



Raw

Architectural Engagements with Nature

EDITED BY
SOLVEIG BØE, HEGE CHARLOTTE FABER
AND BRIT STRANDHAGEN

RAW: ARCHITECTURAL ENGAGEMENTS WITH NATURE

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Introduction

Solveig Bøe, Hege Charlotte Faber and Brit Strandhagen

What appears makes visible what is hidden.

Anaxagoras/Democritus

During the past few decades, we have witnessed a re-orientation within aesthetics towards a broadening of the aesthetic field and a renewed interest in aesthetic phenomena beyond the traditional confines of art. In addition to implying a more sense-oriented approach to the aesthetic as such – partly a result of the re-discovery of its origin in the Greek concept of *aesthesis* – this re-orientation within the field has also led to a renewed interest in nature, and in the interaction of art and nature on the one hand; man and nature on the other.

The topic of this anthology is aesthetically experienced and altered versions of nature, with a particular view to how nature is integrated into architectural structures and other types of human artefacts. More specifically, the shared focus is nature in its raw state – the state in which nature stands out as nature despite, but at the same time through, man's efforts at creating form. Man finds and forms places where life may take place. Rather than taking *architecture* as referring exclusively to buildings, the term is broadly defined as a fundamental human way of being in and relating to the world. Consequently, the examples of architecture may range from the simple mark on the ground to the contemporary megalopolis. Whereas nature is inherent in many aesthetic forms of expression, it emerges with a particular power and clarity in architecture. This makes architecture a raw kind of art. Other forms of art – as well as aesthetic phenomena outside the arts – form the main topic of several chapters; however, the analogy to architecture will be obvious and important. The intention of approaching nature in this manner is to shed new light on nature as such; on how nature forms part of architecture and other kinds of aesthetic practices; and on human nature. The explorations of and engagements with nature are cross-disciplinary, and the contributions come from disciplines as different as Philosophy, Architecture, Musicology, Fine Arts, Religious Studies and

Theology. We believe this multidimensional approach to examining the raw to be a fruitful one, and a useful one for working out new and interesting perspectives on nature as rawness. Constituting a domain where the dichotomy between the natural and the artificial is transcended, the rawness of nature escapes a purely scientific investigation.

Jan Brockmann (Chapter 1) starts the journey into the raw by scrutinising the elements of sand, water and wind in relation to the metropolis of Berlin. During this process, Brockmann analyses artworks and literature which contribute to an understanding of Berlin as built on sand, endangered by water and battling against the wind.

Andrew Ballantyne (Chapter 2) and Dag T. Andersson (Chapter 3) give new readings of, respectively, John Ruskin's *Seven Lamps of Architecture* and *The Stones of Venice*. Ballantyne looks at the way geological and other material and cultural processes of formation in Ruskin's theoretical and artistic work may function as generators for understanding architecture. In John Everett Millais's portrait, Ruskin is portrayed as part of nature, along with the once-molten rocks, ferns, and rushing rivulets, reflecting his fascination with mountains, rocks and geology. Andersson focuses on the role played by remembrance and the blurred borders between nature and culture in Ruskin's thinking. He points out that Ruskin's views on how to build in a landscape are founded on a specific understanding of how human beings belong in the world. This understanding implies a specific way of *seeing* both things and ourselves.

Birgit Cold (Chapter 4) argues that human wellbeing depends on successful integration between nature and architecture. Seeing sketching as a way to sharpen our presence and our understanding of aesthetic qualities worth remembering, she guides us through a selection of her own sketches from natural and built environments.

Svein Aage Christoffersen (Chapter 5) uses the Danish philosopher K.E. Løgstrup's philosophy of the senses to consider the place of aesthetic appreciation in our experience of the world – which is explored by applying the concept of poetic existence to a concrete work of architecture, Vejleå Church outside Copenhagen. Peter Brandes's large stained glass mosaics, which adorn its six gables, receive an important part of the attention in Christoffersen's reflection on architecture, time, space and light.

Margunn Sandal (Chapter 6) examines nature in sacred buildings. Central in her investigation are the east wall of the church in Tautra Mariakloster [Our Lady of Tautra], the Cistercian monastery at Tautra, Norway; and Otaniemi chapel, situated on the campus of Helsinki University of Technology in Finland. Sandal explores the ways in which these buildings incorporate the changing vistas of light and nature outside. Drawing on Christian Norberg-Schulz and his theory of place, she sees architecture as a creative and meaningful implementation of our relationship to the natural environment: to landscape, light, water and vegetation.

Eivind Kasa (Chapter 7) discusses architecture as a means of making atmospheres that retain their natural character. He takes us through a history of the making of atmospheres in art and landscape gardening as a means of understanding the

making of atmospheres in architecture. Notions of atmosphere found in Theodor Adorno's and Gernot Böhme's thinking play an important part in his analysis.

Ole Martin Skilleås and Douglas Burnham (Chapter 8) assess rawness as an aesthetic attribute of wine. They analyse the apparent conflict between nature and aesthetics in the wineworld today, and its background. Discussing the movement referred to as 'raw wine', they seek to create a conceptual space for authenticity, or rawness, among the aesthetic attributes of wine.

Solveig Bøe (Chapter 9) analyses olfactory artworks and perfumes that create atmospheres we cannot escape because of the way our sense apparatus is constituted. In the examined works, the physicality of the materials used is important not only as a means, but also as a theme of investigation. Bøe argues that these artworks can express something about the rawness of materials found in nature and nature's generative capacities that would be inaccessible through a purely scientific investigation.

Reidar Bakke (Chapter 10) searches for impressions of raw nature in the Finnish composer Rautavaara's music. Bakke shows how syntax or structure – the 'architecture' of music – is related first and foremost to the elements of texture and form. Symmetry can be found throughout nature, and the structural element of symmetry seems to have an important place in Rautavaara's compositional process. This indicates why symmetrical elements in Rautavaara's music can suggest to listeners 'a touch of nature'.

Hege Charlotte Faber (Chapter 11) analyses a work of art integrated in architecture, but connected to scenery and urban landscape through its size and placement, as well as three site-integrated works of art located on the embankment of the Drammen River. Placed in the urban natural landscape, the works are exposed to changing weather conditions and seasons – and thus to the rawness of (urban) nature.

Sigurd Bergmann (Chapter 12) focuses on the urban environment through an analysis of Roy Andersson's movie *You, the Living* and Ernst Barlach's *Beggar on Crutches* in order to explore the reciprocal interaction of the human and the spatial. The artworks reveal how the naked, raw and 'uncooked' in human existence attempts to adopt a clothed, cooked and cultivated way of life, Bergmann argues. The raw, however, remains in place, dwelling within the cultured, where it never ceases to unleash its power.

Brit Strandhagen (Chapter 13) compares land artist Richard Long's work with the philosophy of Martin Heidegger in an attempt to see art and philosophy as different but related ways of dealing with the human condition. Her chapter deals with interventions in nature in order to explore the dialectical relationship between nature and man. According to Strandhagen, Long's art investigates the boundaries between naturalness and artificiality. In this territory the rawness of nature becomes particularly apparent, and thus also comments on nature and man's vulnerability and need for protection.

Arto Haapala (Chapter 14) reflects on aesthetic values as contrasts to ecological facts. His main argument is that the aesthetic of art cannot be imposed on the aesthetic of nature. Drawing a close analogy between the two, and then taking

the normative position that ecology should be the dominant force in all cases, is a mistake that leads to loss in aesthetic value, he argues.

Alex Booker (Chapter 15) focuses on a slip road roundabout in his photo essay, 'RAW Contained'. The roundabout carves out a section of the landscape, creating an inaccessible island separated by asphalt and fast-moving cars. Constituting an ambiguous domain, the island prompts us to question 'what is natural?'. Hence, this last chapter may serve as a summary of the discussions and explorations addressed in this book – nature as a raw entity despite being formed by human interventions and constructions.

NOTE ON THE COVER IMAGE FROM ALEX BOOKER

The cover photograph shows the last remnant of the trolley track, at the point where it crosses the river Vik on the way from the Ranheim paper factory down to the shipping quay on the fiord. The river was known locally as Lutelva (Lye, or bleach river) due to the runoff of waste chemicals from cellulose and paper production. The area fell into progressive disuse with the decline of paper production and the shift to road and rail transport. From the late 1960s onwards nature re-asserted itself and a forest and brush landscape emerged. Substantial residential development is now taking place and as such the image represents a fragment of the cycle from industrial to post-industrial wilderness and on to urban incorporation.

Sand. Water. Wind.

Jan Brockmann

SAND

Berlin is built on sand that consists primarily of silicon dioxide.

The exhibition 'Mythos Berlin' was staged in West Berlin in 1987 as part of the celebrations of the city's 750th anniversary. It was dedicated to the perceptual history of the vanished industrial metropolis, and the wasteland that once held the railway station Anhalter Bahnhof, the biggest railway station in Berlin, was chosen as the exhibition venue. The cover of the exhibition catalogue¹ was made of sandpaper. An excellent choice in my view, as it reflects not only what is widely perceived to be the 'rough' character of Berlin, but also its distinctive substance,



1.1 Werner Heldt (1904–1954), *Berlin am Meer*, 1947, 36 × 46 cm. Private Collection. Jan Brockmann / © BONO.

the Brandenburg sand. On my walks through the city I see this sand everywhere – anywhere that the ground beneath my feet is exposed.

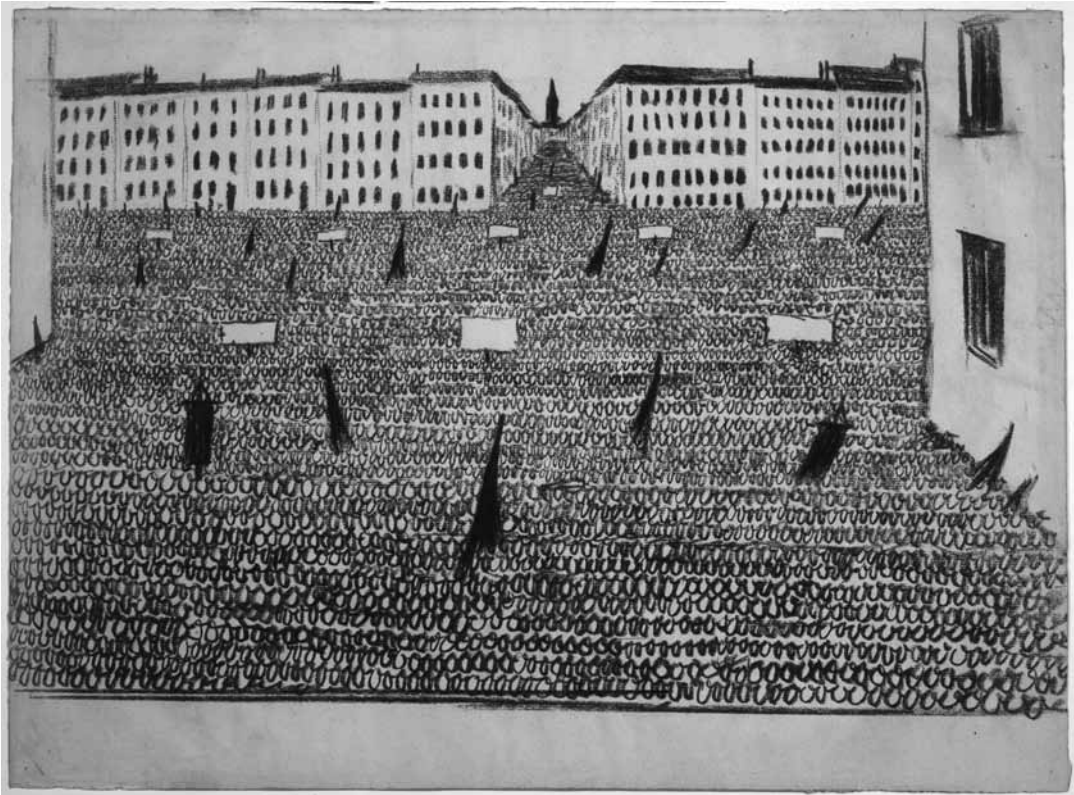
The painter Werner Heldt (1904–1954), a native Berliner, was obsessed with this sand. It runs as a motif throughout his entire oeuvre.

One example of his obsession with the sand in Berlin is a black and white India ink drawing: *Berlin on the Ocean*² depicts the back of a row of tenement buildings, their naked firewalls facing towards something reminiscent of – what, precisely? Is it the Baltic Sea, which has traditionally served as the Berliners' 'bathtub', that is seen pouring into the city? Or did Heldt draw the sandy bed of a dried-out river, or perhaps a glacial deposit? If it is indeed sand that is depicted, it has a fluid character to it, as if it is flooding in, making waves that lick the sides of the buildings. This part of the image can also be viewed as a channel that the water has pulled out of, or is threatening to flood into. Along the left and right hand edges, Heldt's brush has left marks that may signify a type of shrubbery commonly found in the shore zone along the North and Baltic Seas. The backyards are deserted, empty, and the windows are merely blind, black lines. The firewalls are still sooty from the infernal fires created by the phosphorous bombs, thus visualising the dual meaning of the word 'firewall': the very walls designed to serve as protection against fire have been blackened precisely by fire. A ruin forms a v-shaped section, like a funnel, in the left-hand corner of the image. It opens up towards a view of the ocean, where a steamship sailing across the high-lying horizon draws the viewer's attention. The toy-like outline of the ship and its smoke trail creates an odd contrast to the sombre overall mood of the image. The tenement buildings, four storeys tall, form a comb-shaped structure. They have no adorning details, in contrast to the intact façade glimpsed in the background (towards the upper right-hand corner). This blandness was a typical feature of the Berlin backyards of the past, their endless, indistinct rows covering large areas in the working-class neighbourhoods. Even today, this can be observed to some extent, especially in the eastern parts of the city. After World War II Werner Heldt produced a series of images that are variations on this theme. His style became increasingly simplified. This was above all the case in his black and white works on paper, where the simplification was taken to such an extent that it approached calligraphy. And the topic the artist kept returning to, over and over, was the ravaged urban landscape of the post-war era.

But why does Heldt place Berlin by the sea? As the crow flies, the closest saltwater body, the Baltic Sea, is located some 200 kilometres north of the city. The North Sea lies even further away. Scharmützelsee, known as the 'Märkischer See' – the Brandenburg Sea – lies southeast of Berlin. It is the largest lake in the federal state of Brandenburg (part of the former Mark Brandenburg), which is home to some of Germany's greatest water reserves. Nonetheless, Scharmützelsee covers an area of scarcely 14 km².

A more obvious explanation is that the references to the sea appearing in Heldt's works are metaphorical, comparable for instance to poet Georg Heym's (1887–1912) description of the city as the 'Riesensteinmeer', 'the gigantic sea of rocks',³ or to the metaphor 'sea of people'.

Already in 1928, Werner Heldt made a small pencil drawing depicting a densely packed crowd gathered under waving flags, filling the urban space like



a stream. He entitled it *Demonstration*.⁴ And seven years later – alarmed in his Mallorca refuge by the rallying of the Nazis – Heldt picked up the same theme in a series of charcoal drawings where the masses appear as endless rows of zeroes threatening to force their way into the artist's studio. These zeroes haunting the artist indicate his vulnerability not only to crowds, but also to emptiness. Werner Heldt had good reasons to fear the masses. He regarded himself as an outsider: he was a homosexual, and a modern, French-inspired visual artist. He was also given to melancholy, and suffered from heavy depressions from an early age. 'Husum moods' was Heldt's name for his dark hours – a strange term which has many of the same sounds as the term 'hüzün', used much later by the author Orhan Pamuk to describe a similar atmosphere rife among the population of Istanbul. Heldt's term alludes to the North German author Theodor Storm: in a melancholy tribute to a grey town and a grey sea, Storm remembers his birthplace Husum on the North Sea in the 1851 poem *Die Stadt*.⁵ In keeping with the mood in Storm's poem, Werner Heldt describes Berlin in his own poem *Meine Heimat* (My home town) from 1932:

*I was born in a big grey city where the rain falls forever on a sea of roofs, and the boundaries are lost on the horizon. The grey city is my home, my World ... where a hundred thousand pale buildings are huddled together, pondering a dream of the distant sea behind their dead eyes ...*⁶

1.2 Werner Heldt, *Meeting (Parade of the Zeros)*, coal on laid paper, 1935, 46.8 × 63 cm. Courtesy, Berlinische Galerie, Berlin / © BONO.

The words evoke a lifeless city in all of its bleakness, long before the devastation brought by the bombs. In contrast, Heldt's drawing shows a cheerful steamboat sailing across the sea: the very vision of a world secure from harm. Thus, the boat offers a childlike imaginary escape from the universal misery (Plate 1). Many Berliners shared the artist's dream. As early as the 1920s, the city's great Jewish satirist Kurt Tucholsky described the Berliner's ideal dwelling as a house on the Baltic Sea – whose back door opened onto Berlin's Friedrichstraße.⁷

In the wake of WWII, the artist drew the devastated city of Berlin over and over, tall piles of rubble and sand towering among the ruined buildings. However, he had found this topic much earlier. He photographed heaps of sand left behind from the demolition of buildings in the city's poor districts as early as 1930. At the same time, *Berlin on the sea* first appears as a topic in his art. Ten years later he painted a picture (destroyed during the war) reminiscent of Utrillo's paintings from Montmartre: a lone male figure is depicted in a rowing boat in a deserted village-like scene not unlike many of Berlin's suburbs. In Heldt's new version of this painting from 1951 the man is depicted as an angler, but the deserted, dreamlike character of the scene is retained. A likely interpretation of these images is that their theme is death. The river running through Berlin, Die Spree, has become the river of the Underworld, Acheron, and the lone rower represents Charon.

In Werner Heldt's art, the idyllic meets disaster. The environment is reclaimed by the once-displaced natural world. The city that used to contain masses of people – plentiful like the grains of sand by the sea – is now completely deserted. Thus sand, just as much as water, serves as the artist's metaphor for the 'sea'. We might say that sand represents the 'ashes' of the sea. A painting from 1946 with the same leitmotif ('Berlin on the sea') shows an empty vessel without sails ploughing her way through the deep sand of the city.⁸ Thus, the slowness of time is indicated by this image in much the same way that the passage of time is represented by the grains of sand falling inside an hourglass.

Werner Heldt lived in the Western part of the city. But many artists in the East were also contaminated by Berlin's inevitable gloom and melancholy during the 1950s – despite the officially prescribed optimism.

A photograph I took in 2002 at Checkpoint Charlie shows rubble and sand dunes which look identical to the rubble and sand dunes in Werner Heldt's photographs from the 1930s. (Checkpoint Charlie is where US and Soviet tanks confronted each other on 27 October 1961, when the wall was erected; it is also world renowned as the entry point to East Berlin for non-German visitors from the West, up until the fall of the Wall.) The situation remains the same in many places even today, for 'underneath the asphalt lies the land of Mark Brandenburg. And this sand was once the floor of the sea ... nature reclaims that which man has constructed in his hubris'.⁹

Werner Heldt is not alone in associating Berlin with sea and sand. Around 1919 the poet Oskar Loerke (1884–1941) – best known for the symbolism of his nature poetry – wrote the sonnet *Blauer Abend in Berlin* [*Blue Evening in Berlin*], where he evokes an image of a city situated on the sea floor. In the two final lines he likens people to sand: 'Die Menschen sind wie ein grober Sand/Im linden Spiel der großen Wellenhand' – 'People are like a coarse kind of sand/in the gentle play of the