

Call for Abstracts: “Comparative Aesthetics and the Crisis of Ecological Sensibility”

A special issue of the journal *Environmental Philosophy* edited by Russell J. Duvernoy and Tomoki Sakata, on behalf of the Working Group in Environmental Aesthetics (WGEA).



General Problematic of the Special Issue:

Planetary ecological crisis emphasizes a failure of dominant cultural sensibilities and modes of common sense. Myopic and alienated perspectives fail to perceive basic ecological reality, including the value of natural environments, life-giving elements like clean water and clean air, and non-human forms of life. Baptiste Morizot describes this failure in terms of “an impoverishment of what we can feel, perceive, and understand of living beings, and the relations we can weave with them” (Morizot 2022, 6). Arguments calling for a transformed sensibility in response to such alienation can be found across different discursive traditions: consider Félix Guattari’s call for “new social and aesthetic practices” towards ecosophical Subjects, or Gary Snyder’s insistent appeal for “growing a new culture” informed by his assiduous practice of Zen. Recent Indigenous voices within the academy such as Robin Wall Kimmerer and Daniel Wildcat have also focussed on sensibility in challenging dominant modes of common sense, describing attention to natural beauty and slow biorhythms as part of a necessary “cultural climate change.”

Against this backdrop of planetary ecological problems and the dynamic, intercultural reality of the 21st century, this special issue of *Environmental Philosophy* suggests an "aesthetic turn" in exploring the role of comparative and planetary aesthetics towards responding to these problems of impoverished sensibility. Such a turn both activates a root sense of *aesthesis* in reference to sense-perception as well more capacious usage in relation to habituated, cultural, and ethical sensibilities. This exploration involves both better understanding how past understandings and practices of art and aesthetics have contributed to current alienated sensibility and theorizing how an ecological sense of aesthetics can aid in transforming entrenched patterns and habits.

These questions dwell at the intersection between sense-perception, cultural sensibility, and effects and implications of the normative experience or judgment of beauty or aesthetic value more broadly. While the pedagogical potentials (and risks) of aesthetic beauty have been perennial if controversial topics in the Western tradition (from Plato and Plotinus to Schiller and Hegel), how might we redirect the parochial and Euro-centric nature of such questioning in light of the planetary range of different aesthetic practices, sensibilities and forms? And yet, while the variability of aesthetic taste is empirically undeniable, might the aesthetic also function as an experiential modality that mediates or connects across socio-cultural difference, especially in relation to place and ecology? Together, these questions express our primary motivating concern, namely, how aesthetic practices can act as catalysts towards ecological transformation and renewal in the uncertain future of the Anthropocene. Indeed, as Yuk Hui has recently argued, while aesthetic practice is always framed within the cosmological orientation of a cultural episteme, it also can be a means of challenging or reconfiguring that episteme towards new sensibilities of the future (2021).

Questions and themes of inquiry:

We call for papers that explore the transformative role of aesthetic theory, practice, and creation in comparative, ‘transversal’, or planetary keys. This might involve specific or historical study of a particular practice, theme, or concept within an extant aesthetic or cultural tradition, or it may involve more transcendental or theoretical engagement with aesthetic philosophy across different traditions. While mainstream discourse of environmental aesthetics has been largely framed by Kantian concern with aesthetic *judgment* of natural environments, we emphasize aesthetic practices and experiences in manners that exceed the question of judgment. Given the need for new ecological sensibility, how can we understand the transformative powers of aesthetic experience without instrumentalizing aesthetics and turning art into prescriptive propaganda? We invite papers that explore these and related themes while remaining sensitive to different ways that aesthetic experience, qualities and sensibilities have been normatively described. Supposing that the ecological crisis and its geopolitical symptoms call for new cultural epistemes and modes of sensibility, how can dialogue between differing aesthetic traditions contribute to their emergence?

With these themes in mind, we seek contributions from philosophers, aestheticians, art historians, literary scholars, cultural theorists, anthropologists, and artists. We offer the following as a sample of relevant questions:

How do various modes of aesthetic experiences, such as landscaping, gardening, painting, writing, meditation, and ritual practice, relate to specific ways or sensory perceptions that strengthen the bond between humans and ecological cycles? Are there cultural divergences in this regard?

Can aesthetic theory develop a greater appreciation of the interdependency between natural surrounding and human sensibility without homogenizing ecological and cultural diversity across different regions of the planet?

How might a new sense of ecological aesthetics challenge the hold of the commodity form on prevailing social imaginaries?

How should we think about the category of ‘art’ as a specific and unique modality of practice in relation both to ecological specificity and its cultural location?

How might aesthetic practices and experience informed by Indigenous cultures contribute to broadening ecological sensitivities in wider cultural contexts or in a planetary framework without losing their unique enclaved and ecological roots?

How does the specifically European tradition of “landscape” painting potentially intersect with other engagements with place in Eastern aesthetics or Indigenous cosmological practices?

How do different aesthetic forms and practices reflect new themes of planetary sensibility, whether in terms of new forms of ecological anxiety, or towards altered sensitivities and practices?

How does an aesthetic turn in environmental issues relate to paradigms of economic degrowth or deacceleration? Are these turns mutually symbiotic and compatible?

If you are interested in contributing to this special issue, please send an **abstract (approx. 500 words)** by August 15, 2026 to: rduverno@uwo.ca and tomoki.sakata@uni-bamberg.de. Invitations to submit a full paper: Sept. 1, 2026. Submission deadline for full papers: Dec. 1, 2026. Prospective papers should be maximally 5000-8000 words in length, inclusive of notes; they should be formatted using footnotes, American spellings and punctuation, and following the Chicago Manual of Style. The special issue is scheduled to appear in the Fall of 2027.

References

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- Morizot, Baptiste. 2022 [2020]. *Ways of Being Alive*. Translated by Andrew Brown. Medford, MA: Polity Press.
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