

Sustainability in the City and Beyond

Concordia University

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Glass Residue and Upcycling Processes: Materiality, Aesthetic Experiences and Sustainable Engagement

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Upcycling - also known as creative reuse - is the process of transforming waste material, useless, or unwanted commodities in order to leverage new potential opportunities. In Quebec, glass waste from the separate collection process is contaminated with paper, plastic, and metals, and is therefore downcycled into post-consumer products used in infrastructure. In this process, the recycling industry produces various residues, including a fine and harmful dust that escapes from recycling facilities air collectors.

While dust is tied to this industry's economic interests, the politics that are reflected and advanced through particular models of sustainable development and attitudes towards socio-environmental concerns merit investigation. Challenging the exhausted, rejected, obsolete, and invisible status of this materiality, this presentation builds on the Dust Agitator research-creation cycle (Lighthouses, Dust Silica, Dust Agitator, 2015/18), which stems from a three-year research process in glass recycling facilities across Canada and Europe. The research looks at two aspects: (1) how can research-creation produce new ways of upcycling this at-risk material at the end of its cycle, and (2) how to critically engage with the socio-environmental impact of glass residues?

To answer these questions, the presentation shifts this materiality to the foreground and agitates different technical and social assemblages: recycling facilities and their workers, health issues, digital art practices and their electronic and computational media, exhibition spaces, materialisms, natural resources, data and satellites, and infrastructure. This process embeds glass in a continuum of geological, environmental, and artistic relations that mobilize the agency of raw materials, technologies, and practices, from sand extraction to current glass downcycling methods. While dust challenges the notions of scale and visibility, both at the material, sensory and political levels, the presentation offers a critical examination of glass residues and the engagement of research-creation towards materiality.



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