

DESIRING WASTE: A PEDAGOGY OF LIFECYCLE APPROACHES TO WASTE AND BROWNFIELD TRANSFORMATION

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1 ABSTRACT

Waste is a term embedded with negative connotations retained by a long lineage of cultural attitudes towards undesired material excess. This perception has resulted in shortsighted reactions that mismanage potentially valuable waste products and landscapes. These wastes must be embraced as desirable opportunities with latent value for producing new economies, ecologies, and cultural landscapes. Landscape architecture is uniquely positioned to reimagine the potentials of waste landscapes like brownfields: the most prevalent and complex landscape condition faced by this profession with up to one million sites in the U.S. Integrating brownfield transformation into design curricula is imperative. The next generation of landscape architects must be critical of and actively engage with complex, contaminated landscapes and waste legacies. Rather than apply conventional approaches to waste reclamation that typically result in passive parks, this paper argues for an alternative approach—landscape lifecycles—that reconceptualizes waste as a resource for site and material transformation. Grounded in concepts of material lifecycles, industrial ecology, and circular economies, landscape lifecycles spatializes these abstract systems and explores the aesthetic, experiential, and performative potentials of waste. The principle result is a design framework towards waste and brownfield transformation—exposing students to a state-of-mind about waste’s design opportunities rather than providing ready-made solutions. Students explore their unique interests within highly structured courses, resulting in a diversity of distinct, speculative responses that engage with waste’s potential. This paper reflects on the integration of this framework in past studios and a current seminar course, uncovering the successes and opportunities for further development.

1.1 Keywords

Waste Reuse, Brownfields, Pedagogy, Design Education, Lifecycles