

## MATERIAL CULTURES

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Rodrigo Arteaga. To measure, 2019

## STUDIO OVERVIEW

Material cultures positions materials beyond structural or aesthetic realms, to frame them also as carriers of memory, labor, identity, and land relations. Students will consider how landscape materials are extracted, traded, ritualized, and disposed—and how those logics can be reimagined toward ecological and socio-cultural ethics.

In this studio, students will be asked to be responsive to hidden geographies of material flow, holding designers accountable for landscapes elsewhere implicated in the act of building and assembling. Students will investigate locally used and specified materials—including plants, soil, concrete, wood, and plastic—and the narratives embedded in their use, transformation, and legacy. The studio will foreground thinking at planetary scales with care and reciprocity.

## STRUCTURE

### EXERCISE 1: MATERIAL TRACING 7 WEEKS / TEAMS OF 2 OR 3

In this first exercise, students will select a single material used locally and produce a Material Atlas that will illustrate the material's socio-ecological footprint. Whose bodies move and manage this material? Whose land hosts extraction, decay, or disposal? What values are assigned to materials across their lifetime? How are more-than-human species impacted in these processes?

As part of this phase, it will also be imperative to think beyond human timelines to grasp the formation and decomposition of materials in geological and ecological timescales. The Material Atlas will be composed of 4 cumulative exercises intended to build off of each other into a comprehensive material study, which will include Material Composition and Use, Material Lifecycles, Material Relations, and Material Timescales.

## **EXERCISE 2: MATERIAL FUTURES** 7 WEEKS / OPTION TO CONTINUE WORKING IN TEAMS OR INDIVIDUALLY

The proposal of a new Material Future will require students to respond to full or part of a material cycle and envision a reparative future. This design exercise will challenge students not only to design with materials but to design from, through, and for their cycles. Proposals might address questions of public awareness, grief, circularity, socio-ecological justice, care, etc.

### **THE MATERIALS**

\*You and your team will choose only one.

#### **SOIL**

Soil is a living archive, recording interactions. A medium of co-evolution, shaping and being shaped by human activity. As Pablo Pérez-Ramos and Stefania Staniscia state 'soil is not neutral or a surface at all, but a common and thick condition to be designed in itself'. Perceived as abundant, soil is in fact a finite endangered resource.

#### **PLANTS**

While we often encounter them as aesthetic features or ecological assets, their presence in urban landscapes is underpinned by a vast, industrialized system of propagation and distribution—one that reflects histories of human influence, voyages of botanical extraction, and economic optimization. Often valued for their rootedness and fixity in place, plants' agency and aliveness are often overlooked.

#### **CONCRETE**

Concrete is ubiquitous and often invisible. Through concrete's usage, humans have become impressive geomorphic agents. The void within quarries and loss of mountains is diametrically opposed to the solid mass in buildings and built landscapes. In its reliance of limestone extraction, it is tied to planetary flows and deep time.

#### **WOOD**

Wood is symbolic of Pacific Northwest identity. Its logging was and continues to be central to the territorialization of Indigenous land. In cutblocks, rows of monoculture and repetition often maintain a generic understanding of wood as opposed to the multiplicity of woods. Most standardized specs discard significant imperfections and the stories knots, splits, and warps might tell about a forest.

#### **PLASTIC**

Plastic is a petrochemical product often overlooked in built design and implicated in complex 'petroleumscares'. Moldable and malleable, scalable from the mega to the nano, it intermeshes with landscapes and life becoming archaeological strata, embodied in land, water, and both human and more-than-human bodies.

### **LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

- Understand material lifecycles from ecological, cultural, and economic perspectives, particularly in the Vancouver region and other regions implicated in its making.
- Grasp material timescales beyond human timelines.
- Investigate how landscape design can consider planetary needs and respond to a planetary responsibility, particularly in relation to care and ethics of sourcing.
- Practice material storytelling—how a site and its details tell a cultural and ecological story that foregrounds tactility and memory.