

AR-330

Beyond extraction and construction

Förster Kim Ulrich

Cursus	Sem.	Type
Architecture	BA6	Obl.
HES - AR	E	Obl.

Language of teaching	English
Credits	2
Session	Summer
Semester	Spring
Exam	During the semester
Workload	60h
Weeks	12
Hours	2 weekly
Lecture	2 weekly
Number of positions	

Summary

This course approaches the architectural humanities through the lens of materials, beyond extraction and construction. Key readings and case studies, contemporary positions and current initiatives will be discussed from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Content

At a time when we are witnessing accelerated climate and biodiversity crises and face the challenges of the Anthropocene in terms of the stories we tell ourselves and our relationship with the world, architecture and the architectural humanities are concerned with materials again. In an environmental history perspective, the new geological and biological sensibility permits, first of all to critically approach the extractive mindset, i.e. a reification and exploitation of nature, in relation to resources and supply chains at the intersection of economy and ecology, while considering from an environmental humanities perspective on the binary of demolition/not-demolition. This is followed by a revisionist take on architectural historiography, classically dominated by narratives of construction history, while today a rethinking is taking place to understand the material cultures and modernity of the 19th and 20th century, the dependencies of Western societies on industrial building materials based on fossil energy such as iron, steel and glass, as well as aluminum, concrete as cheap material, and the problematic of insulation, in order to address the excavation and renegotiation of natural, regenerative alternatives. Finally, from a humanities perspective, current material practices of circularity, building stock and renewal, as new relationships with the soil and earth cycles sought by positions in philosophy, anthropology and sociology will raise political and ethical questions and critique greenwashing strategies.

Course Sessions

Session One, Friday 24 February (In Person)
Intro: Material Histories / Humanities
Session Two, Friday 3 March (Zoom)
Beyond Extraction
Guest: Prof Dr Elke Beyer (TU Berlin, Habitat Unit)
Session Three, Friday 10 March (In Person)
Beyond Construction
Session Four, Friday 17 March (Zoom)
Industrial Production
Session Five, Friday 24 March (In Person)
Mass Consumption
Session Six, Friday 31 March (Zoom)
Insulating

7 April holiday (Good Friday)
14 April holiday

Session Seven, Friday 21 April (Zoom)
Renovating

Session Eight, Friday 28 April (In Person)
Circulating
Guest: Prof Dr Madlen Kobi (Université de Fribourg)
Session Nine, Friday 5 May (In Person)
Regenerating
Guest: CArPE (tbc)
Session Ten, Friday 12 May (Zoom)
Excavating
Session Eleven, Friday 19 May (In Person)
Grounding

Keywords

environmental history / humanities, material cultures, architectural imaginaries

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, the student must be able to:

- Negotiate building beyond extraction and construction, based on the acquired material literacy, and in an environmental perspective, in view of the prevailing challenges for humankind in general and for architects in particular
- Develop skills and evaluate capabilities of how to make use this of complex material knowledge critically in architectural practice as a decisive part of architectural education in the Anthropocene
- Test and establish different ways of knowing and thinking, to reflect on building material from a historiographical / humanistic point of view, beyond its availability as a commodity

Teaching methods

lectures, readings, sketching / diagramming, discussion

Expected student activities

Students are expected to attend each of the eleven course lectures, to read and prepare to discuss all texts provided for each lecture by formulating questions in advance and being able to visualize key concepts upfront, to engage in in-class discussion.

Assessment methods

The course is continuously assessed in a twofold way (weighing 50/50), next to regular participation in the lectures and discussion:

1. a written response to each of the readings (in lieu of a reading diary), in the form of min 3, max 5 short evaluating comments of a sentence each made towards and/or thought provoking questions stemming from the text, anticipating whether its argument(s), example(s); the point(s) of view offered from an inter-, multi- if not transdisciplinary perspective; and/or the relevance for the personal architectural education and architectural practice in general, to be uploaded on moodle in advance (by 6 pm on Thursdays at the latest);
2. the sketch of a key concept, as argument diagram or analytical drawing, assigned individually and taken from the readings in the first 5 min at the beginning of each lecture, to be uploaded on Miro upfront, as a basis to be taken up again and discussed at the end of the session.

For a minimum pass (4) at least 50% or more (6 out of 11) of both statements/questions and sketches must be handed in on time and, moreover, potentially explained and discussed in person during the lecture course. Grades 4 (minimum) to 6 (excellent) are step marked regarding content (knowledge and understanding) and argument (organization and communication) according to the EPFL assessment handbook and EPFL teaching guide.

Resources

Moodle Link

- <https://go.epfl.ch/AR-330>