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## Book Review

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Solveig Bøe, Hege Charlotte Faber, and Brit Strandhagen (eds.), *Raw: Architectural Engagements with Nature* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 286 pp., £70.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-4724-2100-5.

In a time when the character of the places we live in is mostly seen as a social construct shaped in intangible cultural narratives, this volume on the relationship between humans and nature in the shapes we build is warmly welcomed. The anthology offers a rich image of the raw through fifteen compact contributions by an international group of scholars from a wide range of fields, such as architecture, architectural history, aesthetics, philosophy, religious studies, and musicology.

The brief introduction gathers the contributions loosely by framing them as considerations with 'aesthetically experienced and altered versions of nature' (p. 1). The editors conceive architecture as a broad range of aesthetic forms of expressions by which humans are in and relate to the world. They also aim to transcend the classic dichotomy of nature and human-made by addressing the natural as rawness in the human-made environment.

In Chapters 2 and 3 Andrew Ballantyne and Dag T. Andersson, respectively, consider the art critic John Ruskin's engagements with nature. Ballantyne considers Ruskin's fascination for geology, rocks, and water and his painted portrait as part of nature. Andersson describes Ruskin's philosophy of seeing and the intertwined relationship between nature, art, and architecture. He also emphasises Ruskin's plea against restoration, for buildings belong to an historical process and accepting decay allows the building to speak of its lost intimations.

Particularly accessible is Chapter 4 by architect Birgit Cold, in which she analyses aesthetic preferences as a combination of structure and mysterious complexity, based on the understanding of place that architectural historian Christian Norberg-Schulz offers. Experiencing light through the glass-stained windows in a modern, Danish Protestant church is the focus of Chapter 5. Therein, Svein Aage Christoffersen offers a philosophical analysis of the relationship between time and place through the experience of the windows as a mood of poetic openness. In a similar vein and built on phenomenological, architectural thought, Margunn Sandal argues in Chapter 6 that architecture is an expression and implementation of human relationship to nature, which is materialised in church building as a frame of the world in which we are involved.

Eivind Kasa problematizes the possibilities for realising atmospheres in architecture as an aesthetic phenomenon in Chapter 7, which asks for mimetic methods rather than rational conceptualisation. Then, in Chapter 8, Ole Martin Killeås and Douglas Burnham similarly emphasize aesthetic aspects of nature in the context of the production, appreciation, and cultural values of wine. This exploration of the senses

in relationship to nature is continued by Solveig Bøe in Chapter 9, in which she introduces the ability of perfumes and olfactory art to address the immediate materiality of the world around us. Additionally, Reidar Bakke discusses the ways in which the Finnish composer Rautavaara incorporates nature in his work in Chapter 10, namely by means of the lyrics, references to folk music, and imitations of bird songs.

By discussing contemporary art and bridge architecture in the Norwegian post-industrial city of Drammen, Hege Charlotte Faber finds the book's core theme again in Chapter 11. She addresses the artworks as part of the public space around the Drammen River and argues that each of them relates closely to nature in its own way: being exposed to the elements, changing appearance because of changing seasons, and referring to nature through folklore by playing with daylight and even generating electric power.

The 'raw' finally takes centre stage in Chapter 12 by Sigurd Bergmann. He makes an eclectic analysis of the materiality of expressionist brick architecture, the depiction of human existence in film, and the work of sculptor Ernst Barlach. Brit Strandhagen analyses Richard Long's art by walking in landscapes as a reflection of Heidegger's concept of dwelling in Chapter 13.

In Chapter 14, Arto Haapala challenges the concept of ecological aesthetics by arguing that the variety of aesthetic experiences is too large to discern any general principles on how the aesthetic relates to ecological knowledge when experiencing natural phenomena. The anthology is finalised in Chapter 15 by Alex Brooker, who visualises and describes the raw in a contained form in a photographic essay on the seemingly isolated and undisturbed character of roadside landscapes, cut off from human presence and yet constructed by it and in such vicinity.

The strength of this book lies in addressing being in place, perceiving place through our embodied being, and representing that in art, architecture, music, and perfumes, all of which fit well with the renewed interest in environmental humanities. Most contributors work explicitly or implicitly from a phenomenological perspective. In various chapters, the work of Martin Heidegger, Christian Norberg-Schulz, and Gernot Böhme is taken as a starting point. From these, aspects of architecture are emphasised that have a strong relationship to the space, landscape, and nature surrounding and shaping it. Moreover, the sensory experience of mood, atmosphere, aesthetics, and the sublime take centre stage. English romantic poetry and painting are referred to several times throughout the book because they represent the experience of humanity as part of and in relationship to nature.

These cross-cutting themes place this anthology in a stream of writing on being-in-the-world that is mainly fed by geographical and cultural academics from the UK and particularly northern Europe (Norberg-Schulz 1999; Jones and Olwig 2008). And although this is not made explicit, the book reinforces established ideas and assumptions on the meaning of place and nature to humanity. It contributes rather unself-consciously to the construction of a particular framing of humanity's relationship to place.

Another aspect that remains rather implicit is the foreseen readership. Even for an academic familiar with the discourse, the density of the book makes it challenging to read. That colour images are often found elsewhere in the book than the text to which they belong reinforces this impression of density and fragmentation. Additionally, I think that the concept of architecture is somewhat overstretched, by making it cover land-art, music, wine-making, and perfumes.

The biggest challenge for me as a reader, however, lies in grappling with the term 'raw', which effectively raises curiosity but is not systematically problematized. Throughout the book this term is often mentioned in passing but its meaning is ambivalent and its distinction from 'nature' remains vague. The 'raw' refers to untouched, naked, uncooked nature in the outside world or in humans (Chapters 6, 12) but also to untreated materials (Chapter 9), materially immediate presence of nature, folkloristic elements (Chapters 10, 11), and the pre-modern (Chapter 8). It relates to architecture by being framed (Chapter 6), being mimicked in form and materialisation (Chapters 7, 10), or by shaping the quality of the light (Chapters 5, 6, 11).

All in all, this dense book offers a kaleidoscopic and valuable exploration of nature in relationship to poetic and artistic aspects of life, mostly to our sensory and bodily being in the world. This results in an intuitively sound richness in interpretation, but leaves the reader searching for solid ground. The question remains: is architecture a raw kind of art?

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#### References

- Jones, Michael, and Kenneth R. Olwig (eds.). 2008. *Nordic Landscapes: Region and Belonging on the Northern Edge of Europe* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press).
- Norberg-Schulz, Christian. 1999. *Nightlands: Nordic Building* (Cambridge, MA: MIT).