organization, or my species'. Living through uncertainties, geo-political and financial turbulence, climate change, ecological crises, ocean acidification, not least species extinction, has unsettled all the usual claims human beings make to defend, use, or co-exist with, nature and the environment. In short, we are in danger of losing our 'ecological niche'.

For this issue of *field*: we were interested in exploring the theme of **ECOLOGY** in relation to architecture: how it is translated from other fields of research; how it can inform ways of reframing issues around sustainability; how it is involved in rethinking ethics, politics and subjectivities; how it is entwined in experiential, creative and exploratory practice.

We invited submissions from a range of disciplines, fields and practices, individuals and groups who were responding to ecology and with renewed interest in the processes and practices generating new ecological models of political philosophy, cultural production and dissemination.

We also felt it was an opportunity to challenge the prevailing acceptance that discussions of 'green building' or 'eco' architecture and urbanism were the only kind of contributions the field of architecture was making to debates around global environmental change. We wanted to move away from approaches that were fostering the 'ecological' as if it were a matter of style or branding, and from those that were in pursuit of an eco-architecture that answered only to laws of energy or biology, or from presentations of an 'urban ecology' in thrall to ideas of metabolism and indeterminable processes. We also wanted to challenge the view that techno-fixes were capable of steering us away from eco-catastrophe, or that ecological thinking is some kind of moral injunction to change collective behaviour.

We were not interested in drawing ideas together into a singular universal concept of 'ecology', nor in forging some kind of new paradigm— *basic error propagates itself*. Instead we wanted to begin to explore the diversity of contemporary debate about ecology in relation to architecture. All the contributors to this issue take a position on the ecological: its potential for reframing our visions of the future, interrogating the status quo, suggesting innovative ways of inhabiting the world, transforming the languages we use, engaging with human and nonhuman others, and shifting imaginaries.

The essays respond to the plurality of approaches evident in the field of architecture and beyond- these are diverse constellations and synergies of ideas that defy categorization. The collection of essays in this issue acknowledges the fluidity of disciplinary identities characteristic of recent developments in design fields, and the ongoing rapprochement between disciplines as they engage with a broader constellation of thinking, usually generalised as ecological but with varying insights.

Ecological thinking can open up discussions around sustainability, resilience and uncertainty, offering alternatives, to the prevailing cultures of calculation and accountability, to the polarization of nature and culture or nature and society, and to so much hype and hubris. A reference for several of our contributions, Guattari's 'ecosophy', posits an ecological framework which understands the interactions and interdependencies of mind, society and environment but is careful to resist calls for holism, preferring to emphasise heterogeneity and difference. The challenge to think ecologically or transversally, across different meanings, ideas and fields is particularly important at a time when the density of relations between the ecological, the social and the political are increasingly

evident. Moreover, an ecological thinking may have the capacity to extend the notion of responsibility through different scales, geographies, temporalities and ontologies.

This issue draws attention to the critical, potential, practical, ethical, and philosophical implications of ecological thinking, in turn offering creative and alternative understandings of the history, spatiality, materiality, technology of human inhabitation. The contributions to this issue of *field: ECOLOGY* show that while these debates are far from new they are also far from over.

The opening essay by Irene Scalbert draws attention to our proclivity for imagining 'perfect worlds'. He suggests that much can be learnt from a human geography that encompasses differing scales of complex inhabitation: from vast geological histories to the intimate detail of human modifications.

David Haley reflects on pedagogy and ecological arts practice as ways of 'keeping the discourse plastic' in the context of social and environmental crisis. He suggests that taking time to engage in dialogue with others and considering a diversity of approaches and futures contributes to ecological resilience.

Jon Goodbun discusses the different ways the 'project of ecology' has been approached and understood in relation to architecture and in particular in the field of urban political ecology. He argues that an engagement with ecological and cybernetic theory as architectural research has the potential to generate 'a new ecology of knowledge'.

Steve Parnell's history of AD between 1965 and 1972 reveals the inherent contradictions in an editorial 'non-policy' that attempted to be at once ethical and ecological. It reveals how for architectural practice in this period, the aesthetic strand of consumer culture came to be more influential than the ethics of ecology.

Amy Kulper's contribution explores the morphological context of ecology through the lens of Banham and Dallegret's 1965 essay 'A Home is not a House'. She presents this as a cautionary tale about advancing a version of 'ecology without the oikos' or of architecture's capitulation to technological imperatives.

Benjamin Morris discusses projects for the 'new new Orleans' in the wake of Katrina. Ecological thinking may inform the way we understand possible inter-relationships; natural environments and social and cultural networks in the continued re-invention of an 'impossible but inevitable city'. Ben's poetry offers another way in which we can engage with the ecologies of our own making.

Neeraj Bhatia and Maya Przybylski ask what it is possible to learn from ecosystems in the design of physical infrastructures of the 21st century. In recognising the pressing realities of the Arctic regions - a harsh and transforming climate and threatened and fragile Inuit communities - they propose projects and interventions that consider the complex networks they are nested in and learn from existing ecologies.

Lisa Tilder presents a series of projects- both future scenarios and cautionary tales- of the MUTT Collaborative. Her essay sets the scene for reconsidering architecture as a dynamic and projective practice that moves towards an ecological or positive future.

David Cross reveals the process of his thinking around a new art project inspired by a set of solar energy collectors in the French landscape. He takes us on a journey that weaves together personal narrative, history of technology and a questioning of our role in the destruction of the earth's ecosystems.

Katrin Bohn and Andre Viljoen propose their Continuous Productive Urban Landscape (CPUL) strategy as an essential element of the sustainable city. The urban food system presents 'a challenge and an opportunity'. CPUL suggests ways of giving spatial and organizational coherence to the infrastructural and qualitative aspects of urban agriculture.

Catharina Gabriellsson tells the story of the Mayfair Squat of 2008 and the establishment of the 'Temporary School of Thought' by the 'DA! Collective' in the context of a discussion about political occupation and slack space. In so doing she traces an account of architecture's potential 'undoing' - a questioning and shifting of its values. This undoing is a pre-requisite for an understanding of an architectural ecosophy that draws on Guattari's three ecologies. She urges us also, following Bateson, to consider architecture's 'uncommitted potentiality for change'.

The final section of the journal presents some recent projects that have addressed ecology and ecological thinking, exploring networks of practices and cultural production and instances of resilience. They are notable for questioning existing models of knowledge production and fostering new modes of dissemination.

RHYZOM, an EC programme Culture 2007 project, maps emerging cultural productions related to local contexts (eco-cultures, local skills and alternative economies, traditional practices and cultures of resilience, rural/urban exchanges) and aims to reinforce them through an European interdisciplinary network and collaborative platform. RHYZOM activities have included cross-thematic field trips, immersive workshops and

translocal dissemination. Doina Petrescu charts the process and ambitions of this project and its ecology of reciprocal empowerment.

Spatial Agency is a project that presents a new way of looking at how buildings and space can be produced in proposing a much more expansive field of opportunities in which architects and non-architects can operate. It suggests *other ways of doing architecture*. In an edited extract from the book of the project (co-authored by Awan, Schneider and Till, Routledge 2011), the group draw particular attention to a group of practices whose motivation has been 'ecological'. In different ways, they have worked with the environment, acknowledging human impact, and focusing on the interdependence of the environment, economics and the social.

The *Interdependence Day* project is a collaboration between Geography, Open University, **nef**, the new economics foundation and Architecture, University of Sheffield. Contributors to this project are being brought together in the ATLAS web and print publications. Together these map out and probe the demands posed by a dynamic planet and navigate the novel ethical and political questions of our current state of global interdependence: between people, places and things, near and far, in both space and time. The ATLAS aims to provide a rich and stimulating interdisciplinary resource, but with an ironic inflection that plays on the traditional claims of an atlas to be 'capturing the world'.

Juliet Sakyi Ansah and Robert Sharples, MArch students, write a personal account- almost a field diary - of notes and observations on, and discussions that took place at and around, the ECOLOGY Theory Forum they co-organised in November 2009 at the School of Architecture, University of Sheffield. The ECOLOGY Theory Forum provided, as Doina Petrescu observes, 'the expression of a kind of ecology of education'. This innovative student-led event challenged participants to explore the concept of ecology and in the process reframe it as a knowledge that could perhaps be 'more cohesive and less conclusive'.

What these projects and initiatives all reveal is the importance of continued debate on the issues clustered around the term ecology in order to encourage a shared way of making sense of the past and speculating about what might be. It is in discussions between many, between students, staff, colleagues, visitors, practitioners from different disciplines and varying fields of practice that we begin to rethink and remake what ecology can mean for us in the here and now. As we have argued elsewhere, '[the] ecology of the future is an ecology of the subjectivities and responsibilities of the present.'²

² Cf. Florian Kossak, Doina Petrescu, Tatjana Schneider, Renata Tyszczyk, Stephen Walker (eds.), *Agency: Working with Uncertain Architectures* (Critiques series) (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 17.

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