MATERIAL GESTURE
SITE

Art can be anything an artist says it is. This year artists are piling up rocks, carving cliffs, and digging holes in the desert.

This is the third semester in a series of atelier semesters that focuses on the unique gestures dictated by a particular material as a way of working such material in what we call MATERIAL GESTURE.

Roland Barthes in his writings on the work of Cy Twombly, defines the term gesture as the surplus of an action. An action, he writes: “is transitive, it seeks only to provoke an object, a result.” Whereas the gesture is “the indeterminate and inexhaustible total of reasons, pulsions, indolences which surround the action with an ‘atmosphere’.”

In the atelier we will explore the gestures of making in relation to a material, in order to produce an architecture that is solely focused on the relationship between the two, where the reality of the work lays within the material, the form and the act of making. The architecture that results from this approach does not reference or represent something, neither is it an abstraction, but simply attempts to exist as a physical reality.

In this semester, the site will be taken as a departure point. Not the site in the context we usually know - as in the view, the vegetation or its relationship to a build environment. But rather, the site from a geological perspective, how the landscape is formed (the history), that what the ground consists of, and how it is transforming.

We will start with a field trip to mount Etna with the volcanist Marco Marcinno and artist Carlos Irijalba. During the field trip we will study and explore the geology of the site: the soil, sand, stone, minerals, lava and ash; the crust, faults, cracks, hills, and craters. We will study the processes (the gestures of the volcano so to say) that have shaped the landscape as it is and that will continue to change it in the future.

The project you will develop in this atelier is based on this research and exploration. You are asked to work with geological material and processes and transform them to design a building that would be situated on that site.
ATELIER
The atelier starts on September 22 at 10 am. For the start of the Atelier you are asked to give a brief 5 minute presentation of a previous project by yourself and a project you like with the focus on Material Gesture and Site.

Weekly ateliers will be given on Thursdays and Fridays. Anne Holtrop will visit the atelier every two weeks. A detailed time line will be handed out at the start of the studio.

FIELD TRIP and SITE
Excursion to Mount Etna in Sicily with artist Carlos Irijalba and volcanist Marco Marcinno, October 5 – 8. A detailed booklet will be handed out during the Atelier. Mount Etna is also the site for your project.

ASSIGNMENT
You will work individually. There is no given program for the building, this has to be chosen at a certain moment in the development of your designs. The program should not complicate the building, but rather support the spatial and material conditions that you have set. For the final presentation a model of scale 1:15 is required, which will provide a limitation to the size of your building.

For the final presentation a physical model (or fragment) of scale 1 to 15 is required that shows the material and the production process (the way of making). This is the key element of the presentation. Besides the model, drawings of the way of making the building, plan and section and photos of the model are requested, all on portrait A2. The A2 material will be collected digitally and a semesterbook will be made after the presentation.

GUESTS
At the start of the semester our guests will be announced.
Giulio Branca, from the first semester MATERIAL GESTURE – CASTING AND CUTTING, glass, 2016
Guillaume Guisan, from the first semester MATERIAL GESTURE – CASTING AND CUTTING, lost formwork, reinforced concrete, 2016
Mara Meerwein, from the first semester MATERIAL GESTURE – CASTING AND CUTTING, palm leaf, 2016
Sara Meyer, from the second semester MATERIAL GESTURE – HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL & 24 OTHERS, for a work by Bojan Sarcovic, SHE, 2010, onyx, building made out of lime, 2017
Agnieszka Gronek, from the second semester MATERIAL GESTURE – HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL & 24 OTHERS, for a work by Anish Kapoor, CONCRETE SCULPTURES, 2012, cement mortar, building made out of in situ cast concrete in lost formwork of felt, 2017
Anita Morvillo, from the second semester MATERIAL GESTURE – HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL & 24 OTHERS, for a work by Carl Andre, PLUMBLOCK, 1982, lead, building made out of steel rods in sizes 5, 10 and 20 mm, 2017
Silvio Rutishauser, from the second semester MATERIAL GESTURE – HOTEL INTERCONTINENTAL & 24 OTHERS, for a work by Raphael Hefti, SUBTRACTION AS ADDITION, 2012, glass, Luxar coating process, building made out of cast glass, 2017
REFERENCE
Robert Smithson, ASPHALT RUNDOWN, 1969,

film ASPHALT RUNDOWN, Robert Smithson and Nancy Holt, 1969, Vimeo 9 min
ROBERT SMITHSON: O.K. we'll begin with entropy. That's a subject that's preoccupied me for some time. On the whole I would say entropy contradicts the usual notion of a mechanistic world view. In other words it's a condition that's irreversible, it's condition that's moving towards a gradual equilibrium and it's suggested in many ways. Perhaps a nice succinct definition of entropy would be Humpty Dumpty. Like Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall, all the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty Dumpty back together again. There is a tendency to treat closed systems in such a way. One might even say that the current Watergate situation is an example of entropy. You have a closed system which eventually deteriorates and starts to break apart and there's no way that you can really piece it back together again. Another example might be the shattering of Marcel Duchamp Glass, and his attempt to put all the pieces back together again attempting to overcome entropy. Buckminster Fuller also has a notion of entropy as a kind of devil that he must fight against and recycle. ... Now, I would like to get into an area of, let's say, the problems of waste. It seems that when one is talking about preserving the environment or conserving energy or recycling one inevitably gets to the question of waste and I would postulate actually that waste and enjoyment are in a sense coupled. There's a certain kind of pleasure principle that comes out of preoccupation with waste. Like if we want a bigger and better car we are going to have bigger and better waster productions. So there's a kind of equation there between the enjoyment of life and waste. Probably the opposite of waste is luxury. Both waste and luxury tend to be useless. Then other's kind of middle class notion of luxury which is often called "quality." And quality is sort of based on taste and sensibility. Sartre says Genet produces neither spit or diamonds. I guess that's what I'm talking about.

REFERENCE
Robert Smithson, interview with Alison Sky, ENTROPY MADE VISIBLE, On Site #4, 1973. This interview took place about two months before Smithson's death. Although published posthumously, Smithson and Sky completed the editing of the text together and Smithson provided all the illustrations.

STRIP MINE, Ohio
ALISON SKY: Isn’t entropy actually metamorphosis, or a continual process in which elements are undergoing change, but in an evolutionary sense?

SMITHSON: Yes and no. In other words, if we consider the earth in terms of geologic time we end up with what we call fluvial entropy. Geology has its entropy too, where everything is gradually wearing down. Now there may be a point where the earth’s surface will collapse and break apart, so that the irreversible process will be in a sense metamorphosized, it is evolutionary, but it’s not evolutionary in terms of any idealism. There is still the heat death of the sun. It may be that human beings are just different from dinosaurs rather than better. In other words there just might be a different situation. There’s this need to try to transcend one’s condition. I’m not a transcendentalist, so I just see things going towards... well it’s very hard to predict anything; anyway all predictions tend to be wrong. I mean even planning. I mean planning and chance almost seem to be the same thing.

SKY: I with the architectural profession would recognize that. In their grand masterplan schemes for the world, architects seem to find the “final solution” to all possible situations.

SMITHSON: They don’t take those things into account. Architects tend to be idealists, and not dialecticians. I propose a dialectics of entrophic change. ... I’d like to mention another mistake which is essentially an engineering mistake and that’s the Salton Sea in southern California, which happens to be California’s largest lake. It happened back during Teddy Roosevelt’s administration. There was a desperate attempt to try to reroute the Colorado River. The Colorado River was always flooding and destroying the area. There was an attempt to keep the Colorado River from flooding by building a canal, in Mexico, and this was illegally done. This canal was started in the delta of the Colorado and then it was rerouted back toward Mexicali, but what happened was that the river flooded into this canal and the canal overflowed, and fed back into the Imperial Valley which is below sea level. So that this thirty mile lake was created by this engineering mistake, and whole cities were inundated, the railroad also was submerged, and there were great attempts to try to fight back this deluge, but to no avail. Since then, people have come
to live with this lake, and recently I was out there I spent some time in
Salton City which is a city of about 400 people. And another example
of blind planning is this maze of wide boulevards that snake through
the desert. Now it was the idea that they would turn this into a huge
retirement village or whatever, maybe a new Palm Springs, but the
bottom fell out of that so that if you go there now you just see all these
boulevards going all through the desert, very wide concrete boulevards
and just sign posts naming the different roads and maybe a few trailer
campgrounds near this city. It’s impossible to swim in the Salton Sea
because barnacles have grown all over the rocks. There is some water
skiing and fishing. There’s also a plan to try to desalinate the whole
Salton Sea. And there’s all kinds of strange schemes for doing that. One
was to bring down slag from the Kaiser Steel Company, and build a dike
system. So that here we have an example of a kind of domino effect where
one mistake begets another mistake, yet these mistakes are all curiously
exciting to me on a certain kind of level - I don’t find them depressing.

... It’s like the Anchorage earthquake that was responsible for creating a
park. After the earthquake they set aside a portion of earthquake damage
and turned that into a park, which strikes me as an interesting way of
dealing with the unexpected, and incorporating that into the community.
That area’s fascinated me quite a bit. Also, the recent eruptions outside
of Iceland. At Vestmann Islands an entire community was submerged
in black ashes. It created a kind of buried house system. It was quite
interesting for a while. You might say that provided a temporary kind
of buried architecture which reminds me of my own Partially Buried
Woodshed out in Kent State, Ohio where I took 20 cartloads of earth and
piled them on this woodshed until the central beam cracked. There was
a problem from one of the local papers. They didn’t really see that as a
very positive gesture, and there was a rather disparaging article that
went under the heading “It’s a Mud Mud Mud World.”
But basically I think that those preoccupations do escape architects
and I’m thinking of another problem that also exists, that of mining
reclamation. It seems that when they made up the laws for mining
reclamation they wanted to put back the mines the way they were before
they mined them. Now that’s a real Humpty Dumpty way of doing things.
You can imagine the result when they try to deal with the Bingham pit in
Utah which is a pit one mile deep and three miles across. Now the idea of
the law being so general and not really dealing with a specific site like
that seems unfortunate. One person at Kennecott Mining Company told
me that they were supposed to fill that pit in; now of course one would
wonder where they were going to get the material to fill that pit in.
SKY: Did you ask them?
SMITHSON: Yes, I mean they said it would take something like 30 years
and they’d have to get the dirt from another mountain. It seems that the
reclamation laws really don’t deal with specific sites, they deal with a
general dream or an ideal world long gone. It’s an attempt to recover a
frontier or a wilderness that no longer exists. Here we have to accept
the entropic situation and more or less learn how to reincorporate these
things that seem ugly. Actually there’s the conflict of interests. On one
side you have the idealistic ecologist and on the other side you have the
profit desiring miner and you get all kinds of strange twists of landscape
consciousness from such people. In fact there’s a book that the Sierra
Club put out called Stripping. Strip mining actually does sort of suggest
lewd sex acts and everything, so it seems immoral from that standpoint.
It’s like a kind of sexual assault on mother earth which brings in the
aspect of incest projections as well as illicit behavior and I would say
that psychologically there’s problem there. There’s a discussion of
aesthetics in this book Stripping from the point of view of the miner
and from the point of view of the ecologist. The ecologist says flatly
that strip mines are just ugly and the miners says that beauty is in the
eye of the beholder. So you have this stalemate and would say that’s
part of the clashing aspect of the entropic tendency, in other words two
irreconcilable situations hopelessly going over the same waterfall. It
seems that one would have to recognize this entropic condition rather
than try to reverse it. And there’s no stopping it; consider the image
that Norbert Weiner gives us - Niagara Falls. In fact they even shored up
Niagara, speaking of Niagara. They stopped Niagara for a while because
it was wearing away. And then they put these steel rods into the rock so
that it would maintain its mutual appearance.
SKY: Have they been able to stop it?
SMITHSON: They did stop it.
SKY: From wearing away?
SMITHSON: Well, it’s still there. It didn’t fall spare yet. Niagara looks
like a giant open pit quarry. In other words it has high walls which offend
people greatly in the strip mining regions. There are defects called “high
walls” that exist in the strip mining areas and there’s a desire on the part
of ecologists to slope these down. The cliffs all around Niagara suggest
excavation and mining, but it's just the work of nature. So there's constant confusion between man and nature. Is man a part of nature? Is man not a part of nature? So this causes problems.

SKY: There is definitely some sort of perverse fascination attached to the process of inevitable and impending destruction that will occur either in your own environment or be observed vicariously because people persist in living at the bases of volcanos, on earthquake zones such as the fault line which is supposed to destroy all of California, on top of sinking landscapes such as Venice which is a city built entirely on rotting wooden pilings and will eventually fall into the sea.

SMITHSON: Well, that may be something that's human - that's human need. It seems that there's almost a hope for disaster you might say. There's that desire for spectacle. I know when I was a kid I used to love to watch the hurricanes come and blow the trees down and rip up the sidewalks. I mean it fascinated me. There's kind of pleasure that one receives on that level. Yet there is this for something more tranquil - like babbling toward mining regions and volcanic conditions - wastelands rather than the usual notion of scenery or quietude, tranquility - though they somehow interact.

Robert Smithson, PARTIALLY BURIED WOOD SHED, Kent State University, Ohio, 1970
Walter De Maria, EARTH ROOM, Munich, 1968

Walter De Maria, MILE LONG DRAWING, Southern Nevada, 1968
Michael Heizer, DOUBLE NEGATIVE, eastern edge of the Mormon Mesa, northwest of Overton, Nevada, 1969-70
Double Negative is really a scar of a kind, an intrusion of nature, an assault of some sort. It’s as though a surgeon took an exploratory cut of Mesa to show its innards.

Double Negative redefines the physical properties: the positive is the physicality and the absence, the negative is dealing with that.
My work reacts to the relative experience of time, space and the fictional construction of the territory. Here, geological tempo, natural and manmade cycles are crucial to position our dimension to enhance the criticality of the very current moment.

In recent projects as SKINS 2015 or MUSCLE MEMORY 2016 the exercise is exogenous to an existing system, if a physiological metaphor may apply, I try to act on a particular company or given territory as an enzyme that affects the result of a digestive process. When intervening on an atelier specialized in geological replicas, or another one developing metal foam tissue, I try to mirror their activity for the work to become self-aware. In essence a distillation of their own self, sometimes against their functional purpose, against the grain, to liberate new debris and connotations.
Carlos Irijalba, HIGH TIDES, 2013-16, geotechnical drilling
Batara is a collaborative project between architect Anne Holtrop and photographer Bas Princen, which so far consists of a series of models, a full-scale pavilion and photography. The spaces of Batara are arrangements of sand-cast walls without windows, doors or roofs, only empty openings. The constructions have no apparent function or relation to typology or building style, giving an air of something prehistoric and primitive. It is as if we are looking at a disintegrating ruin bearing witness of some fundamental form of building.

The project originates in a visit to the ancient city of Petra in Jordan. The simple settlement of single-story dwellings eventually became a hub for the caravan trade between Persia, the Arab world and the Roman Empire, and a great city was carved out of the desert rock. Princen’s photography of Petra display spaces that are moving between states of natural and man-made: the rugged surfaces of the mountains were cut sharply and ornamented to house tombs and temples, while today the details and surfaces are eroding away and gradually blurring the distinction.

The walls of Batara are in a similar manner created in a process of removing material, by digging away from the natural environment. Concrete or plaster is poured directly into pits of earth or sand, giving the walls a smoothness on one side and a rough, uneven surface on the other. The process and the outcome are characterized by the combination of intent/constraint and chance/the undefined, where the architecture is partly formed by the material and the natural mould itself. In his text, Material Gesture, Holtrop points to the importance of the material properties and the unintended effect of an action with a material, as a possible new approach to making. Much like Robert Smithson’s Asphalt Rundown (1969), Batara explores how the outflowing properties of concrete work together with the earth mould, with gravity and air to level and solidify. And like Smithson, Holtrop points out that the truth of a material is not found in it’s refined, ideal state, but in the “impure”, worn and lopsided state. In “A Sedimentation of the Mind: Earth
“Works”, Smithson argues that rust is the fundamental property of steel, and that our fear of inactivity, entropy, erosion and the undefined is removing us from the primary process of making contact with matter, and thereby fully understanding and interacting with the world.

In their work, both Holtrop and Princen point to examples in which architecture and the natural environment consist of the same material, making it specific to place and partly undifferentiated from its surroundings. Batara is, like many of Holtrop’s other projects, a mono-material architecture. Using a single material is a way to create a reduced architecture, which feels like a scale-model or seems unfinished. It is an architecture of suggestion and possibility, where the idea is simultaneously clear and open. The structures of Batara may be undefined in terms of their use or what they are about. Yet the reduced state allows us to focus on what this architecture actually consists of, on the qualities of the material and the interaction with it in the process of making, the sequence of spaces and connections between them. Princen’s images of the Batara models only show us fragments of the space, confusing our sense of scale and placing us inside the model. Yet even without a sense of the whole the essence is apparent, and we are invited to imagine what this possible architecture could become.
17 VOLCANOES
The exhibition celebrates volcanoes as figures in the landscape of Java, as politically, economically and culturally-charged objects whose ambiguous existence makes them particularly interesting for architectural scrutiny. Volcanoes act and behave in periodic cycles, they are neither urban nor rural, neither alive nor dead, neither past nor present, neither good nor bad. As giant figures in the landscape, they create the land and continuously transform it. Despite their overwhelming potential for destructiveness, they produce fertile grounds to feed one of the world’s most densely populated islands.

Between 1836 and 1848, the German-Dutch explorer Franz Wilhelm Junghuhn made several expeditions to Java—the geographic, historic, cultural, political and economic center of Indonesia—in the service of the Dutch colonial authorities. He was among the first to climb the island’s many volcanoes, and his books, maps, and lithographs made him the “Humboldt of Java.” Linke and Princen follow in Junghuhn’s footsteps, visiting his favorite volcanoes to produce new bodies of work in which the volcanoes form territorial markers, allowing them to interweave historical and contemporary narratives of Indonesia.

REFERENCE
(part of the exhibition 17 Volcanoes)
Armin Linke, Interior of the Geological Museum laboratory, Bandung, Indonesia and KAWAH IJEN VOLCANO, Biau (Jawa Timur) Indonesia, 2016
REFERENCE
film INTO THE INFERNO, Werner Herzog, 2016, MP4 106 min
REFERENCE
film Anselm Kiefer – Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow, film by Sophie Fiennes, DVD 100 min
From exploring the basic principles of geology to starting a rock and mineral collection, The Practical Geologist is the perfect introduction to the world of earth science.

Beginning with a history of the earth’s formation and development, this book explores the substances that compose the planet, movements within the earth, the surface effects of weather and water, and underground landscapes.

It shows you how to search for, identify, and extract samples of various rocks and minerals, and for each rock and mineral type there is a brief mineralogy and explanation of its locations. There are also sections on mapping, preparing, and curating specimens, and geological sites on the six continents.

REFERENCE
FIELD TRIP and SITE
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