

CALL FOR PAPERS



"A very delicate sensibility is here, where the juxtaposition of 'shiny steel with rough straw' disturbs normal architectural categories 'uniting the slick with the hairy, the fetishized with the repressed'"

Peter Davey

GOODNESS AND BEAUTY OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

CONFERENCE • ROUEN • NOVEMBER 2026
ATE Laboratory (Architecture Territory Environment)
École nationale supérieure d'architecture de Normandie

After several decades marked by formalistic approaches, buildings are now increasingly judged on ethical grounds. We appreciate that their design involves the participation of future inhabitants and users and aims to improve their quality of life and well-being. There is also concern for the working conditions of construction workers. Buildings that are resource-efficient and low in CO2 and pollutant emissions are also valued. Thus, buildings are expected to be good for humans and non-humans, and beyond that, for the environment.

However, buildings are always subject to aesthetic judgments. They are understood through their formal, spatial, and material properties, which stimulate the senses as much as they convey meaning. Buildings that delight those who inhabit them, use them, or simply discover them in public spaces are valued. They are expected to be beautiful rather than ugly, even if opinions may differ on what constitutes beauty in architecture.

That said, judgments based on ethics and aesthetics are most often made separately, depending in particular on how architecture is viewed as a discipline. Ethical appreciations tend to overshadow aesthetical ones among proponents



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of heteronomy, for whom the form of buildings is above all contingent. Conversely, supporters of autonomy view social and environmental issues as constraints to be reduced, if not ignored. For the most radical members of each camp, the ethical and aesthetic merits and flaws attributed to a building have no effect on each other.

In the context of the symposium we are organizing at ENSA Normandie in the fall of 2026, we would like to propose an alternative hypothesis, and in particular question what the good does for the beautiful (and perhaps vice versa). To what extent do ethical considerations relating to the good life and well-being of residents and users and to environmental preservation contribute to the renewal of architectural aesthetics today? What can we think of projects that aim to be manifestos or demonstrations in this regard, at the risk of sometimes being accused of greenwashing? Conversely, what about ecological approaches that remain invisible and imperceptible once the buildings are constructed? More fundamentally, what interactions exist between ethics and aesthetics when evaluating the latter? We are calling for papers based on critiques of contemporary buildings, as well as theoretical and historical insights. We invite researchers and practicing architects alike to join the debate.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Christoph Baumberger, « The Ethical Criticism of Architecture : In Defense of moderate moralism », *Architecture Philosophy*, 1(2), 2015.

Valéry Didelon, « Éthique, esthétique et critique de l'architecture contemporaine », *CLARA* n.12, 2026.

Jacques Fredet, *Architecture : Mettre en forme et composer*, Paris : Éditions de La Villette, 2019.

LEAP, *Du potentiel de l'hétéronomie et de l'autonomie en architecture*, 2018.

Guillaume Nicolas, « Marcher sur deux jambes. Ou comment révolutionner l'architecture sans la tuer », *D'architectures*, n° 325, mai 2025.

Valerio Olgiati, *Non-referential Architecture*, Zürich : Parks book, 2019

« Ecology & Aesthetics », *OASE* n.112, 2022.

Mathias Rollot, *Décoloniser l'architecture*, Lorient : Le passager clandestin, 2024

Jeremy Till, *Ça dépend. Essai sur les contingences de l'architecture*, Paris : Éditions de la Villette, 2025 (2009).

TERMS AND CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

A summary of the proposed paper, no longer than 400 words, must be sent to **bontebeaute@rouen.archi.fr** before **March 30, 2026**. It should include a title, three to five keywords, a short bibliography, and, if necessary, an image. A short CV and the submitter's contact details should also be included with the submission.

Documents must be sent in a single PDF file named as follows:
NAME_bontebeaute.pdf.

Presentations of up to 25 minutes may be submitted and given in **French or English**.

The organizing committee will notify selected speakers by **June 15, 2026**, at the latest.

The final text of the presentations must be received by the organizing committee by **October 15, 2026**, at the latest. Following discussions with the scientific committee, the presentation may be selected for publication, which is planned for after the conference.

CALENDAR

Submission Deadline: **March 30, 2026**

Notification of selected presentations after evaluation by the scientific committee: **June 15, 2026**

Submission of written versions of presentations: **October 15, 2026**
Conference at ENSA Normandie: **November 2026**

CONTACTS

bontebeaute@rouen.archi.fr

ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Valéry Didelon

Professor ENSA Normandie, researcher
lab ATE

Guillaume Nicolas

Associate Professor ENSA Normandie,
researcher lab ATE

COORDINATION

Claire Rosset

Research Engineer, lab ATE

SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

Pierre Chabard

Associate professor, ENSA Paris-La-Villette, researcher lab AHTTEP

Jean-Pierre Chupin

Professor Montreal University, Canada
Research Chair in Architecture,
Architecture, Competitions and Quality
(CRC-ACQUA))

Valéry Didelon

Professor ENSA Normandie,
researcher lab ATE

Pauline Lefebvre

Researcher at the Faculté d'architecture
de l'Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB)

Guillaume Nicolas

Associate Professor ENSA Normandie,
researcher lab ATE

Estelle Thibaut

Professor ENSA Paris Belleville,
researcher lab IPRAUS



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