Remarque
Inscription faite par la section

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
concrete, new materialism, agency, feminist materialist philosophy, sculpture, anthropocene

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

Resources

Bibliography

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