



Urban Ecologies: City Space, Material Agency, and Environmental Politics in Contemporary Culture (Ecocritical Theory and Practice)

By Christopher Schliephake



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The term “urban ecology” has become a buzzword in various disciplines, including the social and natural sciences as well as urban planning and architecture. The environmental humanities have been slow to adapt to current theoretical debates, often excluding human-built environments from their respective frameworks. This book closes this gap both in theory and in practice, bringing together “urban ecology” with ecocritical and cultural ecological approaches by conceptualizing the city as an integral part of the environment and as a space in which ecological problems manifest concretely. Arguing that culture has to be seen as an active component and integral factor within urban ecologies, it makes use of a metaphorical use of the term, perceiving cities as spatial phenomena that do not only have manifold and complex material interrelations with their respective (natural) environments, but that are intrinsically connected to the ideas, imaginations, and interpretations that make up the cultural symbolic and discursive side of our urban lives and that are stored and constantly renegotiated in their cultural and artistic representations. The city is, within this framework, both seen as an ecosystemically organized space as well as a cultural artifact. Thus, the urban ecology outlined in this study takes its main impetus from an analysis of examples taken from contemporary culture that deal with urban life and the complex interrelations between urban communities and their (natural and built) environments.



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Editorial Review

Review

Schliephake's *Urban Ecologies* proposes thereby an inspiring and new field of 'urban material ecocriticism' based on the interdisciplinary merging of urban studies and ecocriticism. . . . This is a book with relevance for anyone interested in cities, the environment, the environmental humanities, and/or ecocriticism, but also for agents both human and non-human alike. (*Anglia: Journal of English Philology*)

Christopher Schliephake's excellent book *urban Ecologies: City Space, Mateial Agency, and Environmental Politics in Contemporary Cutture* stands as a compelling example of the value of the environmental humanities beyond the bounds of the humanities as such. Specifically, this carefully researched, thought-provoking study demonstrates the potential importance of ecocriticism for the fields of urban ecology, urban policy and planning, landscape architecture, and more. (*Green Letters: Studies in Ecocriticism*)

In thinking together urban environments, their cultural representations, and a great number of current theoretical notions, from ecocriticism to the new materialism, Schliephake's book develops an approach of 'cultural urban ecology' which broadens the perspective of the fields of cultural ecology and cultural urban studies alike, and makes this book a must-read for everyone interested in ecocritical approaches to the city and the environmental humanities in general. (Roman Bartosch, University of Cologne)

This highly innovative study explores new terrain in the fields of Ecocriticism and the Environmental Humanities by combining the approaches of Material Ecocriticism, Cultural Ecology, and Urban Ecology into a complex framework of interdisciplinary inquiry. The book renders important new insights into the emerging field of a cultural urban ecology as reflected in a broad spectrum of textual and cultural media between realist and imaginative modes. (Hubert Zapf, University of Augsburg)

This timely study combines insights from ecology, geography, and cultural studies to develop an environmental perspective on the city. Instead of pining for elusive country idylls, it asks how we can understand and improve the places in which most of us actually live. *Urban Ecologies: City Space, Material Agency, and Environmental Politics in Contemporary Culture* is required reading for environmentalists across the disciplines, and it will be of great interest to anyone thinking about cities today—including fans of *Treme* and *The Wire*. (Timo Müller, University of Augsburg)

Urban Ecologies is ecocritical cultural studies at its finest with a welcome focus on urban ecology. Schliephake masterfully develops his argument through studies of nonfiction reportage, *The Wire* and *Treme* television series, documentary films, and cinema, with an especially clear exposition of how so-called 'natural' events are rarely natural, but rather technological disasters. (Patrick D. Murphy, author of *Transversal Ecocritical Praxis*)

This book provides a reflection on urban ecocriticism, a subject that has yet to be fully researched and appreciated within the trans-disciplinary framework of the environmental humanities. The main goal of this book is both to open up urban ecology for ecocritical and cultural ecological approaches and to broaden the focus of consisting models, which tend to narrowly focus on the spatial-material and/or socio-political aspects of urban life, with the help of a cultural-analytical perspective.

About the Author

Christopher Schliephake is teaching assistant in the History Department at the University of Augsburg.

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