

# Geocentric Driftings #1

## Italy – Close Encounters of the Geological Kind

"What if culture was nature all along?"

Vicky Kirby

In Florence, next to Palazzo Pitti, there is a small building. It looks like a temple, like a canonical form of the Renaissance – a pediment, an arch, two pink marble columns, two niches accommodating smooth white statues. Yet, it is also invaded, dripping with stalactites, parasitized by calcareous concretions that encrust its façade and interiors in a thick stony foam. It is called the Grotta Grande, and one may wonder: is this still a building, or is it a cave?

This semester will kickstart a series of geocentric seminar weeks. This first iteration will explore continental Italy, a peninsula traversed by earthquakes, metamorphic movements and fiery mountains, where architectural history intimately touches an intense geological life. Revising the classical tradition of the Grand Tour, meant to expose the young “elites” to the architectural masterpieces of the past, our “Close Encounters of the Geological Kind” will propose an alternative journey. Eschewing the Duomo di Milano and the Pantheon, it will draw a trajectory through architectures and sites that show how the historical, the architectural and the geological always intersect.

We will travel from North to South, starting in Tuscany and finishing in Naples. We will visit the Grotta Grande in Florence, then drift through stone quarries carving whole mountain peaks, pass the artificial hill of Monte Testaccio in Rome, climb fuming volcano slopes covered in ashes, see Roman temples that sank under water, and immerse ourselves in the mineralized waters that make travertine.

Exploring Italy and its architecture from a deep time perspective and through a geological lens, we will reflect together on the questions and the ethical issues a geocentric posture would create for our practice. Once you start accepting that the ground has a *life* of its own, that it makes forms of its own, do you still cut marble away from it? Do you still extract iron ore from it? Do you still pump oil from it? And what kind of architect do you then become?

As we journey down, we will let ourselves be affected by processes counted in millions and billions of years; we will exchange on the geological presences that exists within buildings; and we will reflect together on what a dialogue between architecture and the earth sciences could open up for the future of our discipline.

23-29 October 2022 - min. 16 / max. 21 students

Team – An Fonteyne, Galaad Van Daele, Camiel Van Noten

Cost frame C - CHF 500-750\*

### Geocentric Driftings

Architecture assembles material and spatial forms that are primarily derived from the geological realm. Mineral substances, metallic ores, hydrocarbons and sediments such as clay, iron, sand, oil, copper, all of which result from terrestrial dynamics reaching beyond the millenary timescales of civilizations.

Yet the practice and history of architecture keep neglecting them, treating them solely as resources or inert mediums to be appropriated and shaped to serve grand architectural visions.

As the climate crisis forces us to reevaluate our ways, and to question our consumption of the terrestrial, how could we finally give geological matter the presence and weight it deserves? How to envisage architecture as being also – or mainly – an emanation of tectonic, metamorphic or sedimentary movements? And what do such considerations open up for our practice?

With this series of seminar weeks, the Dept. of the Ongoing will propose an alternative outlook on architecture, and create opportunities for geocentric reflection and exchange.

\* The cost will cover the train and bus journeys inside of Italy, all accommodation costs, entrance fees for all visits, as well as minimum two dinners. The round trip train journey from Switzerland to Italy is not covered and is to be organized individually to offer more freedom to arrive earlier or stay longer.

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