Summary

The agency of concrete: this course enables students to individually develop projects (sculptures, interventions, performances) with and about the assemblage concrete, employing a critical approach based on reading about New Materialism and the anthropocene.

Content

The Agency of Concrete
Artistic Practice With and Within the Assemblage Concrete

Concrete is humans’ second most extensively used material - after water. As such it has tremendous effects on the globe. The anthropocentric promises of modernism to improve mobility, housing, hygiene and the domination of nature also caused effects like the sealing of soils, carbon emissions from cement production, resource extraction, freshwater consumption, toxic dust, overheated cities, and the creation of massive horizontal and vertical barriers.

On a micro-level concrete can be described as an assemblage of cement, water, aggregates and chemical additives. From a distanced point of view it is an assemblage of global proportions: limestone mountains, corporate manufacturing, science and engineering, streets, policy makers, manual labor, aesthetics, corruption, shipping of cargo, CO2 emission trading, crafts and more. The term assemblage – as defined by Manuel DeLanda – means a grouping of diverse elements, be it human, animal, structure, thought, mineral and many more. The concept is particularly well suited to define concrete as a process of heterogeneous forces. “Each member and protomember of the assemblage has a certain vital force, but there is also an effectivity proper to the grouping as such: an agency of the assemblage.” (Bennett, J.; Vibrant Matter, 2010; 24)

Agency is generally understood as the capacity for effective and meaningful action and mostly linked to actions of human beings only. From a human-centered point of view, concrete is a manmade, artificial stone, poured or printed into shape to fulfill specific needs of human societies. It is seen as a dull, passive material which couldn’t have any agency of its own.

Today we should overcome this conventional understanding of concrete as mere petrification of human action by investigating the agencies of concrete. Several New Materialisms liberate the term agency from an exclusive association with human activity. “A theory of distributive agency (...) does not posit a subject as the root cause of an effect. There are instead always a swarm of vitalities at play. The task becomes to identify the contours of the swarm and the kind of relations that obtain between its bits.” (Bennett, 2010; 31f)

As a first step this course aims to identify ‘the contours of the swarm concrete’ by searching for its agencies in a group setting. Analysis of the global assemblage that concrete is, as well as historical and contemporary positions in art history shall prepare for individual projects with and about concrete.

Keywords
Learning Outcomes
By the end of the course, the student must be able to:
• Explore New Materialisms - materialist feminist philosophy
• Contextualise artistic practice related to architecture
• Take into consideration anthropocentric effects of concrete
• Create individual artistic projects

Assessment methods
The evaluation of the UE-A will be made by considering four factors
Theoretical presentation 20%
General engagement 10%
Project idea 35%
Project realisation 35%

0% Grade 1
5% Grade 1.25
10% Grade 1.5
15% Grade 1.75
20% Grade 2
25% Grade 2.25
30% Grade 2.5
35% Grade 2.75
40% Grade 3
45% Grade 3.25
50% Grade 3.5
55% Grade 3.75
60% Grade 4
65% Grade 4.25
70% Grade 4.5
75% Grade 4.75
80% Grade 5
85% Grade 5.25
90% Grade 5.5
95% Grade 5.75
100% Grade 6

Resources
Bibliography
Ressources en bibliothèque

- Valori primordiali e ideologici della materia, da Uncini a LeWitt / Gargiani
- La ressemblance par contact / Didi-Huberman
- Changer de société / Latour
- Changer de société / Latour [en ligne]
- Power of Material - Politics of Materiality / Witzgall
- Vibrant matter / Bennett
- Concrete and culture / Forty
- The Earth After Us / Zalasiewicz
- Sand wars [DVD] / Delestrac
- New materialisms / Coole
- Meeting the Universe halfway / Barad
- Assemblage theory / De Landa
- Reassembling the social / Latour
- Not yet titled, never will be / Plant
- The Encyclopedia of Anthropocene (vol. 1) / DellaSalla
- Archaeological theory in the new millennium / Cipolla