



Scapegoat

Architecture
Landscape
Political Economy

Issue 02

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("Matériau"): Exhibition catalog, *Les Immatériaux*, Paris: Centre Georges Pompidou, 1985

Editorial Note

Materialism continues the commitment of our first two issues on Property and Service to examine foundational yet overlooked concepts in architecture and landscape architecture. In our estimation, these disciplines are haunted by materialism. We see its specular presence invoked in design research's emphasis on large-scale flows and sites of material production, in the renewed focus on 'performance' and the rehabilitation of functionalism, in the centrality of 'material' as an expressive layer of tectonics, and through the import of non-human actors into discussions about spatial design.¹ Each of the above invokes matter as its base.

While matter and materials are at the center of both study and practice, designers rarely call themselves materialists. And, while discourses of materialism have tended to focus on humans, when 'materials' are discussed within architecture and landscape architecture practice, they typically refer to that which isn't human. As such, materialism's philosophical and political economic legacies, not least of which would include the inquiry into the nature and condition of freedom and autonomy, are silenced. This issue of Scapegoat analyses the cost of this forgetting as it conjures the ghosts of materialism.

The materialist problem of human labour is buried in design practice. All buildings and designed landscapes are, of course, made by someone, somehow, somewhere, and under certain

conditions. This connection to the materialist tradition has been systematically occluded through the emphasis on "fabrication," where questions of the organization and meaning of labour have succumbed to the capitalist necessity for technological innovation. In so doing, radical histories of labour within the cannon, such as the collectivist experiments of modernism, or extradisciplinary practices amongst squatters, dropouts, and vernacular traditions are erased.² We contend that the radical re-organization of the built environment occurs through human labour: how something is made determines what is made.

Designers have been grappling with the nature and effects of the globalization of urbanization on the built environment since the 1990s. Today, this preoccupation continues through the fascination with chains of material production and consumption, networks, and logistics: the presence of every local thing is linked interminably to global processes. Within the building industry, this tracing of material flow has manifested in the name of resource and cost efficiency and is formalized through exhaustive analytic tools which account for energy spent, contaminants released, water processed. The social forms of material production are absent from these analyses.

A perspective that includes the material and social dimensions of production necessarily departs from

the privileging of site and instead distributes the potential for design praxis across sites and into networks themselves; consequentially, real intervention is inconceivable without a political economic analysis of the actual engines of urbanization. Architects and landscape architects have access to a bundle of trajectories, connections, and routes by way of the materials they select. *Which* material gets selected is indeed significant, but well-informed, proactive consumption cannot be the final conclusion of materialist inquiries. Furthermore, the fatigue produced by the tangle of connections unearthed through these mappings are not an alibi that could somehow excuse the necessity of social struggle. Instead, Scapegoat asks: how can material practice in design become the driver of anti-capitalist forms of social organization?

While we are committed to engaging the materialist tradition, we are likewise interested in how the study of horizontal relationships among humans and other species, and different constituencies of 'matter,' might productively destabilize our assumptions about design praxis. The arrogance of human agency is tempered through investigations of how the biophysical traits of particular materials, species, and extraction sites (for instance, their decay-resistance, hardness, or elasticity) shape our practices. These investigations help determine how materials resist,

interrupt, and constrain the seamless production of commodities, and are thus instructive for building a contestational practice composed of heterogeneous, complex assemblages.³

An interest in materials might begin with actually present, extensive, and dimensioned things: a painting, a role of Tyvek, a single insect. Through a materialist practice of inquiry these apparently discreet 'things' very quickly become local symptoms of multi-scalar agents such as networks, institutions, or power centres. The material becomes a portal to global complexity. The return to materialism in this issue of Scapegoat calls our attention to the dynamic relays between humans, materials, and the political economic dimensions that condition them across multiple scales and social registers. 🐐

Notes

1. Influences include Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory, writers affiliated with the "speculative turn" and brought together through the journal *Collapse: Philosophical Research and Development*, and the body of work gathered in Diana Coole and Samantha Frost, Eds. *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).
2. See, for example, Dolores Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution: A History of Feminist Designs for American Homes, Neighborhoods, and Cities* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT Press, 1982); Eric Mumford, *The CIAM Discourse on Urbanism, 1928-1960* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); and, Alan Smart, "Sex in the Socialist City or How the Party Ends Up in the Kitchen," *Jan Van Eyck Academie*, jve-design.posterous.com/sex-in-the-socialist-city
3. Karen Bakker and Gavin Bridge, "Material worlds? Resource geographies and the 'matter of nature,'" *Progress in Human Geography* 30.1 (2006), 5-27.

